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Saint Peter Martyr Healing the Leg of a Young Man

1450

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This painting belongs to a series of eight scenes that would have been arranged around an image or statue of Saint Peter Martyr (1205–1252). Here the saint ministers to a youth who had kicked his mother and cut off his leg in remorse. A genial storyteller, Antonio sets the scene in a carpenter's shop. Together with his younger brother Bartolomeo, his partner Giovanni d'Allemagna (who died in 1450), and his son Alvise, Antonio established a family enterprise in Venice surpassed in prestige only by that of Jacopo Bellini and his sons.

Object Details

Title: Saint Peter Martyr Healing the Leg of a Young Man

Artist: Antonio Vivarini (Italian, Venice, active by 1440–died 1476/84)

Date: ca. 1450

Medium: Tempera and gold on wood

Dimensions: 20 7/8 x 13 1/8 in. (53 x 33.3 cm)

Classification: Paintings

Credit Line: Gift of Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1937

Accession Number: 37.163.4

Catalogue Entry

The Artist: Antonio Vivarini was a member of a family documented on the island of Murano (Venice) and Padua from the second half of the fourteenth century. His father, Michele, and the founder of the family, "Vivarinus vitruarius," were both glassmakers. Unfortunately the year of Antonio's birth is unknown. He is documented in Venice between 1446 and 1466, living in the district of Santa Maria Formosa and in Padua in 1447 as a

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The first work documenting Antonio's activity is the polyptych of the Euphrasian Basilica in Parenzo/Porec, which he signed and dated 1440. After this work he began a collaboration with a German painter, Giovanni "de Alemania" or "de Ulma" (that is, from Ulm). The association between the two painters started in 1441 with an altarpiece dedicated to Saint Jerome in the church of Santo Stefano, Venice (now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) and ended with the death of Giovanni in Padua.

It has always been difficult for the scholars to understand the terms of the collaboration between the two painters. Federico Zeri proposed a very thoughtful solution to the problem in 1971, noticing that the *Saint Jerome* in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, of 1444 was signed by Giovanni only.[1] This observation was crucial to distinguishing the works of the two artists, remembering as well the fact that Giovanni died just a few years later in 1450.

Scholars now agree that Giovanni was wedded to a gothic style while Antonio showed a tendency towards an early Renaissance style. The main painter in Venice in the second quarter of the fifteenth century was Jacopo Bellini and both Giovanni and Antonio were certainly influenced by his drawings. Nevertheless, the two partners developed Jacopo's ideas in a very different way. Whereas Giovanni chose to stage his narratives in elaborately decorated, highly imaginative architectural settings, Antonio preferred clear and simple spaces.

The two painters enjoyed a great success in Venice and Padua and received several commissions from important patrons in the 1440s. Their most spectacular works are the three altarpieces for the chapel of the Venetian church of Saint Tarasio (San Zaccaria), still in situ. Their last commission was to fresco the vault of the Ovetari chapel in the Eremitani

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forced Antonio to abandon the commission and return to Venice.

Following Giovanni's death, Antonio began a new collaboration with his brother Bartolomeo. Their first work was the polyptych for the Certosa in Bologna (Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna), which both signed and dated 1450. This new partnership was as successful as the previous one with Giovanni and continued until the 1460s. At the end of this decade the Vivarini workshop could also count on the collaboration of Antonio's son, Alvise, who was also a painter.

Antonio's death happened between 27 August 1466, when he is mentioned as resident in the district of Santa Maria Formosa in Venice, and 24 April 1484, when Alvise Vivarini is quoted in a document as son of the late Antonio.

The Picture: The Met's panel is from an altarpiece illustrating the life of Saint Peter Martyr in which episodes of the saint's life are disposed to the left and right of an image of the saint. It was a particular form of altarpiece very common in Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Met's panel displays a story told by a number of sources of the life of Saint Peter Martyr, such as Berengarius de Landora (before 1316), Pietro Calo (ca. 1323–40), and Ambrogio Taegio (1500)[2].

