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Art in America

Berenson

Venetian painting in U.S.A (4)

39m  
RTP

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130103



Fig. 1. VENETIAN SCHOOL (c. 1400): TRIPTYCH.  
*Collection of Mr. Henry Walters, Baltimore.*



Fig. 2. CATERINO: TRIPTYCH.  
*Collection of Mr. Henry Walters, Baltimore.*

# ART IN AMERICA · AN ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE · VOLUME III NUMBER II · FEBRUARY MCMXV



## VENETIAN PAINTINGS IN THE UNITED STATES: I BY BERNHARD BERENSON

**I**T is my intention to survey in these articles the paintings by Venetian Masters that I have seen in our home collections. No claim can be made to completeness. There are probably treasures unknown to me even in the few great Eastern cities that I frequent, while, as for the interior, my acquaintance with it is confined to a fleeting glimpse of Chicago and Cleveland many years ago. One hears of Rembrandts stalking across the prairies and climbing the Rockies, and of Velasquez invading the West supported by innumerable Grecos, but so far, I have come upon no trace of a single Italian picture of the first order having found a home across the Alleghanies.

Even our East possesses few Italian masterpieces. The Metropolitan Museum of New York and the Museum of Boston, where we might first have expected to find them, are virtually precluded by the constitution and policy of their governing bodies from acquiring great works of art, unless they fall in as gifts. Our private collections, save in a few instances, are of too recent a date to be comparable with those in Europe.

And yet a good start has been made. It is fair to remember that, extensive though the interest in Italian painting has been, scarce a dozen of its enthusiasts could afford to acquire the greatest or even the least works of art. Thus masterpieces are rare; although, in fact, we already possess a number which is surprisingly high considering the circumstances. On the other hand, few of the better known artists are entirely unrepresented. It is already possible for the student whose travels carry him no further north than Boston, no further south than Washington, and no further west than Detroit and Cleveland, to frame for himself, after inspecting original

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specimens, an idea of the evolution and even of the value of Italian painting not too inaccurate and not altogether inadequate.

The following articles have chiefly this type of student in view, and the treatment will accordingly be historical.

## I.

No history of Venice yet written—not even Mr. Horatio Brown's evocative and illuminating study—conveys half so vividly as does a glance at Venetian painting, the sense of how isolated, during the fourteenth century, was the Republic of the Lagoons from the remainder of Italy. Thus, Giotto labored for years in Padua, the nearest town on the mainland, and his activity there quickly altered the typography, so to speak, as well as the technique of the painter's art throughout the whole of Northern Italy. In Venice alone it took decades before a clear trace of his influence began to appear. And this, when it came, was almost entirely confined to such general elements as shape and composition, while the substance, the craft, the technique, remained imperturbably Byzantine. The green underpainting, the profuse gilding, the effects of lacquer or enamel, suffered no change worth mentioning before the revolution started by Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello and achieved by their pupil and follower, Jacopo Bellini. This revolution, we may note in passing, followed the conquest of Padua in 1405 and the initiation of that continental policy which rapidly turned Venice into a great Italian power. Even then, the Vivarinis and their spiritual kin retained a great deal of Byzantinism in their art, and the last of them, Alvise, betrays its continued hold upon him not only in his harder, more polished surfaces, but in his failure to assimilate the new composition and even the new lighting.

These paintings of the fourteenth century and those of the fifteenth which were least affected by the Bellinesque innovation, will form the subject of the first of this series of articles.

