



A Remarkable Florentine Pax

by Michael Riddick

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Fig. 01: A gold gilt silver and niello pax frame and lunette of *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, anon. Florentine goldsmith, 1518; and a partially gilt copper applique of the Virgin, Child and a winged-putto-head, ca. 1445-50, here attributed to Maso di Bartolomeo or his workshop (after designs associated with Luca Della Robbia) (Kollenburg Antiquairs)

A gold gilt silver and niello pax dated 1518 featuring a copper applique of the Virgin, Child and a winged-putto-head, ca. 1445-50, attributed here to Maso di Bartolomeo or his workshop (after designs associated with Luca Della Robbia) (Fig. 01)

Approximate height and width: 280 x 130 mm

The maker of the present pax was a master goldsmith active in Florence during the first quarter of the 16th century. The architectural style of the pax descends from the small gilt-wood tabernacle frames made in late 15th century Florence like those produced by the workshop(s) of Giuliano (1432-90) and Benedetto da Maiano (1442-97).¹

The present frame is remarkable in its construction. It is comprised of at least twenty-five separate pieces, masterfully integrated to produce a seamless finished work. Its maker leaves only nine expertly blended rivets exposed on the obverse and its assembly is equal to the complex nature of other important pax commissions of its time.² The majority of the pax frame is cast in silver with gold gilding applied to its obverse using a mercury amalgam. Some surface areas are rubbed due to wear and leave an exposed tarnished silver surface that gives the illusion of exposed bronze beneath the gilding. The reverse backplate and handle of the pax are silver, also heavily tarnished (Fig. 02). The reverse features a dedicatory inscription above the handle: F • K • F • F (made for [Fieri Fecit] "F K").³ The base of the reverse is inscribed with the date: MD/XVIII (1518). The pax handle features an engraved religious emblem possibly indicating an owner, church, treasury mark or religious order.



Fig. 02: Reverse of a remarkable Florentine pax, dated 1518
(Kollenburg Antiquairs)

The upper portion of the pax forms an arch, flanked by rosettes with two additional rosettes placed centrally at its top and crowned by an acanthus leaf. An engraved arched silver inset features the inscription: PAX • DEI • O • EXVPERAT • OMNEM • SENSVM • CVSTODIAT • CORDA • VRA • ET • INT • VRAS⁴ (*and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus*). Within the arch is a separately cast lunette depicting *St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata*. The lunette is stylistically unrelated to the central Virgin-Child group featured on the pax. To the present author's knowledge, no other documented examples of the *St. Francis* lunette are known though its size corresponds with other lunettes found in similarly styled North Italian frames datable to the same period.⁵ The figural style and rocky landscape of the lunette shows the influence of early Florentine masters like Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) and Antonio di Pietro Averlino, called Filarete (1400-69).⁶

The frieze, base and pillars of the pax feature fantastic grotesques which exemplify an early awareness of themes inspired by the discovery of the *Domus Aurea*, Nero's residence near the Colosseum, whose walls were decorated with classical grotesques inspiring Renaissance artists hungry for visual references from the antique past. The present pax was realized at the time Giovanni da Udine's (1487-1564) grotesque-laden loggia for the Vatican was being painted. The loggia, made under Raphael's (1483-1520) guidance, was a significant inspiration, apart from prints, for the cultivation of grotesques in Italian Renaissance art. The goldsmith responsible for the present pax may have had an intimate connection with the *Domus Aurea*, relying on early sources for the light and buoyant designs featured on the pax which exhibit faithfulness to the classical style.

The pillars of the pax are topped by individually cast Corinthian capitals⁷ and the frieze is flanked by applique busts of angels in relief. The cornices of the pax feature elaborate designs incorporating acanthus leaves, lotus-leaf patterns and decorative dental and bead-and-lozenge trims.

The plinth of each pillar feature angelic busts rendered in niello that mimic the appliques set above each capital. Centered along the base is a circular niello armorial featuring rampant lions and a palm tree with exposed roots (Fig. 03).⁸ The letters “F K” flank the tree while three quatrefoils are arranged across its top. The circular niello is cleverly bordered in relief by supporting caryatids. The armorial likely belongs to the object’s recipient whose monogram, “F K,” corresponds with the inscribed reverse of the pax.