The Dominican friar is here depicted healing the leg of a boy who had confessed that "because of anger, he had kicked his mother with his foot." In literal response to an admonition of Saint Peter that "the foot which had hit his mother deserved to be cut off," the boy had taken "a pickaxe and cut off his foot in vengeance of his wickedness." Immediately summoned by the boy's father, Saint Peter healed the wound, having compassion for the penitent.[3]

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Delaware; one each at the Art Institute of Chicago (acc. no. 1983) and Frascione Arte, Florence; one sold in London (Christie's, July 8, 2021, no. 18); and one sold in Milan (Porro, May 29, 2014, no. 28) (see figs. 1–7 above). In 1937, Georg Pudelko connected the two panels in Berlin with those in The Met and Chicago, cataloguing them as by Antonio Vivarini. In 1957 Bernard Berenson published the Porro panel, and in 1967 Rodolfo Pallucchini published one of the two panels now in the Alana collection as well as the panel now with Frascione. The second panel in the Alana collection was recently recognized by Peter Humfrey (2014).

Pudelko postulated that the panels decorated the altar of Saint Peter Martyr in the church of Saints Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, known also as San Zanipolo. New evidence supports this hypothesis. In the 1733 inventory of the property of the confraternities of Saints Vincent, Peter Martyr, and Catherine of Siena are listed "quadri con soaze nere e dorade con li miracoli di S. Vincenzo n. 13" (13 paintings in black and gold frames depicting miracles of St. Vincent) (figs. 8–10). The combined confraternities of Saints Vincent and Peter Martyr go back to 1565 and the author of the inventory may have confused the two Dominican saints.

The thirteen "quadri" (paintings) quoted in the inventory might indeed be the panels by Antonio Vivarini, if we consider the circumstance that in 1662 Lodovico Vedriani described in the same way three altarpieces of similar in type by the degli Erri brothers in the church of Saint Dominic in Modena.[4] The narrative scenes of these altarpieces were also mentioned as "miracoli" and this evidence might confirm that the fragments quoted in the inventory from 1733 belonged to a similar altarpiece in the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice. Further support for this hypothesis is the fact that the number of scenes ("miracoli") mentioned in the Santi Giovanni e Paolo inventory is also thirteen—as with the altarpiece described by Vedriani in 1662. Parts of this dismantled altarpiece devoted to Saint

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Museum, Vienna. There are fourteen elements including the main one, which is the figure of the standing Saint Vincent Ferrer.

In 1988, Daniele Benati proposed a reconstruction of the Modena altarpiece (fig. 11), that can be applied as well to Vivarini's altarpiece of Saint Peter Martyr.[5] Following the scheme of the Saint Vincent altarpiece, the Saint Peter Martyr altarpiece by Vivarini would have presented a central standing figure in the middle with six narrative panels to either side, with the scenes arranged vertically. A larger panel below the central standing figure functioned much as a predella and may have depicted the assassination of the saint, which is the most represented scene of his life.

From the middle of the fifteenth century, this type of altarpiece was much in fashion among the Dominican friars, who used it to promote the lives of their saints as examples for worshippers. The altarpiece was probably painted around 1450. This date represents a precise moment in Antonio Vivarini's career, when his partner Giovanni "de Alemania" died and the collaboration with his brother Bartolomeo Vivarini had not yet begun. That he very likely painted the Saint Peter Martyr series around 1450 can be argued by observing the characteristics of these paintings. The imaginative architectural backgrounds of Giovanni d'Alemagna has already been replaced by very simplified and clear settings. On the other side, the stylistic influence of Antonio's brother, Bartolomeo Vivarini, is still missing as the figures do not yet show the detailed descriptions of his early works, such as the *Stigmatization of Saint Francis* (Museo Lia, La Spezia, inv. 271) and the *Ecce Homo* (Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna, inv. 1137).