## II.

We begin with the signed work of Caterino in the collection of Mr. Henry Walters of Baltimore (Fig. 2), which has been reproduced and minutely described by Prof. Laudedeo Testi in the first volume of his very compendious and most learned "Storia della

Pittura Veneziana" (p. 244). Its reproduction dispenses us from a minute description. The same authority (*ibid.*, p. 237) tells us that Caterino was known to be active between 1362 and 1382. He was, in fact, one of the prominent painters in the Venice of that time. A glance at Mr. Walter's Polyptych will suffice to inform us that painting in Venice during the decades just mentioned was still playing the same subordinated and modest role that it seems to have taken in the Mediæval Greek world. The general effect of type and color and surface is overwhelmingly Byzantine, and the technique almost wholly so. The Madonna manifests signs of Giottesque influence, coming, however, not directly from Giotto himself at the neighboring Padua, but indirectly through his Romagnol followers at Rimini and its coasts. The few miles of land travel proved so efficient a barrier, before the conquest of Padua and the consequent closer communications, that all the Italianism recognizable in Venice till after 1400 came thither by the sea. As the Madonna in this picture is so much more Italian than any other of Caterino's known works, we may safely regard it as the latest we possess.

Venetian paintings dating from before the Renaissance are so rare that we must not disdain a small Triptych (Fig. 1) in the same collection of Mr. Walters at Baltimore, mediocre enough intrinsically, but with some of the attractiveness of old icons, and not devoid of interest. In the central panel we see Our Lady seated on a flowered hillock, with the Child eagerly clinging to her. Above is the Crucifixion. In the right panel we have the Virgin Annunciate over St. James, in his turn over St. Margaret; and in the left, the Angel of the Annunciation over the Baptist and St. Catherine. The ground, of course, is gold; the enamel-like technique is still Byzantine. The florid pinnacles, combined with a return to round arches, enable us at once to date this modest achievement as of about 1400. Who its author may have been, I have no idea, except that he undoubtedly was a Venetian. The Angel Gabriel recalls both of Lorenzo Veneziano's angels in the Venice Academy (Nos. 9 and 10). The Madonna, on the other hand, is distinctly of Bologna-Marchigian origin, seated as she is on a hillock with rays emanating from her and stars all about her—a motive recurring in the dazzlingly decorative panels of Andrea da Bologna and Francescuccio Ghisi at Pausula, Fermo and Ascoli. I suspect, by the way, that this motive of the Madonna sitting low, destined to become al-

most universal toward 1400, was invented in Bologna decades earlier. Our painter would seem to have had direct contact with the source, for had he got it from such a model as Giovanni da Bologna's panel now in the Venice Academy (No. 17), he would, like that, have omitted the stars.

Passing over a rougher work more in the manner of that embogged Byzantinist, Semitecolo, a Madonna belonging to Mr. D. F. Platt of Englewood, N. J., we come to the only other Venetian painting of fourteenth century character that I can remember having seen in America. It is an oblong panel in the gallery of the New York Historical Society, which, many years ago, when I last saw it, had the number 183, and was ascribed to Taddeo Gaddi. Evidently a *predella*, it represented the Crucifixion, with the Blessed Virgin fainting into the arms of one of the six women surrounding her, and on the other side the soldiers dividing Our Lord's garment. At the time, the shapes, the arrangement, the color and the technique all struck me as Venetian, although under more than ordinary Italian influence. I have no photograph, and the reproduction in the Artaud de Montor Catalogue (Plate 28) is of that smoothed-out, rounded, blurred character which made connoisseurship, until quite recently, so vague and indecisive.

### III.

The most interesting painter of the transition from the Greek Mediæval style to that of the Italian Renaissance is not represented anywhere in America. This was Jacobello del Fiore, who, in his sumptuous "Justice" of the Venice Academy, in his mighty "Lion" of the Doges' Palace, and in a "Madonna" in my own collection, advances upon his age to a largeness of planes and a succulence of treatment curiously like Palma's. The haphazard of saleroom, or of journalism, has caused him to be overshadowed by a painter far less gifted as an artist, and much less interesting as an historical figure, for Michele Giambono was little more than a docile imitator of Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello, and he is usually toothless, limp and woolly. His technique, based doubtless on Byzantine practice, retains, as does his color, something of the gorgeousness of the East. But as this necessarily disappears in black and white, we shall not reproduce the only fragment of his I have found in America,



