Studies in Late Dugento
and Early Trecento Painting
Who is Duccio?
Part I

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This study focuses on the meaning of Duccio's certain early masterpiece begun in 1285, his Rucellai Madonna: its iconography, style, spatial structure and ornament, to serve as the basis of a more extended examination of his artistic career and sphere of influence, to be examined in a later publication. It also comments on its relationship to two works of art not far removed in time, the tiny Madonna of the Three Franciscans in the Siena Pinacoteca, and especially the round stained glass window from Siena Cathedral that has been attributed to both Duccio and Cimabue.

Any student of the origin of the Italian Renaissance is familiar with Duccio's Rucellai Madonna (Fig. 1) and the Siena Cathedral Altarpiece (Fig. 2). Separated by about a quarter of a century, both happen to be masterpieces. One is the most monumental painting of the Virgin and Child enthroned produced at the time in Tuscany, the other by far the most monumental altarpiece. Any understanding of the master's artistic origin, identity and evolution must proceed from them, and the few extant documents bearing on his life and work.

The Documents

Few documents mentioning Duccio's artistic activity have survived. In 1278 he painted coffers for the commune of Siena, and from 1279 to 1295 he repeatedly illustrated the account books of the camarlingo and the four provveditori. Fortunately, his two extant masterpieces are well documented. In a contract dated April 12, 1285, the Confraternity of the Virgin Mary of the church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence, commissioned Duccio to paint the Rucellai Madonna. The Siena Cathedral altarpiece is the only work bearing his name. A number of documents reaching from its commission on October 1308 to its completion in June 1311 cover its production. One even mentions the payment of musicians who accompanied its festive transfer from Duccio's bottega to the high altar of the cathedral, and an early chronicler also refers to this event. Unfortunately, another work by Duccio, a Maestà with predella painted in 1302 for the chapel of the nine supreme councillors of Siena is lost. He was dead by October 16, 1319, when his children officially repudiated his inheritance, meaning that there was none. All this is well known. No document refers to him as a mural painter.

Sienese Art at the Time of Duccio's Early Artistic Formation

Duccio's birth date is not known, nor when and under whom he received his artistic training. This is unfortunate. It can be assumed that he would have learned his trade sometime in the sixties or early seventies of the Dugento. By the end of that period he was an independent master. The young Duccio would surely have seen Nicola at work on his Siena Cathedral pulpit. He would also have witnessed Coppo di Marcovaldo painting his Servite Madonna del Bordone in 1261 (Fig. 3).

1 The extant documents regarding Duccio's life and artistic activity are conveniently given, also in English translation, in: J. White, Duccio, Tuscan Art and the Medieval Workshop, London 1979, 184–200.
2 Vincenzo Fineschi first referred to the document in his Memorie istoriche che possono servire alla vita degli uomini illustri del convento di S. Maria Novella di Firenze I, Florence 1790, xli-xlii, 118.
3 For the date, revealed in modern restoration, v. C. Brandi, Il restauro della Madonna di Coppo di Marcovaldo nella chiesa dei Servi di
and Guido da Siena his San Domenico Madonna, he may have known the master of the San Bernardino Madonna presently in the Siena Pinacoteca, as well as the master of the Madonna del Voto painted for the cathedral sometime around the late sixties or early seventies. Although collectively roughly defining the artistic milieu of his apprentice years, none of these works connect sufficiently closely with Duccio’s earliest œuvre to identify the master under whom he learned his trade. This applies as well to the Pisan Master of San Martino whose elaborate wooden throne in the Madonna in the Pisa museum has often been connected with Duccio’s in the Rucellai Madonna. It simply differs excessively in the detail for assuming a closer connection. Nor is it dated. The identity of Duccio’s master remains a mystery.

By the time Duccio painted the Rucellai Madonna not only was he fully formed as a painter, but sufficiently known for receiving a Florentine commission. At the time he would have been certainly aware of the work of Cimabue, then the leading painter active in central Italy. Precisely when, and under what circumstances, he would have become aware of Cimabue’s work is unknown. The chronology of the latter is still debated. Cimabue’s only extant work that is precisely dated: the mosaic of Saint John the Baptistist in the apse of Pisa Cathedral, which he made in 1302, belongs close to the time of his death. This complicates matters.

Prior to dealing directly with Duccio’s œuvre it behooves to consider the seeming quantitative difference in the survival rate of Sienese paintings from the later Dugento compared to the early Trecento. From the former period comparatively little remains. Much more has survived from the latter, enough to confirm that Duccio continued to influence painters long after his death in 1318, including Ugolino, Segna, the Master of Città di Castello and especially many minor masters. Although his influence was centered in and around Siena, it did extend over central Italy, even penetrating “Giotto’s” Florence where Ugolino, Duccio’s closest follower, contributed the main altarpieces for the high altars of both principal churches of the mendicant orders: Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce. At the time the great works of Giotto, Simone Martini and the Lorenzetti Brothers already dominated the artistic scene, the Duccesque masters, collectively considered, representing a conservative artistic tendency.

Why then the comparative few Sienese paintings surviving from the later Dugento? Is this simply due to history’s whim? Or did selective historic obliteration play a role? Some outstanding then venerated still extant paintings, such as Coppo’s Madonna del Bordone and Guido da Siena’s San Domenico Madonna were selectively repainted some thirty to forty years after their creation, the restoration limited to the faces and hands of the Christ Child and the Virgin, including her veil, plausibly informing on a drastic change in popular judgment tied to rapid artistic progress. Within a few decades of their production these works would have appeared outdated, their cult value protecting them from oblivion, surely suffered by many lesser works. Simone Martini’s selective repainting of his Palazzo Pubblico Maesta in 1321, but six years after its original production, covering the faces and hands of the Virgin, the Christ Child and some saints, may have involved similar reasons.

Here the documents fill some lacunae. They identify painters receiving important public commissions in the later Dugento whose art has not survived. A master Mino was paid


4 It has been proposed recently that the Madonna del Voto in Siena Cathedral replaced the Madonna degli Occhi Grossi on the high altar some time after the Sienese victory at Montaperti (v. B. John, H. Mann, J. Pen- nick, Claritas. Das Haupitalbild im Dom zu Siena nach 1260. Die Rekonstruktion, Altenburg 2001). However, Monika Buszak has proposed, differently, that the Madonna degli Occhi Grossi continued to serve the high altar of Siena Cathedral until displaced by Duccio’s altarpiece, while the Madonna del Voto was intended for a different altar in Siena Cathedral dedicated to Saint Bonifacio (M. Buszak, Per la storia delle due ‘Madonne delle Grazie’ nel Duomo di Siena, Prospettiva 103/104 (2001) 97–110).


6 The accounts of the Opera del Duomo at Pisa list payments to Cimabue for work on the mosaic of Christ Enthroned flanked by the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist in the cathedral apse in the period reaching from September 2, 1301 to February 19, 1302. The entry dated February 19 states that he was paid ten lire de figura Sancti Johannis, quam fecit in apse Magiaestatem (SS Pisa, Archivio di Stato, Opera del Duomo, 79, fol. 129r).
nineteen lire for painting a Madonna and saints in the Palazzo Communale in January 1289. Another, named Jacobus, received five lire eight solidi and nine denari in 1294 for work in the same public palace. And a third master named Guidomus received forty-one lire and ten solidi, a considerable amount, between August 8 and November 15, 1295, for contributing a Maestà and the apostles Peter and Paul, again in a Palazzo Communale. Further, a Bindo Dettisalvi received six lire on December 28, 1296, for a Saint Christopher he painted in the curia dominorum novem. All these works are lost. Considering the prestigious nature of Guidomus and Mino’s commissions, they must have been masters of some renown. And perhaps there were other outstanding masters then active of whom we have no direct artistic record.

Could these unknown masters have influenced Duccio’s early career? Throughout this period the Siennese consistently chose the best artists available for their principal church and state commissions. Nicola made the pulpit for the cathedral; Giovanni, his son, served for years as its architect and leading sculptor; the Florentine Coppo, retained by the Siennese following their victory at Montaperti, painted his Madonna del Bordone for their Carmelitian church; Duccio contributed the altarpiece for the high altar of the cathedral; and Simone Martini and Ambrogio Lorenzetti decorated the principal rooms of the Palazzo PUBlico; etc. Considering their significant commissions, were Mino and Guidomus of the same caliber? And what was their relationship to Duccio?

