MATTEO DI GIOVANNI'S LOST ALTARPIECE FOR SANT'AGOSTINO, ASCIANO

LUKE SYSON, RACHEL BILLINGE, CAROLINE CAMPBELL AND DÓRA SALLAY

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Matteo di Giovanni's 'Assumption' in the National Gallery is one of the greatest surviving Sienese paintings of the Renaissance. In the nineteenth century, the altarpiece to which it belonged was broken up, and the individual paintings which survived entered collections across Europe and America. This project, generously supported by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, presents a new reconstruction of Matteo's lost altarpiece.

It is based on research carried out at the National Gallery in connection with the 2007 exhibition 'Renaissance Siena: Art for a City', and by Dóra Sallay, Head of the Department of Old Master Paintings at the Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest.

INTRODUCTION

In late 2007, the National Gallery mounted the first large-scale exhibition in the United Kingdom devoted to the art of Renaissance Siena. While the art of fourteenth-century Siena is greatly admired, that produced during the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is much less well known, especially outside Italy. 'Renaissance Siena: Art for a City' encouraged its visitors to see Sienese Renaissance works of art in the artistic, cultural and political context of the volatile last century of the Sienese Republic.

Among the highlights of the exhibition was Matteo di Giovanni's great 'Assumption' altarpiece, made for the Sienese-ruled town of Asciano. Matteo, who was born in the hilltown of Sansepolcro in around 1428, became one of the most successful artists working in Siena, where he died in 1495. The central panel of this ensemble, the 'Assumption of the Virgin' (NG 1155), has been part of the National Gallery's collection since 1884. In the exhibition, the 'Assumption' was reunited for the first time with what were then thought to be

all the other surviving parts of this multi-picture altarpiece.[1] As was normal at this date in Siena, this large impressive altarpiece consisted of a number of individual painted panels which were joined together using dowels and battens, and placed within a carved and gilded frame (now lost).

The following pages present a new reconstruction of this great polyptych (Fig. 2), incorporating further paintings which were not in the 2007 reconstruction. It is based on the work of Rachel Billinge and Luke Syson at the National Gallery, and on that of Dóra Sallay, of the Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest. Fundamental to this reconstruction is an understanding of the construction of the various known parts of the altarpiece, particularly the dowels which were used to align the wooden panels on which the paintings were executed, and the horizontal battens which ran across the back of the structure, in order to hold it together.

THE ALTARPIECE

Matteo di Giovanni's 'Assumption of the Virgin' is one of the great visionary works of fifteenth-century Italy, spectacular in every sense of the word. It is thus all the more remarkable to record that by the end of the eighteenth century it was being kept in the dingy surroundings of a wood store belonging to the Augustinian monastery of Sant'Agostino at Asciano, a small town approximately thirteen miles south-east of Siena. Here Ettore Romagnoli (1772–1838), the great early nineteenth-century historian of Sienese art, rediscovered the fragments of this altarpiece, which he described later as 'one of the best panel paintings executed by Matteo', continuing:

> It was once located in the church of Sant'Agostino, and afterwards in the woodstore of the Augustinian fathers, where in 1800 I saw it and rescued what remained of it from complete destruction. Now there remains from the main compartments that the altarpiece contained the very beautiful 'Assumption of the Virgin', escorted by angels that look indeed as if they come from Paradise; the painting was not long ago in the possession of the Gonfaloniere of Asciano (Don Francesco Bampagini), and is now in the choir of Sant'Agostino.[2]

Thus, at least briefly, the central panel of the altarpiece, now in the National Gallery, was displayed close to what was almost certainly its original location, on the church's high altar. Yet, before long, the 'Assumption' was purchased by the Griccioli family of Siena and placed on the high altar of the restored church of Sant'Eugenio a Monistero, just outside the city walls of Siena.

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[1] For a photographic record of the assembly, see Fattorini 2007, p. 67.
[2] Romagnoli Ante 1835, vol. 4, p. 673.