Fig. 3. GIOVANNI D'ALEMAGNA AND ANTONIO VIVARINI: POLYPTYCH.  
*Collection of Mrs. Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs, Baltimore.*



Fig. 4. STUDIO OF ANTONIO VIVARINI: ILLUSTRATION TO A ROMANCE.  
*Collection of Mr. Henry Walters, Baltimore.*



the half length of a "Sainted Bishop" belonging to Mrs. J. L. Gardner of Boston.<sup>1</sup>

By this time Continental influence was streaming in and softening the crust of traditional craftsmanship that lay hardened in the studios of Murano. Thither came Giovanni d'Alemagna, an adept of the Franco-Flemish School, hailing from its last great outpost, Cologne, and made an alliance with Antonio Vivarini. The pictorial practice which resulted from their partnership was destined to oppose the innovations of the Bellini with a resistance rather of inertia than of principle; and it survived long enough to addle in its shell the gift of the last man of talent affected, Lorenzo Lotto.

It is not easy to distinguish between Giovanni and Antonio, and to allot to each his share of a given undertaking, and harder still to put into words the shade of difference we may end by perceiving. On the whole, the more sentimental and smoother faces, the softer modelling, the flatter colors, are Giovanni's, while the harder heads, drier effects and more serious attempt at drawing, are Antonio's. Antonio, however, survived his partner for many years, and his paintings gradually took on more of the character described. But as he instantly called to his aid his younger brother, Bartolommeo (of which fact we are informed by the signature of the Bolognese Polyptych dated 1450, the very year of Giovanni's death), we must still remain on the look-out. Happily, confusion between the two brothers is easier to avoid, for we have ample means of knowing Bartolommeo's independent manner; and besides, this partnership does not seem to have lasted more than ten years.

An important work executed probably by Giovanni and Antonio together may be seen in the collection of Mrs. Dr. Jacobs at Baltimore (Fig. 3). It is a Polyptych in ten parts, on gold ground throughout. The central composition represents St. Michael in the act of striking down the Dragon. On each side are two Saints in full length. Above the Michael we see the Madonna and Child, and on each side two further Saints, all these figures (excepting

<sup>1</sup>The "Dead Christ" in the Metropolitan Museum, as well as its variant at Mr. Horace Morison's in Boston, are not by Giambono, but quite certainly by a contemporary painter from the Marches, probably from Ancona itself. He shows himself a firmer draughtsman, better painter and more magnificent colorist than the fluffy Venetian. The Metropolitan Museum version has been a bone of contention between Prof. Laudedeo Testi and Prof. L. Venturi (*Rassegna d'Arte*, June, 1911; February, 1913). Prof. Venturi is wrong in calling it a forgery, and Prof. Testi in believing it a Giambono, and in regarding the Padua version as a copy after this panel, when, as a matter of fact, it is an independent original by Giambono. I note that in the heat of controversy Prof. Testi goes so far as to distort the name of Bryson Burroughs into Brepon Burroaglio!

naturally the Child) being little more than half length. It must have been, when in better condition, a gracious and sumptuous as well as a typical creation of the first Vivarini. Michael has much of the personal beauty and decorative value of contemporary Catalan painting, and I should be inclined to regard it as more especially Giovanni's work. And so, possibly, may be the figure with the palm. All the others are more probably Antonio's. A comparison with the Polyptych at Parenzo (in Istria) dated 1440, and with the "Coronation" at S. Pantaleone in Venice dated 1444, inclines one to assign Mrs. Jacobs' work to the same period.

