



The Public Defense
of the PhD Thesis in Medieval Studies

by

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on

**EARLY SIENESE PAINTINGS IN HUNGARIAN COLLECTIONS,
1420-1520**

will be held on

Friday, 13 June 2008, at 11:00

in the

**Gellner Room – Monument Building
Central European University
Nádor utca 9, Budapest**

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Abstract

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Early Sieneese Paintings in Hungarian Collections, 1420-1520

The Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest and the Christian Museum in Esztergom – the two Hungarian museums that collect European old masters – conserve an exceptionally large number of Sieneese paintings. This dissertation examines the most coherent group of works among these, those dating between about 1420 and 1520: thirty-three paintings that represent nearly all the known Sieneese masters who were active during these hundred years.

Methodology: Choice of material to be studied and the setting of chronological boundaries

Most of the paintings, now separated in the two museums, originally formed part of the private collection of Bishop Arnold Ipolyi (1823-1886), who in turn purchased all but two of them from the collection of the painter and restorer Johann Anton Ramboux (1790-1866). These collections were formed on the basis of conscious choices; it thus seemed expedient to study the works now in Budapest and Esztergom together. Furthermore, by fortunate circumstances the Budapest museum has acquired some Quattrocento Sieneese pieces from other sources that complement the Ipolyi collection.

The choice of chronological boundaries (ca. 1420 - ca. 1520) was suggested by stylistic considerations. The works studied begin with a fragment from Sassetta's first dated work (1423-25), the *Arte della Lana* altarpiece, which has been described as an "artistic light from the blue" that heralded the advent of a new epoch in Sieneese painting. The last works discussed are by masters like Bernardino Fungai and Girolamo di Benvenuto, whose activity reaches well into the sixteenth century, but who were still trained in the Quattrocento and never truly abandoned its traditions.

A study of the Sieneese works in Hungary dating from the period between ca. 1420 and ca. 1520 seemed promising for manifold reasons. The representative nature of the material provided an opportunity to study Sieneese Quattrocento painting as a whole and interpret the paintings in Hungary in the light of the monographic knowledge of the art of this city state in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Among the Sieneese paintings in Hungary, this group of works was also the least studied, and it was here that research was most needed and new results could be most expected. Sieneese Quattrocento painting has raised much interest among art historians in recent decades, which has resulted in a great amount of new information in this field. The thesis examines the works in Hungary in the light of these new results not only with the traditional methods of art history but with hitherto little used methods based on detailed technical and structural examinations. The research on the individual works is completed with studies about the reception history and historiography of early Sieneese art in general and specifically in Hungary, as well as with detailed provenance research and notes on museological history.

Chapter I – Quattrocento Sieneese Painting and the State of Research

This chapter serves as an introduction to the art of Quattrocento Siena. Besides notes on the city-state, its history and the preliminaries to Quattrocento art, above all the city's famous Trecento heritage that served as an inexhaustible source of inspiration for later generations, it gives an overview of the art of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and current scholarship related to it. The turn of the fifteenth century brought no artistic change. An overview of the period 1420-1520 is presented in three periods divided by important artistic

paradigm shifts. The period ca. 1420-60 is a transitional phase between the late Gothic and the early Renaissance that has been described in such modulated terms as “gotico ombreggiato di rinascimento” (Roberto Longhi), “pseudo-Rinascimento” (Federico Zeri), or “authentically Sienese post-Gothic” (Keith Christiansen). With the rise of the Sienese Enea Silvio Piccolomini to the papal throne in 1458, a new type of art patronage appeared in Siena. Pope Pius II was a man of great international experience, ambition, and learning; he established a humanist type of art patronage previously unknown in Siena which in many respects disregarded earlier traditions. In the wake of Pope Pius’ patronage, full-fledged Renaissance art became established in Siena and brought about an exceptionally flourishing period for local artists between ca. 1460-90. The return to power of the members of the *Nove* political party brought profound changes in art patronage from the late 1480s on. In the period between ca. 1490 and 1520 virtually all important public and private commissions went to foreign artists (Signorelli, Pintoricchio, Perugino, Girolamo Genga, Sodoma, etc.) and local artists were demoted to executing minor works in the city or to working in the countryside. While the activity of the great foreign masters in Siena in this period has been much studied, little attention has been paid to the fate of local masters trained in the Quattrocento, which is one reason why I decided to extend my investigations until about 1520 and examine how the influx of foreign artists influenced their production.