ICONOGRAPHY

The Madonna of the Assumption was particularly important in Siena, and ceremonies for Assumption Day were prominent in its civic calendar. The images of the Assumption that abound in the Sienese 'contado' (territory) can be explained as much by the desire to demonstrate the political loyalty of settlements under Sienese control as to express devotion to the Virgin herself. This is certainly true of Matteo's altarpiece, made for the small town of Asciano.

Matteo's altarpiece obeys the visual conventions for this scene, but invests it with a new ardent energy. The Virgin, seated on a throne of cherubim and seraphim, rises upwards. At her feet, there is a ring of musician angels, with two tiers of angels above them, the uppermost tenderly contemplating the extraordinary event, and with a 'dense covey of saints'[3] on either side. She wears the white robes of the Queen of Heaven ('fair as the moon') and lets her girdle drop down to the doubting Thomas. He stands by the empty tomb, which is set in an enormous, panoramic landscape strewn with craggy rocky formations, little trees and fields; a small town and what may be a monastery are painted left and right. Receiving Mary in heaven is a dramatically foreshortened Christ, flying out of the picture.[4] As Bruce Cole has eloquently described, 'Each of the participants – from the fervent Thomas, whose delicate hands grope for the Virgin's belt, to the ranks of hovering, ecstatic angels around the comely, sad-eyed Virgin – emits a subtle emotional vibration.'[5]

The picture is marvellously organised, obeying a traditional hierarchy of scale, whereby the Virgin is by far the biggest figure in the picture.[6] She floats through the picture surface, her patterned white cloak prominent against the reds, blues and greens of the angels; this effect would have been stronger in the relative gloom of a church interior and before some of the pigments changed colour, such as the lake pigments used to paint the areas of red and the greens, which have darkened. The importance of Mary's belly – her miraculous womb – is underscored by its framing with two white bands of cloth and her praying hands above. Matteo, however, while deliberately complicating the spatial relationships between the figures, links them through the composition and especially through colour.[7] The interplay of colours above echoes in the landscape underneath, with its green fields, and in the tomb with its blue and red panels. The gilded background, unifying the composition, emphasises the beautiful intervals between the figures, while also allowing Matteo's visionary manipulation of space. The angels' feet in the lowest tier are carefully connected with the curve of the far horizon; it is as if they have just launched themselves off the ground,

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[3] K. Christiansen, 'Painting in Renaissance Siena', in Christiansen, Kanter and Strehlke 1988, p.23.
[4] Matteo had already painted a strongly foreshortened God the Father for one of the altarpieces made for Jacomo Scotti (see note 1 above).
5 Cole 1985, p. 98.
6 Not following the example of the 'Coronation' of 1472–4, in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena (440), painted by Francesco di Giorgio with the help of assistants only slightly earlier for nearby Monteoliveto (A. De Marchi in Bellosi 1993, pp. 300-05, cat. 56).
7 In this respect Francesco di Giorgio's example in the painting of the 'Coronation' was evidently more potent. This is also a likely model for the image size of the central panel of Matteo's polyptych.

although, entirely appropriately, it is not spelled out exactly from where. Their music making is beautifully observed.[8] Matteo lends conviction to the sense that the angels actually bear the Virgin's weight by framing her cloudy pedestal on the right with the neck of a lute; arguably she is supported by their music. Though Thomas stands (in seven-league sandals) below the Virgin, her belt and one fold of her cloak snake across the clouds towards his outstretched hands, reaching into the foreground; this effect contributes to the unusual dynamism of the figure. Thomas's dramatically arched back is echoed by the arcs of the angels nearest to him.