The central background of the pax is decorated in niello with a parallel sequence of six-rayed stars, trimmed by a rope-molded border.⁹ The maker of the pax has salvaged a mid-15th century Virgin-Child group whose



Fig. 03: Monogrammed niello armorial along the base of the pax (Kollenburg Antiquairs)

separately cast halos and winged-putto-head base are fused together to form the central relief. The assembly of the pax has been thoughtfully designed to accommodate this central applique group.¹⁰

THE VIRGIN-CHILD APPLIQUE

Evidence that the central Virgin-Child applique is recovered for use on the present pax is demonstrated by its distinguished quaternary-type copper alloy typical of mid-15th century Florentine bronzes.¹¹ The soldering used to attach the halos to the figures is aged versus that used to fuse the applique and other elements of the pax together. Two holes on the reverse of the Virgin’s halo show an early piercing on the left used for its original mount. Later soldering is present where a new



Fig. 04: Reverse of two halo appliques fused with the Virgin-Child applique (Kollenburg Antiquairs)



Fig. 05: Reverse of the Virgin-Child applique showing one of two silver rivets added along its base for mounting onto its later pax frame (Kollenburg Antiquairs)

hole was drilled for incorporation on the present pax (Fig. 04). There is an old patch on the reverse of the applique, along the neckline of the Virgin, probably used to correct a casting flaw or add reinforcement or build-up where the lower portion of the halo applique is affixed. An additional modification to the applique's reverse is observed beneath the figure group, where two silver rivets have been added as a means to further secure the applique to the niello background and backplate of the pax (Fig. 05). Silver rivets are also used to attach the angelic bust appliques above the pilaster capitals and the arched, engraved silver applique to the arch of the pax.

A comprehensive census of examples of the Virgin-Child applique was systematized by Doug Lewis¹² who organized examples into three types: A, B and C, with the first type categorized by three variations (Type A, I-III).¹³ The present author adds three additional examples to Lewis' census: the present example,¹⁴ one in the Buttazzoni collection¹⁵ and another at the Museum of the Holy Shrine of Loreto.¹⁶ In total, the Virgin-Child applique is known by at least twenty examples.¹⁷



Fig. 06: Pax with the *Madonna and Child, Two Adoring Angels, and God the Father Blessing*, ca. 1440s-1450s, here attributed to Maso di Bartolomeo or his workshop (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Inv. 1957.14.392)

An early context for the use of the Virgin-Child applique is found on two paxes: one at the National Gallery of Art (NGA) (Fig. 06) and another corresponding pax formerly in Berlin (Fig. 24).¹⁸ Its frame, flanked by Corinthian columns and topped by a triangular pediment, represents one of the earliest small style of Florentine tabernacle frames distinguished from its earlier Gothic