After its incorporation into the Duchy of Tuscany in 1555, Siena hardly had further urban and economic development for centuries. As elsewhere in Italy, the passing of time and the changes in function and taste resulted in the massive destruction and dispersion of the early Sienese panel paintings, which culminated in the late 18th and 19th centuries due to the suppressions of religious institutions in three waves between the 1770s and the 1860s. The names of most of the great masters of the Quattrocento fell into oblivion; their modern rediscovery owes much to surviving archival records and to the research of local historians. An issue that also has a bearing on the works now in Hungary is the revival of interest in Quattrocento Sienese painting: its collecting and early research, which usually went hand in hand. In fact, in the first half of the 20th century many of the most significant scholars of Sienese Quattrocento painting were also collectors and dealers (Bernard Berenson, Charles Fairfax Murray, Robert Langton Douglas, Frederick Mason Perkins, etc.). An interesting reflection of the growing appreciation – and price – of the early Sienese paintings was the appearance of workshops that specialized in forgeries in Siena at the end of the 19th century.

Chapter II – Early Sienese Paintings in Hungary, 1420-1520: A History of Collecting

This chapter examines four private collectors – Johann Anton Ramboux, Raffaele Bertinelli, Arnold Ipolyi and János Simor – who once owned the works under examination. The origins of the two institutions that now house the paintings are also discussed, with special emphasis on the circumstances of the acquisition of the Sienese works.

Arnold Ipolyi acquired his paintings in 1867 at the auction of Johann Anton Ramboux’s collection, which included one of the largest private galleries of early Sienese paintings that ever existed. A smaller number of paintings belonged to a hitherto unknown Roman collector first discussed in this thesis, Canon Raffaele Bertinelli (1802-1878), whose entire gallery was purchased in 1878 by Cardinal János Simor (1813-1891), the founder of the Christian Museum. Ipolyi’s collection was divided in 1872 when he donated sixty paintings to the National Picture Gallery (the predecessor to the Museum of Fine Arts), but kept the rest of his collection which, after many vicissitudes, was acquired by the Christian Museum in 1920. The analysis of the collecting interests and methods of these private owners threw light on many connections and similarities but also on important differences among them, especially as regards their attitudes to the Nazarene movement and the possibilities of using their collections for the art historic, aesthetic, and religious education of the public.

Most noteworthy is the fact that nearly all the Sieneese paintings now in Hungary came into private hands in the first half or at the middle of the 19th century; that is, long before the collecting of early Sieneese art began on a large scale at the end of the 19th century. Ramboux – a true pioneer in collecting and research – and Ipolyi were connoisseurs who studied and catalogued their own collections. Ramboux aimed at acquiring complete series of works, whereas Ipolyi's purpose in collecting appears to have been to secure the largest number and greatest variety of works possible (both as far as masters and iconography was concerned), even at the cost of breaking up series of companion pieces. Ramboux's and Bertinelli's precocious interest in early Italian paintings seems explainable by their contact with the Nazarene movement, which turned to the early Italian masters for artistic and religious inspiration. A similar interest formed the taste of Cardinal Simor, whose admiration for the Roman and Viennese Nazarenes seems to have led him eventually to the appreciation of the early Italian masters. The prelates Ipolyi and Simor shared the idea of forming a collection of Christian art, a *museum christianum*, for the education of seminarists and the general public.

Chapter III – Early Sieneese Paintings in Hungary, 1420-1520: A Summary of Previous Research and Notes on Museology and Conservation History

Besides surveying the activity of the outstanding curators of the museums in Budapest and Esztergom, the most important catalogues and scholarly publications that deal with the Sieneese works and with the history of the institutions, this chapter traces the international relations of the two museums that affected their scholarly work and the rediscovery of the early Sieneese paintings in Hungary by international scholarship. The museological history of the Museum of Fine Arts and of the Christian Museum deals especially with the history of inventorisation, photographic documentation, installation concepts, exhibitions, and the care of the collections from the point of view of conservation history.

Chapter IV – Early Sieneese Paintings in Hungary, 1420-1520: Catalogue

The major part of the thesis is preceded by a detailed introduction to a methodology that is rather recent in art historical scholarship and indispensable for understanding the type of works found in Hungary: panel paintings that are mostly fragments of larger structures. Every work has been subjected to detailed technical and structural examination, and interpreted in the light of fully or partially surviving larger structures, mainly altarpieces. This approach brought unexpected new results in many cases about the original context and function of the pieces. Wherever applicable, I made the results visual in digital reconstructions.

