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Cast Shadows in Siena: The Case of Domenico di Bartolo II

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Introduction

In the previous study, I examined a majority of works by artist Domenico di Bartolo (active 1420–1444/45) that focused on his treatment of shadows along with a consideration of his relationship to Florence.¹ The discussion began with a fresco cycle (1440–44) Domenico painted adorning the Pellegrinaio (Pilgrim's Hall) inside the Spedale di Santa Maria Della Scala (Santa Maria della Scala Hospital) in Siena. There, we understood how the artist aimed for a naturalistic representation by establishing a direction of light that conformed to the actual window that marked the Pilgrim's Hall and thus a rational depiction of cast shadows. It was possible to situate these as the first large-scale fresco series that faithfully emulated the principles of Masaccio and Masolino's frescoes painted in the mid-1420s at Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel in Florence.

For the first time this past summer, I witnessed Domenico di Bartolo's *The Lives of the Four Patron Saints of Siena* in the sacristy of Siena Cathedral. Through documentation, I was able to confirm that Domenico di Bar-

¹ Koichi Toyama, "Cast Shadows in Siena: The Case of Domenico di Bartolo I," *CARLS Series of Advanced Study of Logic and Sensibility*, Keio University (Tokyo), vol. 3, 2009, pp. 235–248.



Figure. 1. View of the exterior of the Building which contains the Sacristy, Siena.

tolo painted this fresco cycle from 1435 to 1439, and gather how this was an important series in order to understand conditions prior to his painting the Pilgrim's Hall frescoes. Unfortunately, a majority of this large-scale fresco was buried into the sacristy wall, and I was only able to observe no more than one section.

The sacristy, seen from outside the Siena Cathedral, is located inside a separate building that lies below the inner sanctuary of the Duomo adjacent to the façade of the baptistery; the building is connected externally to the cathedral through an arch (Figure 1). As I entered the cathedral and was granted permission to enter the side of the left-transept, I arrived inside a large sacristy named *sagrestia grande*. Facing the far-end wall, that is, where three chapels are located to the northeast and wooden supplies lay along the left wall (northwest), one can see a portion of the frescoes peering out from above (Figure 2). These frescoes were restored by Giuseppe Gavazzi under the supervision of Cecilia Alessi from 1989 to 1990.²

² Many descriptions in this essay are indebted to the following text: Gabriele Fattorini, "Domenico di Bartolo e le *Storie dei patroni* nella sagrestia del duomo,"

The following discussion is based on my experience of directly observing these frescoes.

Images of the Patron Saints of Siena

We are able to confirm the public establishment of the four patron saints of Siena, namely St. Ansanus, the Bishop St. Sabinus, St. Crescentius, and St. Victor from the production and installation of Duccio's *Maestà* (1308–11).³ After this date, Simone Martini painted the same four patron saints in the same place and order as Duccio's *Maestà* in 1315. Around the High altar, there were four side altars each offered to the four patron saints, and it is well known that a series of altarpieces, each painted by a different artist, were unified and completed under the Mariology theme. Specifically, Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi painted the *Annunciation* (Museo degli Uffizi, commissioned 1319–installed 1333) for the St. Ansanus altar; Pietro Lorenzetti painted *The Nativity of the Virgin* (Siena, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, commission 1335–installed 1342) for the St. Sabinus altar, Ambrogio Lorenzetti painted *The Purification of the Virgin* (Museo degli Uffizi, paid 1339–installed 1342) for the St. Crescentius altar, and Bartolomeo Bugarini painted *The Nativity of Christ* (Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass. c. 1350) for the St. Victor altar.⁴

Upon entering the 15th century, new decorations were prepared in succession under the supervision of Caterino di Corsini (1404–20) who became the cathedral's new *operaio*. During this process, important projects that related

in *Le Pitture del Duomo di Siena*, a cura di Mario Lorenzoni, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), pp. 108–117. This author was granted permission from the Soprintendenza in Siena to visit the sacristy on August 24, 2010

³ References from the 13th century that list the four patron saints exist, but St. Victor is replaced by Bartholomew, one of the twelve apostles, in the Siena cathedral stained glass (c. 1288) designed by Duccio. Raffaele Argenziano, Fabio Bisogni, "L'Iconografia dei Santi Patroni Ansano, Crescenzo, Savino e Vittore a Siena," negli atti del seminario *I santi patroni senesi fra agiografia e iconografia* (Siena, 24 gennaio 1990), *Bullettino Senese di Storia Patria* XCVII (1990), pp. 84–115, in part. 87–88.