In the Walters Collection, also at Baltimore, there are two panels attributed to our earliest Muranese. The "Madonna" is undoubtedly an independent work of Antonio's. She sits on a flowered hillock, against a gold ground, worshipping the Child lying in her lap. The influence here is that of Gentile da Fabriano, and the quality of the picture is not unworthy of that inspiration. The action of the Child is rather better than in Gentile, but both the drawing and the color are less delicate. The other panel shows "St. Jerome" standing in his cardinal's robes against a patterned background. In one hand he holds a book, in the other a church with a round bell-tower. It is a variant of a figure relatively frequent in the paintings of the Vivarini, typical instances occurring in the S. Pantaleone "Coronation," in the great Venice Academy Triptych and in the S. Zaccaria Polyptych. It is to the St. Jerome in the last that Mr. Walters' figure comes nearest; but his panel is of a color at once more saturated and softer than I am acquainted with in the works of Giovanni and Antonio da Murano. I have therefore a certain hesitation in ascribing this impressive and attractive panel to either painter. If it be by one of them, that one is Giovanni.

Another "St. Jerome" belongs to Mr. Augustus Healy of Brooklyn, N. Y. I unfortunately remember nothing about it except that I thought it was by Antonio. To a later phase of the same painter's career belongs a full length "St. Bernardino" in the possession of Mr. J. G. Johnson of Philadelphia. Mere mention will suffice, as I have said what I have to say about it in my Catalogue of the Italian Masters in that Collection.

Finally, there is a "Dead Christ" belonging to Mr. D. F. Platt of Englewood, N. J. He is seen against the Cross, naked from the waist up, rising out of the tomb, with His side and hands pierced.

There is quiet feeling here and depth. We may ascribe it, despite obvious faults, to Antonio in his latest years, when he painted the same subject at Osimo and at Bari. On the other hand, I feel somewhat timid about accepting as Antonio's the four panels published by Mr. F. M. Perkins in the *Rassegna d'Arte* of 1909 (p. 88). They belong to Mr. Francis L. Bacon of New York, and represent "SS. Christopher, Nicholas, James and Antony." As I am not acquainted with the originals, and as the reproduction gives me no color and no clear information as to condition, I can only say that the Nicholas and Antony may have been painted by Antonio and soon after 1440, but not the other Saints.

#### IV.

Compositions of a narrative character, both lay and ecclesiastical, must have abounded in Venice before 1480. Yet by an unlucky accident few of any earlier date have been preserved. All the more precious, consequently, are the few that have come down to us, and this alone should lead us to give some attention to three such paintings in the Walters Collection<sup>1</sup> (Figs. 4, 5, 6), even if they were intrinsically less interesting and entertaining than they are. They have, moreover, this additional interest that, since they are too large to have been chest fronts, we may imagine them to have formed chamber decorations. They thus may claim to be a rarity, since, in this kind, little even of Tuscan work has survived.

Unfortunately I am unable to interpret these pictures and say what they illustrate. I lack the necessary familiarity with the tales and romances which the later middle ages echoed from the remote past of Greece and Rome. And besides, it is not likely that the subject was exhausted in these three panels. It is probable that, forming, as it may have done, the decoration of a room, the series may have been more numerous. Even the fact that one of them is nearly ten feet wide, while the others are only eight, and may therefore have occupied a central position, gives me no clue.

Let us begin with this wider panel (Fig. 4). In the foreground of a landscape of rock and grove and wood, we see, a little to the left, an arched temple of rather Brunelleschian architecture. Within, on an elaborate pedestal, stands the statue of a naked goddess with a globe in her hand. Below are two priests, one of them wearing

<sup>1</sup> Published by A. Venturi in *L'Arte*, 1905, p. 225. and ascribed to the school of Piero della Francesca. Traces of Jacopo Bellini's influence in the setting entirely confirm Mr. Berenson's view that the pictures are Venetian.—EDITOR.

a high Byzantine hat. Outside are a number of ladies and gallants, all meticulously dressed in the finery and foppery fashionable toward 1465 or so: shaved foreheads and bulging head-dresses for the women, curls and ringlets for the men, and sumptuous brocades for all. The gallants, with mincing gait, are trying first to induce and then to force the ladies to embark with them in a ship anchored on the right. Its pennons bear the crescent moon. This emblem served, in the Renaissance, to indicate the presence of people who were regarded as outside the pale of Græco-Roman civilization, ancient or contemporary, of Barbarians in the classic, or of Paynims in the Christian world.