PRECEDENTS AND INFLUENCES

In NG 1155 Matteo has been seen as responding to North Italian artists[9] and to the Florentine Antonio del Pollaiuolo, particularly given the wiry muscularity of Christ and Thomas, and the crisp, fluttering linearity of the draperies. The huge landscape has been thought to result from Matteo's admiration for Piero della Francesca, the artistic hero of the town of Sansepolcro where Matteo was born. Viewed in these terms, Matteo's otherwise standard image of the Assumption has been to some small degree modernised. However, Matteo's debts to the Quattrocento 'visionaries' (Sassetta and the young Giovanni di Paolo) and all the way back to Simone Martini are just as crucial,[10] and his patrons evidently had a major say in the structure and iconography of the altarpiece. Taddeo di Bartolo's 1401 altarpiece of the 'Assumption of the Virgin' for the Collegiata (now the Duomo) at Montepulciano provided as important a model for the monks of Sant'Agostino as anything in Siena for their polyptych. The shape of the central panel, the National Gallery's 'Assumption', appears to derive from the façade of Sant'Agostino in Montepulciano.

It has been pointed out that Matteo's 'Assumption' is organised along the 'spacious lines' of Sassetta's altarpiece made for the Basilica of San Bernadino dell' Osservanza in Siena,[11] itself derived from the much revered Porta Camollia fresco by, or started by, Simone Martini (both are single images which are arch-topped).[12] The three circles of angels, for example, come from these prototypes. But there are also notable variations: Sassetta's altarpiece had been commissioned by Saint Bernardino, and certain strands in the iconography might therefore have been associated particularly with the Franciscans.[13] Matteo's polyptych, on the other hand, was executed for an Augustinian foundation, and had to function as a visual link to the mother city. Matteo has de-emphasised the geometric arrangement of the prototypes and he has omitted the mandorla. Sassetta's altarpiece had the panoramic landscape, as do others from the first half of the

8 Wortham 1928, pp. 323–29, esp. pp. 324–25.
9 K. Christiansen, 'Painting in Renaissance Siena' in Christiansen, Kanter and Strehlke 1988, p. 23; A. Angelini, 'La seconda metà del Quattrocento', in Chelazzi Dini, Angelini and Sani 1997, pp. 293-94 ('Assumption').
10 See Cole 1985, pp. 97–98.
11 Pope-Hennessy 1950, p. 83.
12 On the fresco of the 'antiporto' of Porta Camollia, see recently Paardekooper 2002, pp. 22–23; Fattorini; Israëls 2008a; Israëls 2012.

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fifteenth century, but, while Sassetta has assembled the Apostles within it, Matteo has chosen to isolate Thomas with the girdle dropping into his hands. Even if his dramatic pose in profile was prefigured in Sassetta's painting (in which he also faces right), and was probably in Simone's model, Matteo has imbued him with a startling vigour; Thomas seems electrified.

Alternative sources associated with the wider city and the Sienese 'contado' were in fact provided by the Duccio-designed stained-glass window in the Cathedral, before which the worthies of the towns under Sienese control gathered on Assumption Day. This was likely therefore to be a key point of reference for non-Franciscan images, especially in subordinate towns like Asciano. Duccio's Virgin, like all the others, faces forwards, but, whereas the model pioneered by Simone and much copied presents the figure balanced perfectly (Munich, Alte Pinakothek, WAF671, reproduced on the Alte Pinakotek's website at http://www.pinakothek.de/en/lippo-memmi), Duccio's Virgin has her right knee raised, her left lowered, and it is this more dynamic feature and the arrangement of draperies with her dress exposed that were followed by Matteo. That is not to say that Simone's model at the Porta Camollia was rejected or unimportant. But the physical structure of the altarpiece – as we will see a central narrative with a single saint on either side – recalls Simone's 'Annunciation' and the other Trecento Marian altarpieces in Siena Cathedral rather than the series associated with Bernardino. The overall message is therefore more all-embracing and less specifically Franciscan.

DATE AND ORIGINAL LOCATION

A nineteenth-century guidebook mentions an inscription and the date 1474,[14] possibly on its original frame and now lost. This makes it just possible that the central panel (or its woodwork) was cannibalised from one started for an earlier Servite project in Siena of around that date (evidently abandoned), but it is most likely that Matteo's altarpiece was in Sant'Agostino from the start. The cluster of buildings in the left background of NG 1155 is possibly a schematic representation of Asciano. Like the real town, Matteo's Asciano is situated on a hillside, and includes two churches and the town hall below. It might correspond to a lateral view, seen from the west, of Sant'Agostino, with the Collegiata of Sant'Agata, the town's other main church, behind. The body of water may be the river Ombrone running through a valley near Asciano tellingly called the Piano (plain) di Sant'Arcangelo, and the scorched terrain resembles the hills around Asciano during a Tuscan August.