Not only did the Siennese import outstanding foreign artists, by the later Dugento Sienna started to export its own. Duccio painted the Rucellai Madonna for a Florentine confraternity. The Siennese goldsmith Guglielmo di Mannoia signed a silver chalice made for Pope Nicholas IV, now in the treasury of the church of San Francesco at Assisi. Around the turn of the century Memmo di Filippuccio, considered the master of certain murals in the tower of the Palazzo Comunale and the Collegiata of San Gimignano, was for many years the city’s leading painter. Memmo’s extended...
documented activity at San Gimignano would indicate that the artistic situation in contemporary Siena was then highly competitive, leading him to seek his fortune elsewhere.12

This study consists of two parts. The first will be devoted to the Rucellai Madonna, its style and meaning. The second part will deal with some stylistic differences and resemblances of the Siena Cathedral Altarpiece with the former. It will also deal with some specific issues regarding the attribution to Duccio of certain paintings that have been assigned to him or his ambient, especially the exceptional round stained glass window in the cathedral that has been recently restored. Wherever applicable and available, ornamental conventions, often disregarded, will be taken into consideration.

Part I. The Rucellai Madonna (Fig. 1)

Giorgio Vasari, beginning his Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects with a biography of Cimabue, refers to a Madonna that Vasari believed he painted for the Church of S. Maria Novella in Florence:

Fece poi per la chiesa di Santa Maria Novella la tavola di Nostra Donna, che è posta in alto fra la cappella de’ Rucellai e quella de’ Bardi da Verno; la qual opera fu di maggior grandezza, che figura che fusse stata fatta insta a questo tempo; ed alcuni angeli che le sono intorno, mostrano, ancor che egli avesse la maniera greca, che s’andò accostando in parte al lineamento e modo della moderna.13

Fig. 5. Giotto, Ognissanti Madonna, Uffizi Gallery, Florence (Photo Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Fiorentino)

Fig. 6. Kaha Madonna, National Gallery of Art, Washington (Photo National Gallery of Art)

(He then made for the church of S. Maria Novella the panel painting of Our Lady, which is set high between the Chapel of the Rucellai and that of the Bardi da Verno; which work was of greater size than any figure that had been made up to that time; and certain angels that are round it shew, although he still had the Greek manner, that he was approaching in part the direction and fashion of the modern [style]).


13 V. n. 3. supra.
The painting in question is no other than the Rucellai Madonna in the Uffizi Gallery, resplendent in its recently cleaned state. Now universally accepted as Duccio’s early masterpiece, it is securely dated 1285, when the Dominican confraternity of the Laudest of the Virgin Mary commissioned Duccio to paint it. Although Vasari erred in his attribution, his basic judgment, briefly stated, that the painting is partially conservative, substantially tied to the so-called Byzantine manner, but also modern, corresponds in essence to our present view. However, exploring and identifying the various influences and sources which shaped the painting is hardly a simple matter. This involves separating those elements reiterating ultimately to Byzantium from others derived from the local Italian medieval past, and, last but not least, from those derived from northern Gothic art.

Before it was moved to the Uffizi Gallery, the painting was located in the northern transept of the Dominican church of S. Maria Novella, precisely where Vasari had seen it. All this, and especially its exceptional quality and style, resembling in many ways his signed Siena Cathedral Altarpiece, account for the unanimous agreement of contemporary scholars that the Rucellai Madonna is the “panel ... with the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Omnipotent Son...” that the Laudest ordered from Duccio.

The contract commissioned Duccio to produce a large painting on wood of the Madonna for the lay society devoted to the cult of the Virgin: the società delle laudi, based in the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. The painting’s name derives from its location close to the Rucellai Chapel in that church whence it was moved to the Uffizi Gallery in 1940. Saint Peter Martyr, the founder of the confraternity commissioning the painting, appears in a roundel in the lower border. It has also been noted that the design of the throne cloth resembles the later Duccio mural decoration of the society’s chapel located at the south side of the right transept, where it was thought that the painting was originally hung. However, recently Irene Huéck has proposed that it was placed precisely where Vasari saw the mural over two-and-a-half centuries later — “high between the chapel of the Rucellai and the one of the Bardì da Vernio” — on the wall separating the two chapels at the end of the right transept. The painting’s attributions and its early vicissitudes have been traced in detail and need not be repeated here. The painting also happens to be the largest known Proto-Renaissance Tuscan Madonna available, measuring 4.50 by 2.92 meters, representing the apex of a trend in late

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14 The commission document is available in: White, op. cit., 185–187.
16 White, op. cit., 185–187.
17 V. n. 2 supra.
18 For differences regarding the identifications of the saints represented in the lower border roundels v. J. H. Stubblebine, Duccio di Buoninsegena and his School I. Text, Princeton 1979, 22; Huéck, op. cit., 37ff.
19 Stubblebine, op. cit., 1, 25.
20 Huéck, op. cit., 33–46.
medieval Italian painting of representing the Madonna and Child enthroned in ever increasing monumental size.\textsuperscript{21}

Contemporary scholarship has thoroughly examined the \textit{Rucellai Madonna}'s carpentry and cost. It seems that the 150 lire in small florins specified in the original contract of 1285 were reasonable compensation for a panel painting of its particular large size and careful execution.\textsuperscript{22}

Obviously, like any outstanding work of art, a genial product like the \textit{Rucellai Madonna} did not emerge in one inspired moment. Its formation consisted of a series of specific decisions. Considering the substantial cost of this huge painting, its creation would have included extended consultation with the patronage: representatives of the confraternity of the \textit{Laudesi di Santa Maria}. The primary subject matter was given: the hierarchic Virgin and Christ Child. In her central location the huge Virgin is virtually equidistant from the image's four sides. For what this may be worth, this scheme differs fundamentally from the Virgin's placement in another near contemporary monumental Virgin enthroned: Cimabue's

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\textsuperscript{21} In its present state the \textit{Rucellai Madonna}, measuring 450 by 292 cm, is the largest of all Tuscan Madonnas painted on wooden panel in the Dugento and the Trecento. In a recent study Paolo Amati and Ornella Casazza examined the site of Cimabue’s \textit{Santa Trinità Madonna [Le ‘vere dimensioni della Maestà di Cimabue, Critica d’arte} 583 (1995) 25–44]. It now measures 424 cm by 244 cm. However, the present frame is not original. The authors concluded that in its original frame it would have measured 458 by 275 cm. However, Vasari, who was aware of both paintings, clearly stated in his \textit{Lives of the artists} that the \textit{Rucellai Madonna} was the largest he knew: ‘in quale opera fu di maggior grandezza che figura che fesse stata fata in su a quel tempo’ (G. Vasari, \textit{Le Vie degli eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568} L. Tore, ed. R. Betzurini, F. Barocchi, Firenze 1966, 40). Of all extant late medieval Italian Madonnas, the one in the sanctuary of the Virgin at Montvergine, measuring 460 cm by 238 cm, is the tallest (for the latter v. n. 61).

\textsuperscript{22} V. White, op. cit., 320f.

cal axis crosses her closer eye: in this instance precisely the eye's inside corner. However, different from the typical Byzantine Hodegetria who gestures toward the Child with her right hand without touching him, now this hand connects gently with the Child's right leg, thus partly offering physical support. This particular arrangement appears widely in Italian and Byzantining Madonnas of the period. It is found in Cimabue's earlier Louvre Madonna; Giotto's later Ognissanti Madonna; the Kaha (Fig. 6) and Mellon Madonna in Washington. It also appears in the mosaic of the Madonna located above the sarcophagus of Cardinal Consalvo Rodriguez, who died in 1299, in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.

For what this may be worth, in Cimabue's Santa Trinità Madonna the Virgin still refers to the Child with her right hand without touching him.

The pose of Duccio's teaching or blessing Christ Child, seated sideward on the Virgin's lap as he looks sharply to the viewer's left side, ultimately derived from Byzantium, often appears in Sienece painting of the seventh and eighth decades of the Dogenzo, as in the San Bernardino Madonna of 1262 and Guido da Siena's Polypych 7, both in the Siene Pinacoteca, etc.