⁴ Hendrik Willem van Os, *Siena Altarpieces, 1215-1460: form, content, function*. Vol. I, Gröningen, 1984, pp. 77–89.

to the four patron saints were included: the St. Ansanus chapel fresco by Spinello Aretino, the St. Crescentius chapel fresco (1405) and St. Sabinus chapel fresco by Martino di Bartolomeo, and St. Victor chapel decorations by Andrea di Bartolo during the same period. None of these fresco decorations exist today.⁵

Preparations went underway to expand the sacristy for new decorations supervised under Caterino di Corsini (1408–09). These comprised the *sagrestia grande* from the above visit. On the far wall, three chapels were built, and frescoes were predominantly painted by Benedetto di Bindo (1409–12).⁶ He also painted the *The Legend of the True Cross* (Siena, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, 1412) on a cabinet that stored the saints’ relics.⁷ Francesco di Valdambrino also sculpted seated figures of the four patron saints for the sacristy. Although it has been passed down that these seated figures each carry a box that holds a relic, what remains today are three busts from which we may observe the standard naturalistic style of Francesco (Siena, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, 1409).⁸

That is, after the 15th century, we can confirm through this decoration campaign that the reverence toward the four patron saints regained a new height.

Inside the Sacristy of the Siena Cathedral: Documentation of *The Lives of the Four Patron Saints*⁹

In 1435, Domenico di Bartolo was assigned to paint the *The Lives of the Four Patron Saints* in the sacristy. The previous year, Domenico was com-

⁵ Carl Brandon Strehlke, *Domenico di Bartolo*, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia Univ., 1985, pp. 57–58

⁶ Wolfgang Loseries, “Gli Affreschi di Benedetto di Bindo nella sagrestia del duomo,” in *Pitture del Duomo di Siena, op.cit.*, pp. 108–117

⁷ See Silvia Colucci, “Benedetto di Bindo,” in *Da Jacopo della Quercia a Donatello: Le Arti a Siena nel Primo Rinascimento*, a cura di Max Seidel, Ex cat.(26. 3, 2010–11. 7. 2010, Siena), Milano, 2010, pp. 124–125.

⁸ See Gabriele Fattorini, “Francesco di Valdambrino,” in *ibid.*, pp. 58–61.

⁹ References to documents concerning Domenico di Bartolo’s frescoes in the sacristy are from Carl Brandon Strehlke, *op.cit.*, pp. 246–256; “Regesto dei documenti,” a cura di Susan Scott, in *Pitture del Duomo di Siena, op.cit.*, p. 191.



Figure. 3. Domenico di Bartolo, *The Emperor Sigismund Enthroned with Counselors*, 1434, The Cathedral of Siena.

missioned to paint *The Emperor Sigismund Enthroned with Counselors* (Figure 3) on the Siena Cathedral floor, and the work was produced based on his sketch (1434). No fresco paintings by Domenico are known prior to this time. Therefore, one reason these frescoes were commissioned to Domenico can be attributed to his close relationship with the Opera del Duomo of the cathedral through the floor design of the Siena cathedral, and to his friendship with Jacopo della Quercia, the sculptor who had just been selected to become the *operaio* del Duomo.¹⁰

In the documents that remain, the first payment to Domenico is recorded on March 24, 1435 and the selection of the scene to be painted on March 27, 1435. The documents further indicate that the St. Ansanus fresco was to be completed first by August 1435 and the St. Victor altar was to be completed in a hurry by the following October 25, 1436. In addition to the completion of the above saint frescoes, the payment for the third St. Crescentius fresco was made in 1437 (unspecified date).