I used this methodology together with the traditional methods of art history, aiming at the complex study of the paintings regarding attribution, dating, stylistic properties, compositional models, iconography, the circumstances of the commission, the original location, context and function of the pieces, among other things. The research brought a wealth of new information, from which only the most relevant can be mentioned here. In the case of Pietro di Giovanni's *Assumption of the Virgin*, I analysed its possible compositional models reaching back to the first half of the 14th century, and investigated the changes caused in the iconography and composition of the work by a radical 19th-century restoration. For Sano di Pietro's *Banquet of Herod*, a great deal of information came to light during research conducted with two co-authors. The predella fragment formed part of an altarpiece commissioned around 1447 by Bartolomea di Domenico di Francesco, the abbess of the Augustinian convent of San Giovanni all'Abbadia Nuova in Siena, where the decapitation of the Baptist had special veneration. All seven fragments of the dismembered predella were reunited: the central *Crucifixion* was proved to have formed part of the predella on the basis of the examination of the irregular wood grain, whereas the two pilaster bases (*St. Francis of Assisi*, *St. Bernardino*) were newly proposed to have belonged to the complex. The attributions of two Madonnas formerly ascribed to Sano were refined: for one, workshop participation was suggested; the other is now

catalogued entirely as a workshop product. A third Madonna formerly ascribed to a follower of Sano is in fact by a minor artist best known for his illuminations, Pellegrino di Mariano. Pellegrino's oeuvre as a panel painter was systematically studied in the course of this research. Another work by his hand is the predella fragment showing *St. Catherine of Siena*, for which a lost but documented companion piece showing *St. Nicholas of Tolentino* was discovered in a Dutch collection. In the case of two fragments (*St. Francis of Assisi*, *St. John the Evangelist*) from another dismembered predella by Neroccio de' Landi, stylistic parallels and the use of a unique punchmark confirmed the debated authorship. The two works date from ca. 1475-80 and formed part of a Franciscan altarpiece, possibly Neroccio's triptych dated 1476. In the case of yet another predella fragment, the debated attribution to Benvenuto di Giovanni seems to be correct, and the figure represented is not St. Peter Martyr but the Carmelite *St. Angelus of Licata*. The discovery of an unknown fragment from this predella showing *St. Sigismund* suggests a provenance from the Sienese Carmelite church San Niccolò where the cult of St. Sigismund is documented. Two more predella fragments found their original context through technical, iconographic, and stylistic examinations. In both cases, the original order of the predella scenes could be established on the basis of matching the fragmented decorative motifs between the predella scenes. One of the scenes, Matteo di Giovanni's *Crucifixion of St. Peter*, is highly interesting also as an iconographic novelty, since it shows the martyrdom of the apostle prince away from Rome, with a schematic cityscape in the background. Girolamo di Benvenuto's *The Virgin appears to St. Bernardino* must have formed part of an Observant Franciscan altarpiece, whose main panel is now in the Museum of Montalcino. For many other fragments, the original context was corrected: three works formerly identified as predella fragments were found to be a furniture fragment (Circle of Vecchietta: *Conferral of the Balzana*), an independent piece for private devotion (Circle of Benvenuto di Giovanni: *Nativity*), and the fragment of a vertical structure decorated with narrative scenes (Giovanni di Paolo: *St. Ansanus Baptizing*). Matteo di Giovanni's *St. Jerome* was identified together with its companion piece, the *St. Nicholas of Bari* in Altenburg as unusually large pilaster bases, perhaps from the artist's monumental Augustinian altarpiece from 1474. The most interesting discovery of a companion fragment came by way of iconographic considerations: a fragment showing *Two Angels* – hitherto attributed to Guidoccio Cozzarelli but probably by Matteo di Giovanni – belonged to a Baptism-of-Christ-composition and formed part of a lunette of an altarpiece. The original appearance of another lunette by Matteo (*Virgin and Child with Two Angels*, 1482) was modified on the basis of the technical examination of its fragments, helped by the discovery of an integral version of the composition by Guidoccio, Matteo's student. In another work by Cozzarelli, an altarpiece so far believed to be signed and dated 1486, the old inscription is probably not a signature but a dedicatory inscription by the painter's son Carlo, whereas the painter's signature seems to survive in a copy on the modern bottom frame of the altarpiece. Since this must be based on a damaged original, the date 1486 is not reliable and a dating to ca. 1486-89 should be preferred.