Significantly, the Rucellai Christ Child no longer holds the scroll or book, representing the Divine Word, as he had traditionally done before. Instead, he now simply grasps the edge of the mantle covering his lower body. Accordingly, the symbolic aspect of his presence is reduced. And his delicate tailored dress clings suggestively to his body, constituting an initial step in the gradual revelation of his nudity, a process in which Duccio participated.

Christ's childlike pose and attire conform to neither Italian nor Byzantine traditions according to which he usually was, and often continued to be, presented as an adult teacher addressing the beholder. Here Duccio also probably drew on contemporary northern Gothic art that by the later thirteenth century had already widely explored the Virgin's affective relationship to her caring son.

The Rucellai Virgin's throne is by far the most intricately shaped wooden throne appearing in late medieval Italian painting. Set in oblique position, the throne is still presented in medieval reverse perspective.

Three superposed kneeling angels hold onto the throne with both hands at both sides. The convention of placing angels at the sides of the Virgin's throne reverts to early Christianity and Byzantium. Usually they were the two archangels Gabriel and Michael, together representing the beginning and end of Christian time. Before the advent of Cimabue and Duccio the two appear, reduced in size, above the throne in Coppo's Madonna del Bordone (Fig. 3), and they are placed partially behind it in the near contemporary Madonna Enthroned close to Coppo in Orvieto (Fig. 7). The multiplication of angels flanking the Virgin's throne from two to six already appears in Cimabue's Louvre Madonna (Fig. 8), where, however the angels stand, one partly overlapping the other. In his Santa Trinità Madonna Cimabue will increase the number of angels flanking the throne, who also stand, to eight. Differently, Duccio's angels, fully superposed, kneel.

It behooves that one consider the placement of Duccio's angels in some detail. His two lowest angels rest their knees and feet on two narrow steps, or platforms, connected to the base line. Differently, all the higher placed angels are applied directly on the gold background. Their spatial roles are ambivalent. Carefully modeled in the round, their kneeling positions, particularly of their feet, would agree with the presence of a supporting ground, replaced, however, by the gold surface on which they float. These superposed angels are tightly fitted within the limited space available between the throne and the side borders, their wings reaching beyond. Together with the throne they form a lateral screen set close to the picture plane.

Essentially the composition of the angels is bilaterally symmetrical. This arrangement is not new since it is found earlier in Cimabue's Louvre and Uffizi Madonnas. However, 24

Stubbiehine observed the same motif in the early thirteenth-century statue of Saint Anne holding the Infant Virgin in the northern porch of Chartres Cathedral (Stubbiehine, op. cit., 1, 26).

25 Many medieval images of Byzantine Madonnas present the Christ Child facing the beholder. However, the sharply sideward looking Child also often appears. See, for example, the ivory relief of the Madonna in the Catharlaiconvent in Utrecht, and a number of Byzantining icons painted in Italy, including the Madonna di Sotto gli Organi in Pisa Cathedral; the Madonna della Madonna in the Cathedral of Monopoli, and the icon in the Museo Diocesano, Palermo [reproduced in: Mother of God, Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art, ed. M. Vastiiki, Milan, 2000, 395, pl. 57, 427, figs. 216, 217, and 428, fig. 218 (beneath Mother of God)]. See also the Kohn Madonna in the National Gallery, Washington, whose geographic origin and chronology is much discussed by Jurovich Fields (v. J. Fields, Icon to Altarpiece in the Frankish East: Images of the Virgin and Child Enthroned, in: Italian Panel Painting of the Duencento and Trecento. The National Gallery of Art, ed. V. M. Schmidt, Washington 2002, 127ff) continues to consider the Kohn Madonna, which he dates into the 1260's, an example of crusader art. On the other hand, on the basis of its closer internal examination, including that of the Mellon Madonna, also in the National Gallery, Washington, I would favor placing their production in central Italy in the later Dogenzo (v. J. Polzer, Some Byzantine and Byzantizing Madonnas painted during the later Middle Ages. The Kohn and Mellon Madonnas, Arte Cristiana 50/775 (1999) 167-182; also, idem, The Byzantine' Kohn and Mellon Madonnas: Concerning their Chronology, Place of Origin, and Method of Analysis, Arte Cristiana 90/813 (2002) 401-410).
given the oblique position of Duccio’s throne, this symmetry could not be wholly sustained. Accordingly, Duccio’s central angel at the (viewer’s) right side holds the throne’s front post with both hands, while his counterpart at the left side holds the rear left post with one hand while extending the other toward the front of the throne. Further, the right hands of the upper and lower angels at the left side take hold of the throne’s rear post, while the respective angels at the right side hold onto nearer posts. And the feet of the lower left angel are set on the platform that extends in front of the throne, while his nearer hand holds onto the throne’s rear post. Spatial irregularity is also evident in the placement of the angels’ haloes. Those of Duccio’s two lowest angels, who kneel before the throne, extend behind the latter, whereas all the other angels’ haloes reach in front. Collectively considered, these inconsistencies reveal a certain deliberate disrespect, or denial, regarding coherent spatial statement.

Duccio’s concern for bilateral symmetry, to the extent that it could be achieved, also works vertically. Barely visible, the thin fingers belonging to the unseen rear hand of the upper left angel are wrapped around the throne’s rear side post, while the fingers of the lower left angel’s rear hand are cupped around the upward curved bottom edge of the throne’s left side. Accordingly, they support the throne. Interestingly, the lower angel’s right arm should be visible, which it is not. Turning to Duccio’s respective angels at the right side, their rear hands are not seen. However, it can be assumed from the positions of their rear arms, which are only partly visible, that they supported the throne in the same manner.

Duccio’s elaborate carpentry throne is set on a platform, or step, so narrow that one doubts whether it can accommodate the hierarchic Virgin’s huge body. This platform extends above and beyond an even narrower platform, or step, whose front face connects with the image’s base line,

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Fig. 12. Duccio, Rucellai Madonna. Detail: Lower Left Area (Photo Polzer)

Fig. 13. Duccio, Rucellai Madonna. Detail: Lower Cloak and Dress of the Virgin (Photo Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Fiorentino)

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\[17\] V. also Polzer, The ‘Byzantine’ Kahn and Mellon Madonnas, 408ff.
that is, the picture plane. It behooves to consider where in the evolving artistic concern with pictorial space these narrow steps, or platforms, belong.

Here some background information is deemed necessary. In essence, within about half a century Italian paintings of the Virgin and Christ Child enthroned moved from being entirely flat to offering concrete foreground depth — even reaching into a spatially coherent middle ground. Let it suffice to compare the Bigallo Master's Madonna in the Acton Collection in Florence (Fig. 9), painted around the middle of the Dugento, with Giotto’s Ognissanti Madonna (Fig. 5), which is usually dated around 1310. The former is essentially flat. The Virgin’s throne and figures are virtually pleated into the picture plane. Differently, Giotto carefully constructs a coherently receding foreground reaching into middle distance, consisting of steps rising from the base line toward the throne platform, including the figures they support. Only at some uncertain distance beside and beyond the throne, comprising the figures set in back of the latter, does spatial recession dissipate and cease, replaced with a flat gold background. The painters working on the mural cycle of the life of Saint Francis at Assisi before 1300 shared Giotto’s grasp of coherent spatial recession. It was revolutionary in its time! One must be aware, however, that here, as in other leading paintings of the early Trecento, spatial recession remains limited to the fore and middle ground. Further distance penetration is not yet the painter’s concern. The beginning interest in the latter begins some decades later in works such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s Peace and War murals in the Pa-

lazzo Pubblico of Siena and Taideo Gaddi’s late mural of God’s pact with Satan in the Campo Santo in Pisa.

Further, one must realize that differences apply within the arbitrary spatial solutions used by medieval Italian and Byzantine painters. The Bigallo Master's Acton Madonna (Fig. 9) is fundamentally flat. It differs in this respect from many Byzantine Madonnas enthroned that do use spatial components, however reduced and arbitrary these might be. One of them, still found, as indicated, in the Rucellai Madonna, is reverse perspective, where the orthogonals, rather than converging, separate in distance, contrary to real experience. It is a convention widely used in medieval times in the rendering of thrones, chairs and tables, and also the platforms supporting them. Implicit in this convention is the assumption that only the part of the object closest to the beholder really matters. The application of reverse perspective reverts to the art of Early Christianity and Byzantium.28 However reduced, its spatial aspect extends by association to the figures and objects connected to them, as evident in a Madonna icon at Mount Sinai (Fig. 10), where her throne rests on two platforms, one set on top of the other.