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13 Israëls 2008b; Israëls 2009, pp. 122–26.
14 Micheli 1863, p. 138; Pope-Hennessy 1950, p. 82.

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STRUCTURE AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ALTARPIECE

An original location in Sant'Agostino in Asciano is consistent with the structure of the altarpiece. Although it has been argued that NG 1155 was intended to stand alone,[15] Romagnoli's early nineteenth-century account shows that the altar must have been a polyptych containing an unspecified number of subsidiary panels ('di molti comparti che la Tavola comprendeva').[16] Hartlaub tentatively suggested that the 'Assumption' could be connected with Matteo's pictures in the Museo di Palazzo Corboli, 'Asciano of Saint Augustine' (the name saint of the convent) and 'Saint Michael' (a local patron saint whose name was used for the nearby valley). There works are still in their original frames, and are now falsely married to Giovanni di Paolo's much smaller 'Assumption'.[17] The saints are depicted on tall rectangular panels with spandrels at their tops creating pointed arches. The panels must have continued above these arches, but their tops were at some stage rather brutally sawn off, plausibly at the moment when the 'new' altarpiece incorporating Giovanni di Paolo's painting was constructed.

THE LATERAL SAINTS AND UPPER PANELS

The two saints have a physical presence like that of the Virgin in the National Gallery's 'Assumption'. Augustine is endowed with severe monumentality and Michael has a remarkable springiness. His calm expression and the shape of his head echo Mary's. The Asciano panels are, like the 'Assumption' itself, pictures of great power and imagination. Matteo has dazzlingly exploited the varied possibilities of different gilding techniques for the 'Saint Michael'. The use of dark glazes painted over the gilding for volume and incision for ornament make his fantastic 'all'antica' armour truly astonishing. When John Pope-Hennessy re-elaborated Hartlaub's hypothesis, he declared that (after cleaning) there was 'no doubt' that the 'Saint Michael' and the 'Saint Augustine' functioned respectively as the inner and outer panels on the left side of the 'Assumption' – and that two more lateral panels were once placed to the right of the central scene. Assuming four side panels in total, he suggested that the altarpiece might have measured 'almost four metres' in width. He added that there was a strong possibility that two of the altarpiece's 'upper panels' – by which he almost certainly meant crowning pinnacles – were the damaged 'Angel Gabriel' that appeared on the New York market in 1926, its whereabouts now unknown[18], and the 'Virgin Annunciate' (Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art). Though cut down into its present shape, the width of the 'Virgin Annunciate' at its base makes it very possible that it was set above the 'Saint Michael'. As with the rest of the

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15 Alessi 2002, pp. 142-44; Paardekooper 2002, pp. 28-29, 36, note 78.
16 The "four or five works" Romagnoli's refers to in his travel notes of 1800 and in his later biography of Giovanni d'Asciano (see note 2 above) most likely refer to the same panels.
17 Hartlaub 1910, pp. 72, 78. Matteo's pictures were joined with Giovanni di Paolo's 'Assumption' some time before 1865, when Francesco Brogi recorded them together in the Collegiata of Sant'Agata in Asciano (Brogi 1897, p. 12).
18 Pope-Hennessy 1950.

picture, the lighting source is from the left and Pope-Hennessy rightly argued that the 'Virgin Annunciate' is a twin to the Virgin in NG 1155. Compelling parallels can be drawn between the oval shape and modelling of her head, the specific treatment of facial features like the slightly down-turned mouth, rosy cheeks and bruised eyelids, and the vertical folds of her dress as it falls over her belly. She even has the same sleeves, revealing her underdress at the wrists, and transparent veil covering her blond hair. Only her cloak has changed – necessarily, to show her in these different roles.