After this time, there is a one and a half year gap in the documents concerning Domenico's patron saint frescoes until March 23, 1439. The documents were suspended; that is to say, the reason for the production break of the four patron saints frescoes can most certainly be attributed to the death of Jacopo della Quercia (October 20, 1438). During this time, Domenico was

¹⁰. In Carl Brandon Strehlke, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

considered to be involved in a number of commissions and productions of works outside Siena.¹¹ The documents, which reappeared in 1439, state that Giovanni di Pietro di Ghezzo Borghesi succeeds Jacopo della Quercia as the cathedral's *operaio* and was entrusted to continue the supervision of the project.¹² In the many documents that follow, we know that payments were resumed and the fourth fresco of St. Sabinus was completed (October 23, 1439).¹³

Searching the Sacristy: A Description

As we enter the sacristy and confront the fresco on the left hand side that includes a large missing area, we see multiple figures painted with Renaissance-type architecture in the background (Figure 4). In the central foreground along a fluted pilaster, we see the depiction of a young figure with rays of light from emitting head, who points with his right hand toward the upper area. It is possible that an important component manifests from the seated elderly figure who raises his head toward the upper area. Apart from this, along the L-curved wall, there are at least three seated figures, and we see one whose profile is just visible at the end of the missing area. Along that figure's left armpit, a man who is positioned to our far right places his hand on his knee, and he may be of a very high rank. Down in the lower portion of the foreground, a figure stands with his elbow bent.

In the upper region above the wall where the men are seated, bordered by bricks, open windows with their tops rounded into semi-circles and round occhi appear, but the inside of these windows are painted black and do not show the exterior scenery or light. *Bifora* appear further at the top, and a vessel with a footrest is placed there.

Behind a young figure who points to the upper area, there stands an elderly man who sports a well-stocked beard. Next to this old man, we catch

¹¹. Cf. Koichi Toyama, *op.cit.*, 242–247.

¹². Document (1439, 3, 23) published da Gaetano Milanesi, *Documenti per la storia dell'arte senese, raccolti ed illustrati dal Dott. G. Milanesi*, II, Siena, 1854, pp. 172–173; Carl Brandon Strehlke, *op.cit.*, pp. 252–253,

¹³. Carl Brandon Strehlke, *op.cit.*, p. 255.

No image available



Figure. 5. Domenico di Bartolo, detail of figure 4.

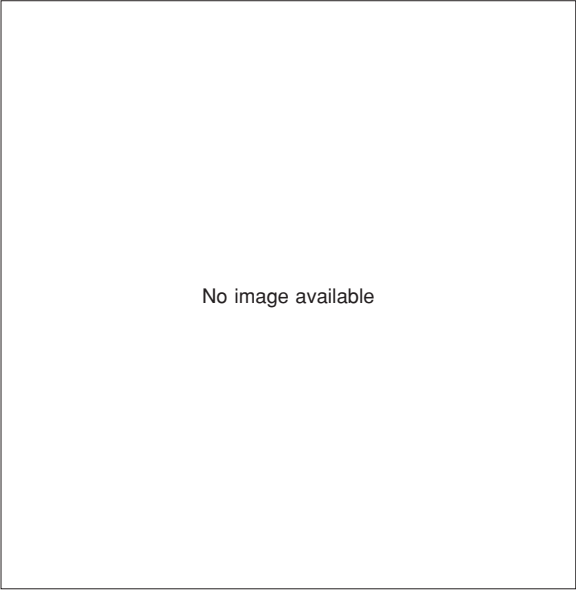


Figure. 6. Domenico di Bartolo, detail of figure 4.

sight of another man who descends along a staircase from the interior of the building (Figure 5). This man wears a blue hat and a green garb, holds a stick with his right hand which he bears on his shoulder, and carries a lantern and a letter in his left hand. Some consider this man to be a pilgrim, but from the letter that he carries, we can assume that he is in fact a messenger.¹⁴ This figure wears a characteristic coat of arms on his chest, and this crest is repeated in the semi-circular arch along the upper portion of the building (Figure 6). Thus, we may consider that this messenger has come down from the building where he works and is on his way out to deliver the letter.¹⁵

¹⁴ Fattorini calls these figures, “figura di un pellegrino.” cf. Fattorini, in *Ex. cat. op.cit.*, p. 113.