Of all later Dugento painters active in Italy it was Cimabue who drew most on this Byzantine tradition, as evident in his murals of the Evangelists on the crossing vault of the upper church of San Francesco at Assisi. There he elaborated on the Byzantine formula by superposing such platforms, each supporting a separate object or figure. Closely

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28 See, for example, the table in the mosaic of Abraham feeding the three angels in the church of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome.
related to this convention, in a number of his Madonnas, including the ones in the Louvre and Bologna, he introduced "solid" ground bars, set arbitrarily on the gold ground, supporting the feet of the Virgin’s throne.29

Significantly, in scenes involving seated figures, such as representations of the Virgin enthroned, progress in spatial realism resides in the connection of a throne or chair to its supporting ground.30 If in the former the beholder’s eye is assumed to be located some distance above the supporting ground, as is normally the case, it follows, should a throne’s or chair’s front and rear feet descend to the same level, that spatial recession is excluded. However, if they descend to different levels, the rear feet located higher than those in front, then some awareness of a receding floor or terrain is indicated.

We proceed to Duccio’s use of pictorial space in the Rucellai Madonna (Fig. 1). As stated, the throne is placed some distance within the image. The Virgin’s footstool (suppedaneum), sharing the throne’s oblique position, clearly projects in front of the latter. It consists of two levels, or steps, as she rests one foot on each. The footstool emerges from within the throne sides. It also projects in front of the latter, as can be seen at the lower right. It is not quite clear whether footstool and throne constitute a united, or separate, structure. Significantly, the front feet of the throne and those of the suppedaneum all descend to precisely the same level, which coincides with the front edge of the platform supporting the throne. This has a flattering effect! Had Duccio intended a coherent spatial order, the suppedaneum’s front feet should have descended to a lower level!

Fig. 16. Duccio, Madonna of the Three Franciscans, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena (Photo Soprintendenza B.A.S. — Siena e Grosseto)

Fig. 17. Saint Agatha Master, Madonna del Popolo, S. Maria del Carmine, Florence (Photo Artini)

Significantly, this is precisely what happens in the Coronation of the Virgin from the round stained glass window dated 1287/1288 in Siena Cathedral (Fig. 11). There the feet of the throne’s suppedaneum descend into a lower border below those of the throne. The authorship of the window, recently cleaned, has been much debated. It has been attributed to both Cimabue31 and Duccio.32 This important issue will be dealt with further below.

29 V. for further discussion Polzer, Concerning the Chronology of Cimabue’s Earths, 23.
30 It is assumed that the viewer’s vantage point faces directly the image, thus located some distance above the foreground.
31 V. White, op. cit., 137ff; v. also below in text.
32 Most Italian commentators have attributed the window to Duccio: v. E. Carli, Petrarca Docescesi, Florence 1946; also L. Belloli, A. Bagnoli in the catalogue of the recent Duccio exhibition in Siena: Duccio. Alle origini della pittura senese, Milan 2003, 166–185 (henceforth Duccio. Alle Origini), with extended bibliography. Regarding its attribution to Duccio or Cimabue see below in text.
An easily overlooked detail in the Rucellai Madonna further informs on Duccio’s complex spatial thinking. Roughly aligned with the oblique position of the throne, the receding side of the narrow front platform is visible in the lower left corner (Fig. 12). Accordingly, the toes of the lower left angel’s rear foot rest on nothing solid. Instead of reaching across the entire width of the image, this narrow platform, or step, is still considered a separate entity. The same applies to the wider rear platform supporting the throne. Had it extended to the right border, it should have covered the gold ground appearing in back of the lower right angel’s feet. Indeed, a bit of the receding edge is visible next to the inside of the lower right angel’s right bent knee. Duccio considered these platforms, or steps, a separate solid spatial entity reaching inward from the picture plane with the purpose of supporting the throne. Here one senses a residual awareness of Cimabue’s ground bars or spatial platforms.33

We now turn to the Virgin. She dominates the whole image, not only in her great size, but also by virtue of the intense blue of her ample cloak.34 As has been stated, her extended volume exceeds the limited depth of her throne seat, defined by the narrow supporting platform or step. Accordingly, her hierarchic scale contributing, one is not quite sure whether she sits on top of, or partially floats before, the throne.

The Virgin’s basic pose follows essentially that of the Byzantine Hodegetria type. Her blue cloak covers her head, and a subtle rose fringe at the left side of her face indicates that she still wears the bright coloured cloth typically tightly covering the hair of the Virgin in Byzantine and late medieval Italian painting. Here the white head cloth, borrowed from the Gothic north,35 which reaches around the Virgin’s face and neck in Duccio’s later Siena Cathedral Altarpiece, is not yet present. Beneath her cloak she wears a long sleeved bright rose dress. Both, the edges of her cloak and her dress at the neck and wrists, are lined with a border embroidered in gold. Her cloak offers an exceptional diversity of fold arrangements. A multitude of folds appears in the lower portion of the cloak covering her right leg, as well as the lower part of her rose dress (Fig. 13). Many are pliant and curling. At the other extreme, some contours of her attire offer sharp edges, straight or curved. A number of garment folds explain the disposition of her limbs beneath the cloth: for example her dress as it is stretched between her feet, or where the blue cloak loosely descends below the right leg. Other fold arrangements, however, offer a linear excitement significant in itself, wholly removed from her anatomy, contributing to a denial of weight and substance. Consider especially the undulating path of the cloak’s golden border band as it descends before her body, and the rich curvilinear play of folds toward the bottom of her dress. Here only her attire offers such a diversity of line and rhythm. By comparison the garments of Duccio’s angels and the Christ Child, including

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33 For further discussion of Cimabue’s spatial platforms and groundbars v. Polzer, op. cit.
34 According to Alfio del Sessa, who restored the Rucellai Madonna, the amaranth blue tends to get darker because of its granular structure that attracts impurities over time. The cloak’s basic fold structure, which is still largely visible, would thus have been originally cleaner and the colour brighter.
their fold patterns, substantially agree with the bodies they cover. The exceptional diversity in garment fold treatment evident in the Rucellai Madonna, reaching from stiff line to extreme curvilinear excitement, is not explored to the same degree, and sometimes not at all, in any of the paintings generally attributed to Duccio, including his Siena Cathedral Altarpiece.

Where could Duccio have obtained his exceptionally vibrant, diversified, use of line? One is reminded distantly of the complex fold patterns found at the bottom of garments in certain Carolingian ivories.36 Certainly, he rejected the angular compartmented garment fold schemes found in leading Tuscan Madonnas of the preceding generation, as in the one close to Coppo in Orvieto (Fig. 7) or by the San Bernardino master in Siena.

Here influence from northern Gothic sculpture cannot be excluded. Consider the Saint Melodia from the northern porch of Chartres Cathedral. She virtually floats on the waves of garment folds wrapped around her feet (Fig. 14).37 Similarly, Duccio’s Virgin also steps on her own dress with her left foot, a motif often found in Gothic sculpture.

Duccio’s Christ Child is securely seated on the Virgin’s left knee (Fig. 15). He looks directly to the left side, while extending his right arm in the same direction with the typical teaching-blessing gesture. Following a convention widely found in earlier Tuscan and Byzantine art, he is unconcerned about his mortal mother, who holds him by the waist. At the time the Christ Child, of the type conforming generally to the Byzantine Hodegetria model, could assume a variety of positions. In Coppo’s Madonna del Bordone, and the one in Orvieto (Fig. 7), the Christ Child, also laterally seated, looks up, differently, toward his mother. Among Cimabue’s paintings the Christ Child of the Santa Trinità Madonna directs his blessing hand and face toward the be-holder (Fig. 4), while in the Louvre version he gestures sideways as he looks forward (Fig. 8), and in Cimabue’s mural in the lower church of San Francesco at Assisi he turns both sideward in gesture and glance, etc.

Duccio’s Rucellai Christ Child takes a decisive step toward humanizing his appearance, away from his usual medieval presentation as the incarnate Divine teacher, by discarding the scroll or book that he traditionally held in his left hand. Cimabue’s Christ Child in the lower crossing of San Francesco at Assisi will do the same, a feature not to be discounted when considering the mural’s chronology.38 And the Child’s thin dress, partly transparent, reveals his torso, as in Duccio’s early Madonna with the three Franciscans (Fig. 16), marking an early step toward the uncovering of his body, that will evolve further among Duccio’s later paintings and those produced within his circle of influence in the early Trecento.