However, Ludwin Paardekooper corrected Pope-Hennessy in one important respect, noting that the 'Saint Michael' (Fig. 23) is a right-hand lateral panel rather than a second left-hand one.[19] 'Saint Augustine' (Fig. 24) would indeed more probably, as the name-saint of the church, have been positioned to the immediate left of the centre panel, at the Virgin's right hand in the place of honour.

Before the exhibition in 2007 we had the opportunity, thanks to the generosity of the owners of the individual paintings, to examine 'Saint Michael', 'Saint Augustine' and the 'Virgin Annunciate' in the Conservation Department of the National Gallery.

On the left and right respectively the capitals of the frames of 'Saint Augustine' and 'Saint Michael' are flush with the rest of the frame, but to the right of Augustine's head and to the left of Michael's, the capitals project beyond the frame edges and would have overlapped the painted surface of Matteo's central panel. Examination of the 'Assumption' at points where the frames would have overlapped revealed repaints which were applied to cover where these framing elements had been originally. It is possible to see the repainted area to the right of the 'Assumption', which was covered by the projecting capitals still attached to the frame of 'Saint Michael'. Measurements of the positions of the dowels set into the edges of the central and side panels confirmed the alignment of these pictures.

The battens which remain on the 'Assumption' have been cut. It was possible to show that they continued across the backs of 'Saint Michael' and 'Saint Augustine'. In the left edge of the 'Virgin Annunciate' there is a dowel hole which may be lined up with a dowel hole visible near the top of the right side of the Assumption. This enabled us to understand how these two pictures were aligned in Matteo's altarpiece for Asciano.

The panels have been arranged in our reconstruction to conform with the positions suggested by the evidence of the original placement of the dowels and of the battens.

The total width of the altarpiece would therefore have been approximately 3.10 metres. Although the Gothic church of Sant'Agostino is now somewhat changed, the pointed entrance arch to its choir or presbytery, where the Augustinian monks would have been seated during the Mass, behind the high altar on which the

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19 Paardekooper 2002, p. 36, note 78.

altarpiece was surely placed, is unaltered. This entrance arch has a width of 4.8 metres, comfortably accommodating the altarpiece.

THE FRAMING PILASTERS AND THE PREDELLA

Further surviving pictures by Matteo may plausibly be added to this reconstruction. These are works which seem to have been painted on the side pilasters or buttresses and on the predella.

a) The side pilasters

Two panels survive in a private collection from the pilasters which would have flanked the three main panels of this altarpiece, NG 1155, 'Saint Michael' and 'Saint Augustine'. These pictures represent Saint Agatha and Saint Lucy.[20] They are painted on two smallish rectangular panels which have been stuck together, probably in the mid-nineteenth century. The particular refinement with which the two women are painted – the lovely transparent veil over Agatha's hair, the little corkscrew of curls that touches her long neck, the elegant bounce of Lucy's hairstyle, the tapering fingers of both – link these panels to the lateral saints, Michael and Augustine, from the Asciano altarpiece. All these pictures share a sensitive pale highlighting and the delicate dark contour line used around areas of flesh painting, especially in the hands.

It has long been supposed that Saints Agatha and Lucy were once the lateral sections of a small triptych.[21] However, following Trimpi's suggestion that they came from a larger altarpiece complex, several candidates have been suggested, including the National Gallery 'Assumption'.[22] The underdrawing which has been revealed by IRR under these beautiful little pictures is by the same hand as that responsible for some of the underdrawing of the main panel the polyptych.