¹⁵ Brandi states that this coat of arms was established based on the marriage between the Civoli and Saracini families. cf. C Brandi, *Quattrocentisti Senesi*, Milano, 1949, p. 249. Fattorini later changed this view and assumed that the owner of this crest was Jacopo della Quercia, then *operaio* of the cathedral. cf. Fattorini, *op.cit.*, p. 113.



No image available

On the upper portion of this scene, a grisaille bust of a man is painted on a red background inside a rounded border. A naked putto carries the ends of a garland that cuts across the bottom portion of the bust (Figure 7). He holds a string attached to the garland in his left hand, and bears it over his right shoulder. A putto holding a garland was an intimate motif for Domenico. In fact, Domenico employed this putto repeatedly in the *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Peter and Paul* (c. 1432), a small panel painting currently in the collection of the National Gallery in Washington, as well as in the Siena Cathedral pavement plaque, *The Emperor Sigismund Enthroned* (1434, Figure 3). This ancient, Renaissance-type motif was most certainly employed early on by Jacopo della Quercia in *The Ilaria del Carretto Tomb Monument* (1406–08?) in Lucca, and needless to say, the motif informs Domenico and Jacopo's close relationship. In addition, we can assume that Domenico's experience in Florence, especially his experiences gained from the circle of relations surrounding Donatello, provided a major influence in deploying this motif.¹⁶

Iconography

Does the above scene portray a hagiography of one of the four patron saints? This problem is difficult to solve in an accurate manner.

Scholars have followed the opinion of Cesare Brandi who first observed this scene to represent St. Crescentius.¹⁷ St. Crescentius, a martyr during the joint rule of Emperors Diocletianus (284–305) and Maximianus (286–305) in Rome, was commonly depicted as a young knight holding a cross in his hands and after the 15th century, he was generally portrayed offering his own decapitated head.¹⁸ Having said this however, apart from the similarity between St. Crescentius who was beheaded on via Salaria at the age of twelve, and the young figure painted with a halo along the upper portion of this fresco, it is difficult to prove a reason to identify the figure.

There are hardly any differences between the portrayals of St. Crescentius and St. Ansanus as a young figure in the cathedral's stained glass and *Maestà* both by Duccio or in Simone Martini's *Maestà* fresco (Figures 8, 9). In fact, Fattorini himself who followed the belief that this was St. Crescentius, does not present a clear judgment when identifying between the two saints in the catalogue on Francesco di Valdambrino's bust statues (Figure 10).¹⁹

If we were to say that this fresco represented the life of St. Crescentius, in this same scene he would have clearly shown his faith in Christianity after his father's death, and therefore one may consider that this scene is about his appearance in the courtroom.²⁰ However, the role of the messenger who ap-

^{16.} On Donatello's role of incorporating the putto, see Charles Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto*, Chapel Hill – London, 2001, pp. 1–61.

^{17.} Cesare Brandi, *op.cit.*, pp. 210–212 nota 75, p. 275. Tav. 248.

^{18.} Argenziano-Bisogni, *op.cit.*, in part. pp. 87–88.

^{19.} See note 8; Strehlke also writes that this scene represents either St. Crescentius or St. Ansanus. cf. Carl Brandon Strehlke, *op.cit.*, p. 61. Depictions of St. Sabinus as an elderly episcopal figure and St. Victor bearing a mustache set them apart.