One of the typical Byzantine characteristics adopted by Italian painters during the Dugento is the practice of ap-

37 V. Idini, Concerning the Chronology of Cimabue’s oeuvre, for a discussion of Cimabue’s groundbars and spatial platforms. Cimabue’s Madonna in the lower crossing of the church of San Francesco at Assisi, the earliest mural there located, has often been placed early in Cimabue’s known oeuvre (for a review of its dating v. Ragionieri, in: Belloso, Cimabue, 277). The discarding of book and scroll by the Christ Child, his taking hold of his cloak instead, as in Duccio’s Rucellai Madonna, and especially the dismissal of the typical Byzantine tight fitting bright coloured cloth holding the Virgin’s hair in place, would point to a date after the latter.
plying gold striation (chrysography) on the garments of Christ, the Virgin and Saints, thus defining their divinity or sainthood and separating them from lesser beings. This convention is already rooted in Byzantine art much earlier, as evident in the attire of the eleventh century Christ Pantocrator on the mosaic dome of the monastic church at Daphni, etc. However, chrysography was hardly mandatory. For example, it does not appear on the delicately modeled cloak of the Virgin, nor of Christ, in the exceptional mid-thirteenth century Deesis mosaic in Hagia Sophia, or the early fourteenth century mosaic of the Virgin and Child from the Chora Monastery, both in Constantinople.

Turning to Italy, local painters who adopted chrysography during the later Dugento often used it to excess. Consider the Madonna del Popolo by the Saint Agatha Master in the church of the Carmine in Florence (Fig. 17), or the retable in the Pisa museum offering Christ in the central panel, both surely predating the Rucellai Madonna by some years. In these paintings chrysography is applied on all the figures’ garments, thus losing its discriminating function.

Fig. 22. Assumption of the Virgin, Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris (Photo Polker)

Around 1300 the use of chrysography was clearly debated in leading Italian artistic centers. Giotto essentially dismissed it, so did Simone Martini, and the masters responsible for the Life of Saint Francis mural cycle in the upper church of San Francesco Assisi at Assisi used it with great restraint. Significantly, in the Rucellai Madonna Duccio uses chrysography selectively. On figures’ garments only the cloak of the Christ Child, wrapped around his legs and lower body, received all covering gold striation, thus designating his Divinity! However, it also appears elsewhere in the painting on garment border bands and on the angels’ wings roughly indicating the shapes of feathers. In addition, gold striation patterns are applied on the plane surfaces of the Virgin’s footstool and the narrow platforms, or steps, below, reminiscent of those appearing on Cimabue’s throne in the Santa Trinita Madonna.

As far as I can tell, the kneeling position of Duccio’s Rucellai Madonna angels does not appear in earlier extant

39 I suspect that the practice of chrysography in Byzantine painting is derived from cloisonné enamel, considering the resemblance of the cloisonné holding the vitreous paste in place, on account of its bright metallic colour, with chrysography.
40 Reproduced in: Mother of God, 119, fig. 70. Significantly, in this exceptional monumental mosaic “reverse chrysography” is used in the treatment of Christ’s golden dress. Normally it is the arbitrary striation pattern applied on Christ’s dress that is golden, but here blue lines are used to articulate the gold patterns of his golden dress.
41 Reproduced in: Mother of God, 104, fig. 58.
42 Reproduced in: E. Carl, Il Museo di Pisa, Pisa 1974, cat. n. 30, fig. 45.
43 In Giotto’s mural decoration of the Arena Chapel chrysography appears exclusively on the garments of the angels and Old Testament figures flanking Christ ascending to heaven.
44 Among the scenes of the Life of Saint Francis murals at Assisi delicate chrysography appears on Christ’s garments.
Gabriel and Michael, together defining the age of Christianity reaching from the Incarnation to the Last Judgment. This convention emerged early, sometime after the Council of Ephesus of 431, which declared the Virgin the Theotokos: the Mother of God. They appear, duly named, in a sixth century Coptic embroidery in Cleveland and on the apse mosaic of roughly the same period in a church at Kiti in Cyprus, on a sixth century ivory diptych leaf of the Nikopolis in Berlin and the Madona della Clemenza in Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, of roughly the same date. And they even exceed the Madona in size in the monumental ninth century mosaic decoraton of the barrel vault preceding the main apse of the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople!

Eventually these assisting and protecting angels became smaller. They often appear as half figures in roundels located above and to the sides of the Virgin’s throne, as in the late medieval Byzantinizing Kahn Madonna in Washington (Fig. 6). Or they stand directly behind the throne, as in Coppo’s Madonna del Bordone in Siena (Fig. 3), the Madona in Orvieto (Fig. 7) and the Master of San Martiniano Madonna in Pisa, etc.

During the second half of the Dugento the angels flanking the Madonna’s throne start to multiply. Thus six angels, three to each side of the throne, appear in Cimabue’s Louvre Madonna; eight in his Santa Trinita Madonna where they are also placed in back of the throne; and six in the Coronation of the Virgin on the round stained glass window of 1287/1288 in the apse of Siena Cathedral. The multiplication of these angels would reflect the intense cult of the late medieval Virgin in Western Europe.

Why do Duccio’s angels kneel? The reason might involve a change in attitude toward the Virgin’s spiritual status within the Church’s hierarchic disposition of mortal and spiritual beings. It ranks angels, creatures of the spirit, above mortals, creatures of flesh. Thus the angelic orders appear above Christ Judge in the uppermost register of the Last Judgment mosaic on the domical vault of the Florentine Baptistry, while the smaller souls of mortals appear below. On the earlier well known encaustic icon at Mount Sinai, usually dated into the sixth century, two large archangels standing behind her throne look toward the hand of God the Father, the Divine Master, reaching from Heaven toward the smaller Madonna seated below holding her child. Differently, in Duccio’s Rucellai Madonna the kneeling angels look toward the Virgin! This occurs as well in Giotto’s Ognissanti Madonna some decades later (Fig. 5), as well as in Simone Martini’s Siena Maesta. Differently, in earlier Byzantine representations of saints and angels worshiping the Virgin, as in an early twelfth century illumination in the Homilies of Jacobus kokkabianaphos, all stand before her.

Differently, Cimabue’s arrangement of partly superposed angels standing beside the throne prevailed instead, this convention eventually also including saints. Segna adopted it in his Castiglion Fiorentino Altarpiece (Fig. 18), as well as the one by the Master of Città di Castello in that town. Duccio himself adopted it in his Siena Cathedral Altarpiece (Fig. 2). Examples can be extended.

Why do Duccio’s angels kneel — and why were they not copied? According to the extant evidence, medieval Italian painting offers none before Duccio’s time. Prior to his and Cimabue’s Madonnas only two angels flanked the Virgin enthroned, and they did not kneel. As noted, they were

Italian or Byzantine Madonnas. Fully superposed, they kneel beside the throne, holding onto it with both hands, eyes collectively directed toward the Virgin’s face. Duccio’s extant obra, including that of the masters he influenced, excludes this type of composition. Considering the exceptional quality of the Rucellai Madonna and the religious devotion it must have elicited, this absence is difficult to explain. The only features that may have influenced younger outstanding artists were the two lower angels kneeling before the Virgin’s throne. Such kneeling angels return in Giotto’s Ognissanti Madonna (Fig. 5) and Simone Martini’s Siena Maesta, where, however, they will offer the Virgin vases filled with lilies and roses, recalling Dante’s symbolic connection of these flowers to Mary in the Paradiso.