Mattia Vinco 2019

[1] Federico Zeri, in *Studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Antonio*

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Berengarii Magistri Ordinis, [before 1316]; Pietro Calo, O.P., "St. Petrus Martyr," in *Magnus Legendarius*, [ca. 1323–40], Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, Ms. Lat. IX 17; Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina 9039, Brussels 1898; Ambrogio Taegio, O.P., "Legenda Beatissimi Petri Martiris," [ca. 1500], in *Acta Sanctorum: Aprilis*, ed. G. Henschen and D. van Papenbroeck, 3 vols., Antwerp, 1675, vol. 3, p. 716. For an examination of these sources see Donald Prudlo, *The Martyred Inquisitor: The Life and Cult of Peter of Verona (1252)*, Aldershot, 2008, p. 216.

[3] Prudlo 2008, p. 216.

[4] Lodovico Vedriani, *Raccolta de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti modenesi più celebri*, Modena, 1662, pp. 23–24.

[5] Daniele Benati, *La bottega degli Erri e la pittura del Rinascimento a Modena*, Modena, 1988, p. 70.

Provenance

church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice; Giovanni Vianelli, Chioggia (in 1790; cat., 1790, as by Bartolomeo Vivarini); Achillito Chiesa, Milan (until 1927; sale, American Art Association, New York, November 22–23, 1927, no. 109, as "The Miracle of St. Domenico," by Jacopo Bellini, for \$2,400 to Steinmeyer); [F. Steinmeyer, Lucerne, 1927]; [F. Steinmeyer, Lucerne, and Julius Böhler, Munich, 1927–29; sold to Lugt]; [Frits Lugt, Amsterdam, from 1929]; [Martin Asscher, London, until 1937]; [conte Alessandro Contini Bonacossi, Florence, 1937; as by Antonio Vivarini, sold to Kress]; Samuel H. Kress, New York (1937)

Exhibition History

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New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Art in Renaissance Venice, 1400–1515: Paintings and Drawings from the Museum's Collections," November 8, 2011–February 5, 2012, no catalogue.

References

Catalogo di quadri esistenti in casa il Signor D.n Giovanni D.r Vianelli, canonico della cattedrale di Chioggia. Venice, 1790, p. 28, as by Bartolomeo Vivarini.

Georg Pudelko. "Ein Petrus-Martyr-Altar des Antonio Vivarini." *Pantheon* 20 (September 1937), pp. 283–86, fig. 3, attributes it to Antonio Vivarini; connects it with three additional scenes from the life of Saint Peter Martyr (two in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, and one in the Art Institute of Chicago) [see Notes], suggesting that the four panels originally formed part of a large altarpiece from the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice; calls them late works, dating them between 1458 and 1462.

Margaretta M. Salinger in "A Gift of Two Italian Paintings." *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 33 (January 1938), pp. 8–10, ill., dates it to the 1460s.

"New Metropolitan Pictures." *Art News* 36 (January 15, 1938), p. 13.

Art in America 26 (April 1938), p. 92, ill. p. 89.

Harry B. Wehle. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Catalogue of*

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Roberto Longhi. *Viatico per cinque secoli di pittura veneziana*. Florence, 1946, pp. 50–51, pl. 27, calls it a miracle of Saint Vincent Ferrer; dates it between 1450 and 1460.

Giuseppe Fiocco. "Le pitture venete del Castello di Konopiste." *Arte veneta* 2 (1948), pp. 20, 25, fig. 20, accepts Pudelko's [see Ref. 1937] grouping of the four panels, and his suggested provenance of SS. Giovanni e Paolo; tentatively attributes them to Antonio Vivarini and tentatively identifies the saint as either Peter Martyr or Vincent Ferrer.

Luigi Coletti. *Pittura veneta del Quattrocento*. Novara, 1953, p. XXIX, pl. 52b, attributes it to Antonio Vivarini, dates it possibly after 1450, and identifies the saint as Vincent Ferrer.

Josephine L. Allen and Elizabeth E. Gardner. *A Concise Catalogue of the European Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York, 1954, p. 100.

Bernard Berenson. *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Venetian School*. London, 1957, vol. 1, p. 198, pl. 83, lists it as by Antonio Vivarini.

Rodolfo Pallucchini. *I Vivarini*. Venice, [1962], pp. 27–29, 97–98, fig. 22, adds a panel depicting the funeral of Saint Peter Martyr (Mario Crespi, Milan) to the series; dates the panels close to the dismembered Santa Monica altarpiece of about 1441.