^{20.} Franca Ela Consolino, “Un martire ‘romano’: Crescenzo, negli atti del seminario I santi patroni sesesi fra agiografia e iconografia (siena, 24 gennaio, 1990),” *Bullettino Senese di Storia Patria*, XCVII (1990), pp. 34–48, in part p. 36.



Figure. 8. Duccio di Buonisegna, detail of Maestà, Museo del'Opera del Duomo, Siena.



Figure. 9. Simone Martini, detail of f Maestà, Siena, Palazzo Pubblico.

No image available



Figure. 11. Domenico di Bartolo, detail of figure 4, young figure with halo of rays of light emitting from his head.

pears to our left is not apparent. Furthermore, another problem is that in Sienese tradition, The rays of light instead of a halo represents the blessed rather than a saint (Figure 11).

Cast Shadows

Fattorini has focused on cast shadows in this fresco and provides comments in reference to a series of painters named Pittura di Luce by Bellosi from the mid-15th century. However, his discussion on cast shadows lacks concreteness and is incomplete.²¹

In the main scene to our right and in the upper part of the background architecture, as well as the putto and the bust that appear in the upper region, cast shadows are all painted with a consistent source of light stemming from the right. Cast shadows can be seen at the feet of the seated elderly man or possibly in the pilaster behind the young St. Crescentius (?). Whereas the

²¹. G. Fattorini, *op.cit.*, p. 115.



Figure 12. Domenico di Bartolo, detail of figure 4.

elderly man who stands in the foreground to our left is painted receiving light from the right, cast shadows are painted with light entering from the left in the building's interior, which includes the messenger. In actuality, we can see that cast shadows are added to our right on the staircase at the messenger's feet (Figure 12). From this fact, we acknowledge the left-hand scene to be in a different space-time than the main scene on the right. However, the light from the messenger's lantern, which he holds on his left hand, is not specified.

As a result of these observations, how can we situate cast shadows on this fresco? If one were to say that the subject of this fresco was the life of St. Ansanus, then we can date the production to 1435; if St. Crescentius, then we can consider the date of production by 1437. If this were the case, the cast shadows in this fresco can be attributed to the earliest among his works known to us.

In the documents that relate to the Siena Cathedral sacristy frescoes, and through the documents that include the pending date of the life of St. Cres-

centius, there is a one-and-a-half year gap between August 21, 1437 and March 23, 1439. In my previous essay, I discussed how Domenico received many commissions outside Siena, and at least visited Perugia, Florence, and perhaps Pisa. And we see how even in the panel paintings considered to be produced during this period, Domenico began to experiment with cast shadows.

In the Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala frescoes, which Domenico began work after completing the fresco production of the Siena Cathedral sacristy, we can observe a thoroughly rational depiction of cast shadows, and intricate details (for example in the transparent glass beaker and air bubbles) at par with Northern painters. If we were to make a comparison between the cast shadows produced in the 1440s, one cannot avoid the inconsistent and undeveloped quality judging from the small sections that remain. In particular, seeing how the interiors of the open windows have been painted black, one cannot help but presume a discrepancy from the hospital frescoes. The St. Victor fresco (1439), the last of the sacristy frescoes to be completed, is considered to have been painted after he experienced the most advanced artistic developments in Florence around 1436–39. If this fresco, which we are unable to view today, were to come to light, we would have been able to trace Domenico's development.

At any rate, the first work that attempted a clear cast shadow was a fresco painting, and it is an interesting fact that this comprised a narrative scene. The reason for this with regards to cast shadows is that narrative scenes painted in the medium of fresco predate iconic paintings on panels or other media, and one can observe this tendency among Florentine artists such as Masaccio and Masolino. For a Sienese artist to depict naturalistic cast shadows in the fourth decade of the 15th century is quite unusual, and to be able to confirm this as early as before 1437 is worthy of special mention. Moreover, I would like to examine the circumstances of the 1430s and 1440s in the Tuscan region where Siena and Florence are located as well as the region of Umbria in further detail regarding the treatment of cast shadows.