Datings were reviewed in every case save the two securely datable pieces (Cat. 1, 23): they were often revised (Cat. 22, 26, 27, 28, 29), sometimes in a significant degree (Cat. 12, 20, 21), and occasionally proposed for the first time (Cat. 14, 15). The identification of compositional prototypes was relevant in many cases (Cat. 7, 10, 12, 13, 21, 24 and 31). Each master discussed is introduced in a detailed biography. For a convenient review of earlier opinions, I have provided an annotated References section for every piece.

On the whole, this research contributes not only to a better understanding of a group of works conserved in Hungarian museums, but also to our knowledge of Quattrocento Sienese art in general, into which these pieces fit, sometimes literally, as the pieces of a puzzle.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

- 1999 – Central European University, Budapest,
Department of Medieval Studies, Doctoral Programme
- 1998–1999 Central European University, Budapest
Department of Medieval Studies, M.A. in Medieval Studies (1999)
- 1994–1998 Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Faculty of Arts,
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- 1993–1994 Central European University, Prague, Department of Art History
- 1989–1992 Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, Department of Art History
and Department of English, B.A. in Art History and English (1992)
- 1992–1995 Kossuth Lajos University, Debrecen, Hungary, Department of English,
1987–1989 M.A. in English (1998)

Employment

- 2001–2008 Christian Museum, Esztergom, Curator

Project Memberships

- 1998–2002 OTKA (National Scholarly Research Fund of the Hungarian Republic)
preparation work for a catalogue of the early Italian painting collection of the
Christian Museum in Esztergom

Scholarships and Grants

- 2007 May–June Research Scholarship of the Kunsthistorisches Institut – Max-
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- 2006 April–July Hungarian State Eötvös Scholarship
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- 2004 March–June Research Grant by Hungarian Scholarship Board (MÖB)
– Kunsthistorisches Institut – Max-Planck-Institut, Florence
- 2002 January–September Doctoral Research Support Fund Scholarship of the Central
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– Kunsthistorisches Institut – Max-Planck-Institut, Florence
- 2001 January–April Klebelsberg Kunó Scholarship
– Accademia d’Ungheria in Roma, Rome

Select Publications

Articles

“A budai Szent Zsigmond-prépostság Fájdalmas Krisztus-szobrának ikonográfiája,” (The iconography of the Man of Sorrows statue from the Collegiate Church of St. Sigismund in Buda), *Budapest Régiségei*, XXXIII, 1999, 123-39.

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“Matteo di Giovanni: Crocifissione di San Pietro”, in: *Siena e Roma: Raffaello, Caravaggio e i protagonisti di un legame antico*. Exh. cat. (Siena, Complesso Museale di Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, 25 November, 2005 – 5 March, 2006), Siena: Protagon Editori, 2005, cat. 0.5, 72-75.

“Matteo di Giovanni: Altare Placidi” and “Matteo di Giovanni: Altare degli Innocenti,” in *Matteo di Giovanni: Cronaca di una strage dipinta*. Exh. cat. (Siena, Complesso Museale di Santa Maria della Scala, 23 June - 8 October, 2006), ed. Cecilia Alessi and Alessandro Bagnoli, Asciano: ali edizioni, 2006, 44-47, 157-163.

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Select Conference Papers:

“Tradition and Appropriation of the Chalice Symbol: Images of the Eucharistic Man of Sorrows in Fifteenth-century Central Europe,” *10th International Medieval Congress*, Leeds University, Leeds, 14-17 July, 2003.

“Pellegrino di Mariano: The Panel Paintings Revisited,” *Papa Pio II Piccolomini*, Siena, Palazzo Pubblico – Archivio di Stato, 5-7 May, 2005.

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From Late Antique Rhetoric to Medieval Vision: Saint Jerome as a Heavenly Messenger”, *The Supernatural and Its Visual Representation in the Middle Ages*, Budapest, Central European University, 12-13 March, 2007.

Nineteenth-Century Ecclesiastical Intellectuals and Early Italian Religious Art: Patterns of Collecting in Italy and Hungary”, *Sacred Possessions? Italy and Collecting Religious Art, 1500-1990*, Rome, American Academy in Rome, 19-21 June, 2007.

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