45 Regarding the early cult of Duccio’s Rucellai Madonna v. S. Orlando, La Madonna di Duccio di Bottini nella S. Maria Novella, Manoscritto dominicano 11 (1910) 205–217; also Rucek, op. cit., 33–46.
46 Dante, Paradiso, XXIII, 70–5: Perché la faccia mia et l’infamia, che tu non ti rivoglio al bel giardino che sotto i raggi di Cristo s’infiora? Quivi è la Rosa, in che il Verbo divino carme si fice; quivi son li gigi, al cui odor si prese il buon cammino.
47 V. n. 26 supra.
48 Reproduced in: Mother of God, 29, fig. 12.
49 Reproduced in: Ibid., 259, fig. 201.
Examples of angels kneeling before the Virgin are found in northern Gothic architectural sculpture: on tympana whose very shape invites the location of kneeling figures in the limited side spaces. Kneeling angels appear rarely in scenes of the Madonna and Child enthroned, preferring representations of her crowned by her son in Heaven, where their worshipping function is appropriate. Censer swinging angels flanking the Virgin enthroned in approximate kneeling position appear in 1220/1230 on the tympanum on the south portal of the church of Notre Dame at Donnemarie-en-Montois.52 There their knees are raised somewhat from the ground, partially recalling the position of the kneeling-running Magi worshiping the Christ Child, as in the Adoration mosaic in the church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. However, on two other early thirteenth century tympana the angels flanking the Virgin crowned in Heaven kneel solidly on the ground: on the northern transept at Chartres Cathedral, and the western facade of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

When precisely the kneeling angels worshiping the Madonna entered the realm of Italian painting is not certain. This occurred surely around the later Duccio. Significantly, two such kneeling angels flanking the Virgin and Child enthroned appear in an apse mural in the Sacro Speco at Subiaco, the very mural that also offers Magister Conclusus' name (Fig. 19). There the angels assume the position of prayer. The mural is not far removed in time from Duccio's Rucellai Madonna.53

Once established in art, angels kneeling before the Virgin become commonplace. Around 1300 the Archangel Gabriel also begins to kneel before the Virgin Annunciate. During the Middle Ages Gabriel traditionally stood before the Virgin, or strod toward her. So he still appears in Duccio's Annunciation in London from his dismembered Siena Cathedral Altarpiece. However, on the panel of the angel announcing her death on the same altarpiece he kneels before her, one may assume in anticipation of her assumption to heaven where she will be crowned, enthroned beside her Divine Son, an aspect of her cult not found in Byzantium. However, the angel Gabriel kneels before her on Giotto's Arena Chapel triumphal arch mural (Fig. 20).54 Interestingly, here popular religious literature may have preceded art, since Gabriel already kneels before the Virgin in the Meditations on the Life of Christ, a popular religious treatise written, it is believed, around 1280 at San Gimignano by a Franciscan friar for the edification of Clares. Giotto may well have known this popular text. Instructing the reader on how to meditate on the Saviour's incarnation, the Franciscan author relates how the Annunciation might have occurred: "See ... how the angel wisely and assiduously introduces and chooses his words, kneeling reverently before his Lady ... fulfilling his embassy faithfully." And the Virgin, consenting to God's will, "(also) kneel with profound devotion, and, folding her hands, said: 'Behold the handmaid of God; let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38). Then the Son of God forthwith entered her womb."55 With her arms folded, that is, crossed before her chest, Giotto's Virgin Annunciate represents the moment of conception!

All of this taken into account, Duccio's kneeling angels worship the Virgin in a manner previously reserved for
Fig. 27. Duccio, Rucellai Madonna. Detail: Background
(Photo Polzer)

God. Afterwards such worshipping angels kneeling before her will become commonplace.56

Prior to their appearance in Italian art, the worshipping angels adoring the Madonnas also appear in Notre Dame de la Belle Verrière, a stained glass window located in the southern ambulatory of Chartres Cathedral (Fig. 21). The exceptional composition of this window was not devised at one time, since the central element: the central portion offering the Virgin and Child enthroned, survived the drastic fire of 1194, while the six flanking angels were added around the mid-thirteenth century. An altar located below in 1324 would indicate that by then the window received a cult.57 The resemblance of its composition with that of Duccio’s Rucellai Madonna has often been noted.58 It consists of the superposed location of the geneflecting angels in three successive regist-

ters to both sides of the throne, and their collective look toward the face of the hierarchic Madonna seated at the center. Of course, the differences must also be noted. At Chartres the angels’ lowered knees are somewhat raised from the ground, indicated by an irregular line located below, while in Duccio’s painting the feet of the upper four angels are simply spotlighted against the flat golden background, those of the two lower angels resting on a receding step or narrow platform. Further, in the window only the uppermost angels seem to hold onto the throne: to be precise, each grasps a leafed branch extending sideward from the top of the vertical bars representing the throne’s side posts. Otherwise they hold various objects: the top angels spheres, the central angels candles, the lower angels censers. Nevertheless, given the uniqueness in time and place, their resemblances would favour a direct connection. Duccio may have visited Chartres before or around 1285, or he may have used a copy. A “Duce de Siena”, possibly Duccio, is known to have resided in Paris in 1296/1297.59 Even the respective sizes of the Chartres window (490 by 236 cm) and Duccio’s Rucellai Madonna (450 by 290 cm) are not far apart. Indeed, the extraordinary size of Duccio’s painting, and its original position “floating” high on the western transept end wall in Santa Maria Novella, suggests deliberate imitation of a monumental stained glass window!

Finally, the many spatial contradictions contributing, here Duccio’s Madonna seems deliberately suspended between heaven and earth. The closer scrutiny of the angels’ positions and actions would confirm this interpretation. We recall that at the left side the upper and lower angels hold onto the throne as if they intend to support it. And from the bilateral symmetrical disposition of their visible front arms and hands it can be inferred that the respective angels at the right side supported the throne as well.

Where could Duccio have seen angels holding an object with arms so widely separated? The answer may be found in the iconography of Christ’s Ascension, or of the Virgin’s Assumption to Heaven, including flying angels, arms spread apart, who support the mandorla containing them. Around 1175 the Virgin thus lifted to heaven appears in the tympanum of the church of St. Pierre-le-Pullier at Bourges.60 She often returns in similar form in Italian art, as on Orcagna’s relief on his mid-Trecento tabernacle in Or San Michele. A relief of the Assumption of the Virgin located on the north-eastern exterior apse wall of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, dating some time before 1320, offers angels, arms spread apart and

56 The angel kneels before the Virgin in Duccio’s Annunciation of the Virgin’s Death, belonging to the Sienna Cathedral altarpiece, in the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo in Sienna, while the Angel Gabriel stands before her in the Annunciation of Christ’s Birth from the same altarpiece in the National Gallery, London. And in the huge Madonna at Montevergine, attributed to Montevergine d’Arezzo (c. n. 67), two small angels, apparently just descended from heaven, kneel precariously on the upper sides of her throne.

57 For the history of the stained glass window of Notre Dame de la Belle Verrière v. Y. Delaporte, Les vitraux de la cathédrale de Chartres 1, Chartres 1926, 216–222.


59 Two documents dating from 1296 and the year following indicate that a Duch de Siena et Duch de Lombard resided at the time in le paroisse saint Hilaire ... en le rieu soa prasecher a Paris. They are published in K. Michalson, Le livre de la taille de Paris 1296, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborgs Universitets årsskrift 64 (1930) 260, and idem, Le livre de la taille de Paris 1297, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborgs Universitets Årsskrift, 673 (1961) 421.

60 Reproduced in: Schiller, op. cit., fig. 625.
intercrossing, who lift the Virgin in her cloud-like mandorla heavenward (Fig. 22). Just beginning her heavenly ascent, there the two lowest angels assume kneeling positions, as if their feet were still resting on the ground.

Duccio’s Rucellai Virgin is suspended between heaven and earth! Considering that Duccio’s unique composition of the angels’ supporting role had no following, it seems that his interpretation was either not understood, or that it was, for some reason or other, rejected.

Using different means, Duccio returns to the concept of the Heavenly Throne in his early Madonna and the Three Franciscans (Fig. 16). In this diminutive painting the back of the Virgin’s throne is not visible. One only sees a luxurious cloth held up by angels behind the Virgin. Normally connected to the throne back, now angels support the cloth from behind so that it forms, as it descends between their supporting hands, a series of gable-like shapes resembling the contour of a Gothic church façade or reliquary. In essence, the angels’ supporting role of the throne cloth places the Virgin in Heaven. However, since she also offers protection to three Franciscan friars by extending her cloak over them, she caters for her earthly devotees. Some decades later and using different means Simone Martini’s Maestà serving the legislative council of Siena projects the same idea: the heavenly Virgin descended to earth.61

**The Ornament**

Evolving from the practices of the preceding generation of Tuscan painters, including Cimabue, Duccio’s decorative treatment of the gold background and the haloes in the Rucellai Madonna is both the most delicate and complex of

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61 Regarding changes in the texts representing the Virgin’s speech and the appearance of Saint Crescentius dating from Simone’s restoration of his own Maestà in 1321, observed during the recent restoration of the mural, V. A. Stagnoli, *La Maestà di Simone Martini*, Milan 1999, 83–85, 90.
any panel painting of his time. It differs fundamentally from that of his other masterpiece dating a quarter of a century later: the Siena Cathedral Altarpiece. For this reason, and others, it deserves closer scrutiny.