Rodolfo Pallucchini. "Giunte ai Vivarini." *Arte veneta* 21 (1967), p. 200, adds two more panels to the series, "Peter Martyr Exorcising a Demon Disguised as the Madonna and Child" (sold, Galliera, Paris, 1962) and "The

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Fern Rusk Shapley. *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection*. Vol. 2, *Italian Schools: XV–XVI Century*. London, 1968, pp. 31–32, no. K1116, fig. 71, notes that a now lost eighth panel depicting the death of the saint probably completed the series; states that the scenes probably flanked a central panel depicting a full-length figure of the saint; remarks that a date of about 1450/60 is generally accepted.

Burton B. Fredericksen and Federico Zeri. *Census of Pre-Nineteenth-Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections*. Cambridge, Mass., 1972, pp. 211, 444, 607.

Federico Zeri with the assistance of Elizabeth E. Gardner. *Italian Paintings: A Catalogue of the Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Venetian School*. New York, 1973, pp. 89–90, pl. 100, date it to the 1450s; state that the central panel was probably either a painted or sculpted full-length figure of Saint Peter Martyr.

Fern Rusk Shapley. *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection*. Vol. 3, *Italian Schools: XVI–XVIII Century*. London, 1973, p. 389, Addenda.

George Kaftal with the collaboration of Fabio Bisogni. *Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy*. Florence, 1978, col. 848.

Robert Oertel and Hans-Joachim Eberhardt in *Catalogue of Paintings, 13th–18th Century*. 2nd, rev. ed. Berlin-Dahlem, 1978, p. 470, under nos. 66–67 [German ed., 1975, p. 460].

George Bisacca and Laurence B. Kanter in *Italian Renaissance Frames*.

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Christopher Lloyd. *Italian Paintings before 1600 in the Art Institute of Chicago: A Catalogue of the Collection*. Chicago, 1993, pp. 296, 298–99, fig. 3, dates the panels to the 1440s; believes that all the panels originally had trefoil-shaped frames with cusped arches; suggests a comparison with the four altarpieces dedicated to Dominican saints painted for the church of San Domenico in Modena by Simone Lamberti and the degli Erri.

Katharine Baetjer. *European Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art by Artists Born Before 1865: A Summary Catalogue*. New York, 1995, p. 68, ill.

Patricia Meilman. *Titian and the Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*. Cambridge, 2000, p. 16.

Peter Humfrey. "A New Panel by Antonio Vivarini from the 'St Peter Martyr' Polyptych." *Venezia Cinquecento* 24, no. 48 (2014), pp. 5, 10–11, 14–15 nn. 2, 7, 12, fig. 2 (color), reports the appearance of an eighth panel from the series depicting Saint Peter Martyr praying before a crucifix, noting that there must have originally been more than eight since the series would undoubtedly have included the saint's martyrdom; dates the panels about 1450–55 based on comparison with the artist's triptych in the church of San Francesco della Vigna, Venice; discusses possibilities for the original location of the series.

Andrea De Marchi in Mattia Vinco. *Antonio Vivarini in San Zanipolo a Venezia: Iconografia e nuovi documenti*. Florence, 2018, pp. 7–11.

Mattia Vinco. *Antonio Vivarini in San Zanipolo a Venezia: Iconografia e nuovi documenti*. Florence, 2018, pp. 17–47, fig. 6 (color),

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Martyr, and Catherine of Siena, of 1733, and thus with the altarpiece originally on the altar of Saint Peter Martyr in the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice, as first proposed by Pudelko (1937); believes the altarpiece would have followed the format of the one by Agnolo degli Erri dedicated to Saint Vincent Ferrer (ca. 1485; formerly San Domenico, Modena; now divided among the Seminario Arcivescovile, Modena, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna); provides a detailed reading of the iconography of all eight panels, based on original sources.

Old Masters Evening Sale. Christie's, London. July 8, 2021, p. 79, under no. 18.

Notes

Saint Peter Martyr, a member of the Dominican order, was born in Verona in 1205 and was assassinated in 1252. He was canonized by Pope Innocent IV in 1253.

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