We may perhaps assume that the narrative is continued in the panel (Fig. 5) which shows a group of ladies harangued by one of their number. Have they just landed from the galleon in the offing, and is the fool in motley celebrating the event, and are the gallants going to lead them into the town of toy blocks we see to our left? If so, then the third panel (Fig. 6) shows the same ladies in the royal square of the town, with their leader kneeling at the feet of a King, while his Queen and her ladies look on.

The faces are so ugly and the drawings so indifferent, that we may fail to do justice to these decorations. Yet apart from the quaintness and amusing absurdity which appeal to us, but could never have been apparent to contemporaries, these paintings have not only considerable qualities of narration, but of arrangement and grouping as well. Evidently the painter reveled in brocades as much as the people he worked for, and one of the ladies, the one nearest the clown, has insisted on being portrayed from the back so that her gorgeous costume should be fully displayed. For us again, these paintings have the further value of revealing the ideal of the elegant and stately existence entertained by Venetians of rank and fashion during the earlier Renaissance.

I assume that these decorations are Venetian, but as I first knew them many years ago passing for Cossa's, and as they entered Mr. Walters' Collection as "School of Fiorenzo di Lorenzo," a word to substantiate my attribution may not be out of place.

I venture to believe that no one but an irresponsible amateur journalist or dealer would think of connecting these compositions with Fiorenzo, seeing they have nothing in common but their date. The ascription to Cossa, however, was not so senseless, for the ladies



Fig. 5. STUDIO OF ANTONIO VIVARINI: ILLUSTRATION TO A ROMANCE.  
*Collection of Mr. Henry Walters, Baltimore.*

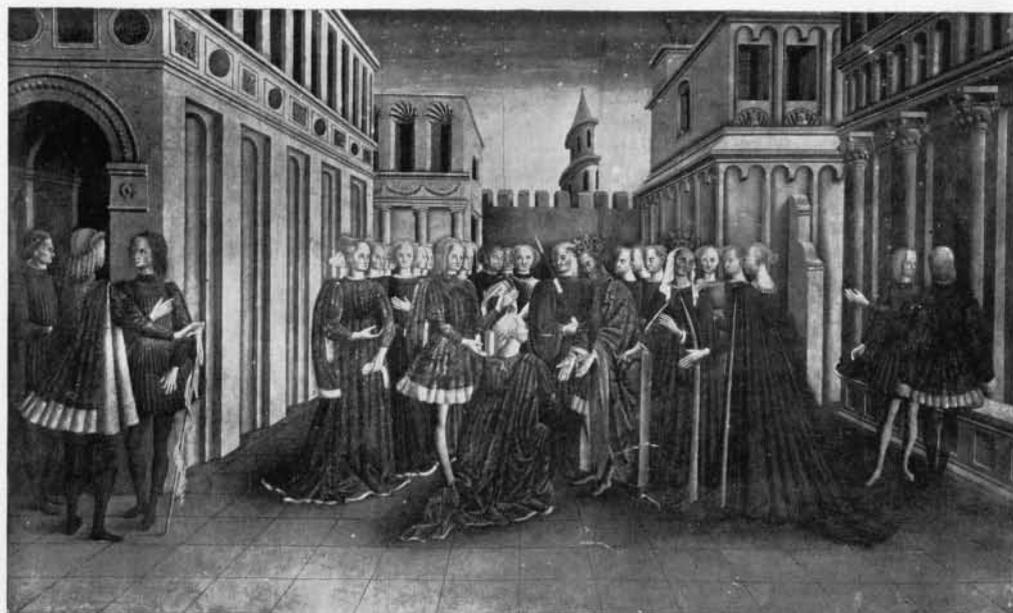


Fig. 6. STUDIO OF ANTONIO VIVARINI: ILLUSTRATION TO A ROMANCE.  
*Collection of Mr. Henry Walters, Baltimore.*