The main design motif of the Virgin’s halo (Fig. 23), the largest and most impressive, consists of four overlapping circles set around a prominent central circle, thus forming a quadrangle containing floral shapes in the open spaces that are covered with crossing scribed lines. Beyond the quadrangle, and around trilobes located in the side spaces, the ground is dotted with a small pearl punch. The design in the wide outer halo band is wholly scribed. However, punch marks line its perimeters, the outer offering a small pearl shape and the inner a small equilateral triangle that is also applied, outward pointing, along the band framing the prominent central circle.

The Rucellai Christ Child’s halo (Fig. 24) also offers both scribed and dotted ornament. As in the former, crossing scribed lines cover the ground around plant shapes located in the main fields. In the three arms of the cross appear circles, squares and volutes formed by dotted lines. Also, a punch motif containing six radially disposed wedge shapes lines the outer halo band.

Interestingly, the haloes of the central (Fig. 25) and lower (Fig. 26) angels at the right side of the throne offer a deliberate contrast in the use of the dot punch and the scribed line. Linear scrolls appear in their main fields, of the kind widely used earlier in Sienese panel painting. Significantly, in the central angel’s halo these volutes are delicately scribed, with clustered pearl punches set at their ends, while in the lower angel’s halo the volutes, initially scribed, are gone over with a dot punch. And in both haloes this contrast is repeated in the decorative treatment of the outer band respective of the main field. An identical small hexalobe punch is used in the outer lining of both haloes. The other angels’ haloes offer more substantial decorative forms. The main design motif of the central angel’s halo at the left side is an outward pointing heart. Surveying these haloes one realizes that here Duccio experimented widely with different ornamental procedures and shapes.

In addition, the extended gold background is wholly covered with an intricately shaped grid (Fig. 27). It is essentially rectilinear, with tilted squares located at the intersections and at the centers of the open spaces. It offers both scribed and dotted lines with patterns of crossing lines covering portions of the design. On the whole, here the workmanship of the gold ground is quite delicate.

The ornamental treatment of the gold background of the Rucellai Madonna bears a certain resemblance to that of Cimabue’s Santa Trinità Madonna (Fig. 28). There the gold background also offers a rectilinear grid formed by scribed
lines, gone over with dot punches of two different sizes. Cimabue’s grid design is simpler. The dotted line also prevails in the design of Cimabue’s haloes, with floral and scroll motifs applied on a clear ground. Motif punches are absent. The ground inside some of the leaf and bud shapes is either clear or offers a grid of crossing scribed lines. Cimabue often uses a distinctive complex circular floral motif consisting of curved inner lobes with pointed leaves extending outward between them. On the whole, Cimabue’s ornament lacks the patient control of Duccio’s. However, Duccio’s grid applied on the gold background indicates some awareness of Cimabue’s ornamental practice.

Although not present in the Santa Trinità Madonna, Cimabue used the ground textured with a dot punch elsewhere, on Christ’s halo from his early painted cross in the church of San Domenico at Arezzo, where another small punch motif is also found.

Taking inventory of the ornament on Tuscan panel painting of the latter part of the Dugento, one finds that the deliberate contrast of dotted versus scribed line, as well as of the dotted (granulated) versus clear gold ground, preceded the creation of both the Rucellai and Santa Trinità Madonnas. These diverse procedures are widely applied, not infrequently in the same work, by the San Martino Master, Margaritone, on the altarpiece signed Melior me pixxi, dated 1271, in the Uffizi Gallery, Coppo’s Madonna del Bordone, and the paintings by Guido da Siena and his shop. The rich floral rinceaux in the Virgin’s halo of Guido’s San Domenico Madonna is applied on a dotted ground. The Polyptych number 6 close to Guido in the Siena Pinacoteca already offers the deliberate contrast of dotted versus scribed ornament in the saints’ haloes. However, in all of these panel paintings the gold background is clear.

Since it is hardly found earlier in the Dugento painting, the presence of a comprehensive ornamental grid design on the gold background of both the Rucellai and Santa Trinità Madonnas calls for an explanation. Its basic grid shape recalls the embossed and/ or stamped metal masks framing many holy figures on Byzantine icons, such as the one of the praying Virgin in the cathedral of Freising dating from the middle of the thirteenth century, etc. Byzantine icons of this kind were well known in Dugento Italy. They influenced the huge Madonna, attributed to Montano d’Arezzo, in the abbey at Montevige near Avellino, which is wholly clad with embossed metal plaques constituting a grid of tillered squares, each containing four Angelic lilies. It is the largest panel painting of its time, exceeding in height even Duccio’s Rucellai Madonna. It has been dated into the nineties of the Dugento, which seems early considering the precocious animaté presence of singing angels, and the fitted royal garment of the Christ Child, reminiscent of the

62 Such decorative grids also cover the gold ground in Cimabue’s Madonna in the Servita Church in Bologna and in the Musée du Louvre.
63 For the discovery of the signature and date in Coppo’s Madonna del Bordone v. n. 3.
64 The ornamental shapes decorating the saints’ haloes on Polyptych 6 in the Siena Pinacoteca closely resemble those appearing on Cimabue’s Santa Trinità Madonna.
65 For the date of the Freising icon v. D. and T. Talbot Rice, Icons and their Dating, London 1974, 277, no. 6; see also the double panel Annunciation icon from the Church of Virgin the Peribleptos, Ochrid, which is dated 1108–1120 (ibid., 45, no. 19a and b – well reproduced in: P. J. Müller, Icônes byzantines, Paris 1978, plates III).
66 Nail holes along the periphery of the Virgin’s cloak on an icon of the Virgin of Interventio in the Cathedral of Spoleto indicate the original presence of metal masking (reproduced in: Mother of God, 333, fig. 209; v. also H. Belting, Likenes and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art, Chicago–London 1994, 244, 580, n. 71).
dress of Simone Martini’s Child on his Siena Maestà of 1315. The diagonal grid covering the ground in the Madonna by Lello da Orvieto in the cathedral museum at Anagni, with its fleurs-de-lys, surely imitated such metal masking using pastiglia relief. Similarly, the great Madonna by Duccio and Cimabue imitated the effect of elaborate Byzantine metal masking by working the gold background with punch and scribe.

In addition, awareness of Byzantine goldsmith work is surely also involved. The delicate linear scrollwork and the pearlised contours on the precious metal icon of Saint Michael in the treasury of Saint Mark’s basilica in Venice resembles the plant scrolls and dotted lines appearing in the haloes of many Dugento Italian panel paintings. This aspect of Byzantine influence, especially marked in the later Dugento, surely contributed to the label: maniera greca, that later Renaissance commentators, including Ghirlandaio and Vasari, applied to Tuscan painting of this period.

The general concern for decorating and texturing the gold ground and haloes with punch and scribe is yet absent from the activity of leading Tuscan painters of the later Millecento and the early Dugento. It does not appear on Cross 432 in the Uffizi Gallery, the two great painted Crosses 15 and 20 in the Pisa museum, the paintings by the Bigallo Master and the Beringhieri family of Lucca, etc. In these the gold background is consistently clear and the decoration on haloes

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68 See also the two panels representing Saints Nilus and Bartholomew in the museum of the Badia at Grastaferrata (reproduced in Leone De Castris, op. cit., 235, figs. 6, 7).

69 In his Commentarii Ghirlandaio associates Italian art before Giotto with the maniera greca: Cimabue tenne la maniera greca; Cavallini is praised, but tiene un poco della maniera antica cioè greca; and Giotto lasciò la rovescia di 'Greci'. (J. von Schleier, Lorenzo Ghirlandaio’s Denkwürdigkeiten I, Berlin 1912, 348). And in his Fire Vasari also connects the
is painted. Delicate scribed ornament and dotted lines do appear on the haloes of Giunta’s crosses.70 It is in the third quarter of the Dugento, as in the paintings of Coppo and Guido, that the new ornamental practices involving more complex scribed and punched designs are widely investigated in the treatment of gold surfaces.71

The Round Stained Glass Window in the Choir of Siena Cathedral (Figs. 11, 29)

The exceptional round stained glass window in the choir of Siena Cathedral, one of the most outstanding artistic creations of later Dugento Siena, has recently undergone thorough restoration. This has created renewed interest in its art historical position, discussed by a number of specialists in the recent catalogue of the exhibition regarding Duccio’s œuvre and its wider sphere of influence held in Siena from October 2003 to January 2004.