The two figures of Saints Agatha and Lucy are of different heights and whereas the head and upper body of Saint Agatha are depicted as if the spectator is standing directly before her, in such a way that we view the tops of her feet, Saint Lucy, looking down, is best viewed from below. We see the underside of her dish and the back of her right hand holding it. While Lucy is mostly paint, much more gold can be seen in the figure of Saint Agatha. This implies that Saint Lucy was originally seen from below and further away, and that the two saints were placed at different levels on the two tall side-pilasters. Typically, small saints were painted on these, one above another in series of three or more. 'Saint Agatha' would have been in the lowest position on the left, 'Saint Lucy' higher up on the other side. Saint Agatha's greater prominence might be explained by the fact that Asciano's second important church is dedicated to her. It was quite usual to pay tribute in

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20 Trimpi 1987, pp. 103-104, no. 7.
21 H. Brigstocke in Weston-Lewis 2000, pp. 82-83, cat. 21.
22 Trimpi 1987, pp. 103-04, no. A7.

one church to a neighbouring foundation in this way, by placing the image in a subsidiary part of an altarpiece.

b) The predella

No extant fragment was associated with the predella of the altarpiece until Luke Syson's recent suggestion that a gold-ground panel at Villa I Tatti, Florence (Berenson Collection) of 'Saint Monica praying for the Conversion of her son Augustine' may have been part of it.[23] The rare subject of this panel, based on Lippo Vanni's fresco in the church of the Augustinian hermitage of San Leonardo al Lago near Siena,[24] perfectly suits the context of an Augustinian altarpiece. The scene is painted on a thick wood panel with horizontal grain, which suggests that it is indeed a predella fragment. It is consistent with the main panels of the altarpiece in style and in the use of a gilded background, and the unusual height of the painted surface, a full 42 centimetres,[25] links the picture with great probability to the Asciano altarpiece, the largest that Matteo ever executed. There must have been other narrative scenes painted on the horizontal board of the predella, but none of these has yet been found.[26]

However, two paintings, representing 'Saint Jerome' (Christian Museum, Esztergom) and 'Saint Nicholas' (Lindenau Museum, Altenburg) can be shown to be pilaster bases, or pedestals.[27] Physical evidence proves that these two small panels, both painted on wood with a vertical grain, were originally glued and nailed to a horizontal board.[28] Since they are also gilded on their inner sides, and painted a dark claret colour on their outer sides – a treatment commonly used for pilaster bases – they must have been positioned originally as projecting elements at the left and right ends of a predella.

The connection of 'Saint Jerome' and 'Saint Nicholas' to the Asciano altarpiece is hypothetical as they are not evidently linked to it through their iconography, and there is no scholarly consensus regarding their date.[29] Their style, however, shows very close parallels with the male saints in NG 1155 in their markedly similar facial features, including the dark flesh tones, the creased, parchment-like skin, and the confidently

23 Syson, in London 2007-08, p. 131. For more on this panel, see the forthcoming catalogue of the Berenson collection at Villa I Tatti, edited by Carl B. Strehlke and Machtelt Israëls.
24 Cornice 1990, p. 308, fig. 34.
25 The present dimensions of the panel are 42 x 39.1 x 1–3.5 cm; the painted surface measures 42 x 38.8 cm. The support is a single panel that retains its original thickness. Fragments of a barbe prove that the painted surface has not been reduced on the left, top and right. At the bottom, the paint edge appears to have been slightly reduced.
26 As the intact edge of the paint, or barbe, along the right edge of the Villa I Tatti fragment shows, the scenes were once separated by moulded strips or small projecting panels.
27 Written communication of Dóra Sallay to Luke Syson (May 2007); Syson in London 2007–08, p. 131; Sallay 2008, pp. 7–8.
28 The nail holes, now repaired, are discernible in both panels at about mid-height along both vertical sides. Fragments of horizontally grained wood survive trapped in spots of glue on the back of the Altenburg fragment, proving that the piece was originally fastened onto a horizontal plank.
29 As the most likely date of execution for these two fragments, the majority of scholars suggested the 1460s, whereas Riccardo Massagli (in Boskovits and Tripps 2008, pp. 164–65, cat. 30) proposed the period c. 1455–60. Erica Trimpi (1987, pp. 93–95, no. 2, pp. 138–39, no. 29), however, claimed that because of the absence of the 'hardness of form of Matteo's early period' they should be dated 'somewhat later', on the basis of a comparison with the predella of Matteo's Celsi altarpiece of 1480.