here are ugly in a way that reminds one of the faces in the Schifanoja frescoes at Ferrara. There is this difference, though, that in these Cossesque frescoes the ladies are ugly with energy, with humor and even with charm, while here they are ugly without alleviation or excuse. Moreover, the women at the Schifanoja are drawn and modeled with much vigor and mastery, while here the heads and faces are the weakest part of the work.

What we do find to be the case with the faces of the men as well as of the women in these panels, is that they all have the pinched anxious look of Antonio Vivarini in his later years. The women, being ladies of fashion, do not occur in his known paintings, for these are all ecclesiastical, but the men may be found in the S. Zaccaria Polyptychs, in that of 1464 from Pesaro now in the Vatican, and even in the much earlier "Epiphany" in Berlin, to cite conspicuous examples only. The landscape with its spur-like hills occurs in the Berlin picture too, and the bushes and flowers are notably like those in any of Antonio's paintings. The strongest link in the chain connecting these decorative compositions with Antonio Vivarini is the architecture, with its tendency to the close repetition of perpendicular elements, whether arched or square-topped. How characteristic they are of the earliest Vivarini will be recognized by everyone who has in mind the S. Pantaleone "Coronation," the Venice Academy Triptych, or, better still, the *Predelle* in the Vienna Academy with the "Story of the Passion."

It would be tedious to carry my demonstration further. I do not ascribe these paintings to Antonio himself, because I find them a little too poor in drawing, and there are such slight divergencies in type as one would expect in work designed by a master and executed by his pupils.

The date is clearly determined by the costumes as being about 1465.

## SOME SCULPTURES FROM VERROCCHIO'S WORKSHOP · BY OSVALD SIRÉN

VERROCCHIO'S individual importance as an artist is more evident in his sculptures than in the paintings which are attributed to him. Not only traditional statements by Vasari and other old authors, but the whole character of his art, give us ample reason to believe that he felt himself more at ease when working in plastic material than when he used the brush. His artistic education was pre-eminently that of a goldsmith and he excelled in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship such as casting, chiseling, wood-inlaying, mechanics and so on, and even when he drew draperies it is said that he soaked the cloth in plaster so as to arrange the folds in a more sculpturesque fashion. It is the strikingly plastic, often over-emphasized, treatment of the draperies which, more than anything else, gives us the clue to Verrocchio's own creations. In this respect scarcely any of his numerous pupils quite reached the level of the master: Lorenzo di Credi developed Verrocchio's plastic draping into heavy bulkiness; Leonardo soon found a much suppler and richer mode of treatment. However, there is a basis of plastic clearness even in his draperies which he evidently inherited from the master. On the other hand, it should be stated that there were less gifted individuals working in Verrocchio's *bottega* who did their best in imitating the master's mode of draping, thereby succeeding, however, more in catching the stiffness and angularity of the folds than the palpable gravity and clearness in the rendering of the stuff. Certain well-known Madonnas in the picture galleries at Berlin and London bear witness to this.

Verrocchio's monumental terracotta Madonna in the Museo Nazionale at Florence (Fig. 1) gives us the standard of his ability in the field of Madonna representations. She holds her own place among the numerous Madonna reliefs by Florentine Quattrocento sculptors. The Virgin is a lady of dignified beauty, not shaken by the pathetic emotions of Donatello's Madonnas, nor disturbed by that somewhat restless spirit which characterizes Rossellino's fashionable Virgins, but filled with a bright and harmonious happiness as she looks at the sturdy lad who is standing before her on the cushion. The type is strong, marked by a straight nose and a high forehead; the hands are particularly well formed, with beautifully modeled