The Sienese round stained glass window is one of the most significant creations of later Dugento Italian art. According to the documents the window, located on the eastern choir wall of Siena Cathedral, was begun at the commune’s expense in the years 1287/1288.72 Sienese scholars have attributed the window to Duccio, although some others have vigorously disagreed.73 Obviously, considering the closeness of its production to that of the Rucellai Madonna, begun just two years before in 1285, these two outstanding works deserve careful comparison.

At first glance one observes fundamental compositional differences. In the window’s scene of the Coronation of the Virgin (Fig. 11) the throne is made of masonry instead of wood, and the flanking angels do not kneel but stand. Considering the closeness of their production these compositional changes would seem excessive, assuming that both works were by the same master.

Before proceeding further, one must be aware of the intricate technique required in the making of monumental stained glass. The window, measuring 5.60 m. in diameter, required the presence of a master glazier capable of creating such a large window. And painting on the glass, using pigment mixed with vitric paste, taking account of the beholder’s distance from the window in its high location on the eastern apse wall, did not require the detail found in panel painting. The window’s production was a collaboration effort.

Thus far the authorship issue has centered around two principal candidates, these being the leading Tuscan painters then active: Duccio and Cimabue. John White supplied substantial evidence attributing the window to the latter.74 On the other hand, since Enzo Carli most scholars, especially those based in Siena, have opted for Duccio. They include Bellosi and Bagnoli who have expressed their views in the catalogue of the Siena Duccio exhibition that ended on January 11, 2004,75 marking the completion of Camillo Tarozzi’s recent restoration of the window.

Let us consider Duccio’s and Cimabue’s respective claims. Nowhere in the window’s painting is Duccio’s characteristic sinuous line to be found. Further, the pronounced diagonally sideward and downward tilting feet of Siena’s four patron saints (Fig. 30) and of the two closest angels in the Coronation of the Virgin (Fig. 11), widening sharply toward the toes, closely resemble Cimabue’s articulate large feet in his Assisi murals, also evident in the angels of his Santa Trinità Madonna (Fig. 4). Compared to Duccio’s angels feet in the Rucellai Madonna are small and flexible, the toes bending as they respond to the pressure of a presumed ground (Fig. 1).

Many of the physiognomies in the window hardly belong in Duccio’s realm. During the window’s recent restoration Alessandro Bagnoli, who endorses Duccio’s authorship, duly stressed the close resemblance of the shape of Christ’s head in the scene of the Entombment of the Virgin with the head of the Christ on a painted cross in the Castello di Gallico at Asciano.76 And Bellorsi drew attention of its resemblance to the head of Christ on another painted cross presently in the Salzini Collection in Siena.77 Neither cross can be firmly connected to Duccio. On the other hand, in the stained glass window the severe bearded physiognomies of the Evangelist Luke (Fig. 31) or Saint Bartholomew, that are still substantially legible, strongly recall Cimabue’s dramatic male figures in his Assisi murals! Consider especially their large staring eyes. They do not agree with Duccio’s softer artistic temperament. Nor do I observe a closer resemblance of the Virgin ascending to heaven (Fig. 32) and the younger patron saints of Siena with Duccio’s respective figure types.

In addition, compared to Duccio’s early thrones in the Rucellai Madonna and the Madonna of the Three Franciscans, on the window the Evangelists’ chairs and the throne in the Coronation of the Virgin offer a greater degree of coherent spatial recession. Significantly, in the Coronation of the Virgin the suppedaneum reaches forward from the throne so that its front supports come to rest at the lower edge of the painters preceding Giotto, including the Sienese Ugolino, to the maniera greca. In both versions of 1550 and 1568 he writes that Cimabue learned to paint from Greek masters, perfecting what he borrowed (see the useful juxtaposed texts of both these versions of Vasari’s lives in Bettarini and Barocchi, op. cit., II, Testo, 35). In both versions Gaddi (Gaddi attese continuamente a studiare la maniera greca accompagnata con quella di Cimabue (ibid., 82) the same applies to Margaritone who was highly praised by the painters working alla greca (ibid., 89ff). Tafani learned the art of mosaic from Greek masters, including an Apollonio he knew in Venice whom he brought to Florence to teach him the art of mosaic (ibid., 73) Differently, Giotto ... divenne così buono imitatore della natura, che brandi affinto quella goffa maniera greca, e risuscinò la moderna e buona arte della pittura... (in both the 1550 and 1568 Viee: ibid., II, Testo, 97). Ugolino still tenne sempre in gran parte la maniera greca (ibid., 139).

70 Around the mid-Dugento painters began to use scribed lines and small motif punches for decorating haloes. The haloes of the Virgin and Saint John on the side panels of Giunta’s painted crosses in Santa Maria degli Angeli consist of a plain gold ground, while on Christ’s halo the ornamental design of the cruciform bands is defined by dotted lines, and Christ’s halo on Giunta’s cross in the church of San Ranieri, Pisa, is decorated with delicate scribed volutes.


73 The documents regarding the production of the stained glass window are available in Carli, Pietrata Duccesca, 12–14.

74 For a recent bibliography concerning the window’s authorship v. Bagnoli, Duccio. Alle origini, 180.

75 White, op. cit., 137–140.

76 In: Duccio. Alle origini, 166–180.

77 A. Bagnoli, Restauro della Vettrata di Duccio di Boninsegna del Duomo di Siena, Soprintendenza B.A.S. per le province di Siena e Grosseto, n.d.

78 In: Duccio. Alle origini, 162.
decorated border band, while the front of the throne proper reaches only down to the base line of the main image. Accordingly, the throne in the *Rucellai Madonna* is yet spatially substantially compressed, as the front legs of the *suppedaneum* and those of the Virgin’s throne descend, differently, to the same level. This solution also applies to the *Madonna and the Three Franciscans*.

Further, on the round window the design of the feathers on the angels’ wings compares consistently with that found in Cimabue’s *œuvre*, and not Duccio’s. In the *Rucellai Madonna* the angels’ wings are brown close to their bodies, the individual feathers indicated briefly with golden contour lines. Only toward the wings’ lower extremities does Duccio introduce at times different brighter colours (Fig. 12). Duccio will continue to use such brown wings with golden lines indicating the feathers throughout his later career. Differently, as in the window’s main scenes, in his *Santa Trinità Madonna* Cimabue’s angels’ wings offer bright and contrasting colours throughout. Significantly, on the window the composition of feathers in the uppermost portion of certain of the angels’ wings offers adjoining rows of short feathers extending in opposite directions (Fig. 33). This arrangement is found in the detail in Cimabue’s *œuvre*, particularly on the mural of the *Virgin En-throned* in the lower crossing of the church of S. Francesco at Assisi (Fig. 34). Further, in the *Coronation* scene the relaxed position of the angels leaning from behind over the back of the throne differs from the superposed placement of Duccio’s kneeling angels in his *Rucellai Madonna* painted a few years before. Duccio will imitate their relaxed positions two decades later on his Siena Cathedral Altarpiece.

In conclusion, the window’s strong Cimabuesque features cannot be discounted. I should not be surprised if Cimabue had been involved in the window’s production. He might have been chosen for his acquaintance with the glazer from his activity before at Assisi. Considering the resemblances adduced by Bagnoli and Bellosi, an artist related to Duccio may also have contributed to the window. In any case, the unquestioning attribution of the window to Duccio is not warranted.

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78 In Cimabue’s *Louvre Madonna* the upper portion of the angels’ wings, close to the shoulders, is brown, similar to Duccio’s angels’ wings in the *Rucellai Madonna*. Similar angels’ wings, their upper portions equally brown with golden lines briefly indicating the feathers, appear widely in earlier *Dugento* Siennese painting, as on the *Saint Peter and the Saint Francis Altarpieces* in the Siena Pinacoteca Nazionale (inv. Nos. 15 and 313), etc.