drawn contours. The Esztergom and Altenburg fragments originally measured about 42.5–43 x 25 centimetres, which perfectly matches the Villa I Tatti panel of 'Saint Monica'.[30] The extreme rarity of such large structures in Sienese art, where the standard height for predellas was about 25–35 centimetres, adds weight to the hypothesis that all three of these fragments were once part of Matteo di Giovanni's Augustinian altarpiece at Asciano.[31]

CONCLUSION

The reunion of many of the constituent parts of the Sant'Agostino polyptych in 'Renaissance Siena: Art for a City' at the National Gallery in 2007–08 was an important achievement. Yet it was – as exhibitions often are – a beginning rather than an end. This publication presents the current state of our research into this subject. The opportunity to conduct technical examinations on the paintings which came to the London exhibition – 'Saint Michael', 'Saint Augustine', 'Saints Lucy and Agatha', and the 'Virgin Annunciate' – was invaluable, and has enabled the reconstruction presented in these pages to be refined and developed in 2013. We would like to thank the owners of these pictures for their kindness, and their commitment to this project. We have also benefitted from the generosity of Dr Dóra Sallay, who has shared her research with us, and who has improved immeasurably this text. Most of all, however, we thank and acknowledge the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, whose support has made this project – and its publication – possible.

We hope that future research, particularly into the underdrawing of the predella panels, will further enrich and improve our understanding of Matteo di Giovanni's Asciano altarpiece, one of the most extraordinary pictorial ensembles to survive from fifteenth-century Siena.

This text is based on Luke Syson, 'The Asciano Altarpiece, 1474' in Luke Syson, 'Renaissance Siena. Art for a City', exh. cat., London, The National Gallery, 2007-08, pp. 124-31 with additions by Rachel Billinge and Caroline Campbell. The section, 'The predella', and the Appendix have been written by Dóra Sallay. We gratefully acknowledge Dr Sallay's active participation in the editing of the text.

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30 The Esztergom fragment (41.2/41.6 x 25 x 1.2/1.4 cm, painted surface 40.8 x 25 cm) now misses about 2 cm of its painted field at the bottom. The Altenburg fragment measures 42.6 x 25.1 x 3.5/3.8 cm.
31 For a more detailed discussion of the Esztergom and Altenburg fragments, see Sallay forthcoming.

APPENDIX: TRAVEL NOTES OF ETTORE ROMAGNOLI

Ettore Romagnoli's mention of Matteo di Giovanni's Asciano altarpiece has long been known, but his unpublished travel notes of 27 September 1800, on which his later account is based, offer some more detail:

> The predella of the high altarpiece, with works by Giovanni di Asciano, is in the sacristy, and in the wood store of the convent I had the chance to save from fire a very famous work by Domenico Bartoli, in which there are Peruginesque figures. The work I am referring to consists of an ensemble of triangular and rectangular panels, all with admirable, excellently drawn little figures, and large figures that are finely finished and well worked, and very beautiful gold decoration. Some parts of it have already been burned, and in the old times these panels formed a large painting placed in the compartment located to the right of the high altar, as one goes towards the door. The Father Prior, to whom I suggested saving this outstanding masterpiece, promised to put it back in the choir. [Added above: 'in 1801 he had it placed in the choir'.][32]

On 15 September 1810, Romagnoli returned to Asciano, and described the National Gallery 'Assumption' in the sacristy of Sant'Agostino, now with the correct attribution to Matteo di Giovanni:

> In Sant'Agostino [...] the very beautiful painting by Matteo in the sacristy is painted with great affection. It depicts the Virgin Mary in glory among very beautiful little angels.[33]

It is unfortunately unclear what predella ('gradino') Romagnoli saw in the sacristy in 1800, but it was possibly the predella of the 'Assumption' altarpiece discussed here below. Indeed, Romagnoli attributed parts of the 'Assumption' altarpiece (identifiable with the lateral panels, pinnacles, and/or the pilaster fragments) to Giovanni d'Asciano elsewhere as well, for example, in his biography of that artist:

> In 1800, besides a very beautiful panel by Domenico Bartoli, I found four or five pieces on panel painted by our artist [Giovanni d'Asciano] in the woodstore of Sant'Agostino in Asciano. Some of them had already been burned but I managed to convince the Prior to conserve whatever was still there. He judiciously did so and placed them in the choir of that church where they can still be seen. They depict various saints.'[34]

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32 Biblioteca Comunale di Siena, P.VI.63, f. 107, 'In sagrestia vi è il gradino dell'altar maggiore con op[er]e di Gio[vanni] di Asciano, e nel legnajo del convento ebbi la sorte di salvar dalle fiamme un opera Celebratissima di Domenico Bartoli, ove sono figure Peruginesche. Questa opera di cui parlo consiste in un complesso di tavole a triangoli e quadrati, tutte figurine ammirabili, disegnate egregiamente, e figure grandi tutte finimento, tutte lavori, e riporti d'oro bellissimi. Parte già erano abbruciati, e nel antico queste tavole formavano un gran quadro situato nel Vacuo a destra dell'altare maggiore, andando verso la porta. Il Padre Priore a cui raccomandai la Salvazione di sì gran bell'opera mi promise di riporla in Coro [nel 1801 le pose in coro].'
33 Biblioteca Comunale di Siena, P.VI.64, ff. 106-107, 'In S. Agostino [...] bellissimo il quadro di Matteo in Sagrestia con grande amore toccato esprimente M. V. in gloria con angelini bellissimi'
34 Romagnoli Ante 1835, III, p. 195, 'Nel'1800 trovai nel legnajo di S. Agostino d'Asciano oltre una bellissima tavola di Domenico Bartoli, quattro, o cinque pezzi di tavole colorite dal nostro artista [Giovanni d'Asciano]. Alcune altre erano già state

This last account is based on Romagnoli's 1800 travel notes in which he mentioned the same fragments as Giovanni d'Asciano's works immediately after his long description of Pietro di Giovanni d'Ambrogio's 'Nativity' altarpiece, which he attributed to Giovanni d'Asciano (on the second altar to the left): 'Of this follower of [Si]Mone, there are a further four or five works of the same beauty in the woodstore'.[35]

During his 1800 Asciano visit, Romagnoli tended to ascribe Lippesque and Sassettesque works to Giovanni d'Asciano (in reality by the Memmi workshop, Sano di Pietro, Pietro di Giovanni, and Pietro di Rufolo) and Matteo di Giovanni's works to Domenico to Bartolo and Girolamo di Benvenuto, but his attributions are too vague to rule out that the predella and the 'four of five fragments' he ascribed to Giovanni d'Asciano in fact belonged to Matteo's 'Assumption' altarpiece.

Alternatively, other mid-fifteenth-century predellas that Romagnoli might have seen in the sacristy in 1800 include the now lost predella of the 'Nativity' altarpiece and the predella of one of Matteo di Giovanni's two altarpieces painted much earlier for the church, around 1460, for Jacomo Scotti.[36] In 1800 Romagnoli documented the predella of one of these altarpieces surmounted by the main register of the other one on the second altar to the right (with the exception of the miracle-working central panel depicting the 'Virgin and Child', which, as he notes, had been moved to the high altar by that time). The 'Nativity' by Pietro di Giovanni and the extant parts of Matteo di Giovanni's two early altarpieces are now in the Museo di Palazzo Corboli of Asciano.

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abbruciate e di ciò che vi rimase potei persuadere il Priore a conservarle, e come giudiziosamente fece le situò nel coro di quella chiesa dove ancora si vedono. Esprimono varj santi.'
35 Biblioteca Comunale di Siena, P.VI.63, f. 108, 'Di questo seguace di mone vi e' pure nel legnajo 4 o Cinque opere della stessa bellezza.
36 Cf. A. Angelini in Bellosi 1993, pp. 126–31; L. Paardekooper 2002, pp. 25–26.

Luke Syson, Rachel Billinge, Caroline Campbell and Dóra Sallay, *Matteo di Giovanni's Lost Altarpiece for Sant' Agostino, Asciano*
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