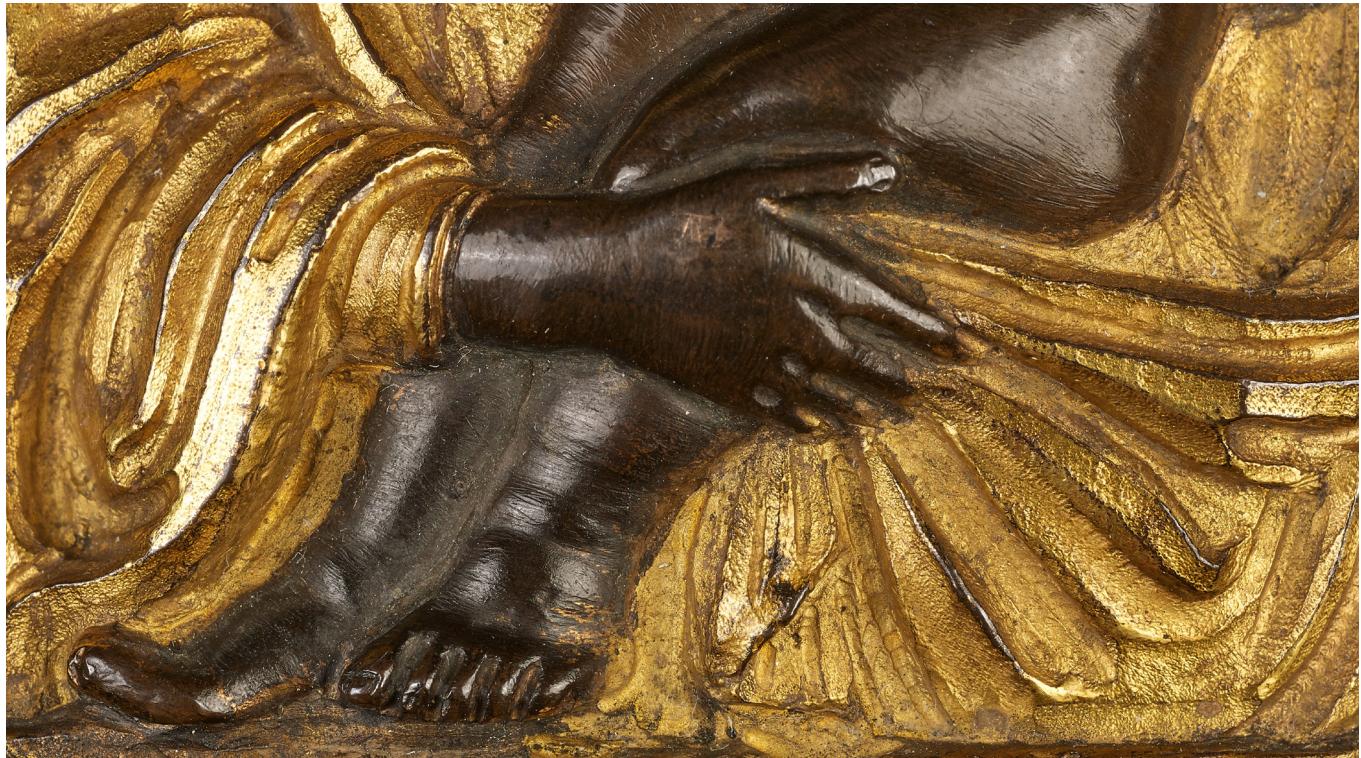


Fig. 07: Detail of the Virgin-Child applique on a later (1518) Florentine pax (Kollenburg Antiquairs)

counterparts. Tim Newberry traces the impetus for this style of frame to Filippo Brunelleschi (1337-1446) whose designs captivated Florence during the early 1430s.¹⁹

While the NGA and Berlin Virgin-Child examples are casts of good quality, reproducing the round contours of the original model and employing the same gilt features that leave the flesh-tones exposed in bronze, the previously unpublished applique on the present pax surpasses the aforesaid examples in its quality of casting and definition of details. The crispness along the folds of drapery, between the digits of the hands, feet and strands of hair is exemplary. The sculptor's tool marks on the original wax or clay model appear reproduced in the fresh and lively character of the bronze, not subdued through aftercasting (Fig. 07).²⁰ It's reasonable

to suggest the present cast could be the prototype from which all other casts descend. The steadfast dependence on the direct casting method employed for bronzes in Florence during the 15th century increases this possibility.²¹

Two characteristics differentiate the present Virgin-Child applique from other examples. First, the special attention given to its finishing is outstanding. A qualified hand has treated the surface of the bronze with spectacular attention, chasing details of the hair and chiseling the Virgin's drapery with extraordinary care (Fig. 08). In preparation, the finisher has tested his chisel on the reverse of the applique, probably before beginning treatment on its obverse (Fig. 09). There is a disciplined use of a punch tool on the halo of the Virgin



Fig. 08: Detail of the obverse of the Virgin-Child applique (Kollenburg Antiquairs)

which terminates in chased parallel strokes radiating along its outer margin. The quality of the applique, notwithstanding its possible connection with an important artist, was likely the impetus for the pax maker's choice in preserving the object in a newly enriched context relevant to the tastes of the first quarter of the 16th century.²² The only comparable Virgin-Child applique whose surface appears similarly treated is an example at the Louvre (Inv. OA2554) which shows chisel-work on the drapery of the Virgin. While the quality of the Louvre cast appears to be reasonable its details may be vestigial, cast from a finer finished bronze like the present example.²³ Other untreated, yet satisfactory casts of the Virgin-Child applique integrated with later pax frames include an art market example cited by Lewis²⁴ and the example in Loreto whose frame is set upon a later marble base inscribed: AVE MARIA, recalling the format for serially produced devotional tabernacles fashioned as polychromed cartapesta and stucco reliefs.



Fig. 09: Detail of the reverse of the Virgin-Child applique (Kollenburg Antiquairs)

An additional characteristic unique to the present Virgin-Child applique is its base which features a sloped integral lower extension hidden behind the winged-putto-head applique to which it is attached (Fig. 10). The sloped feature appears to have been integral to the original wax or clay model of the relief²⁵ and is not present on any other cast example of the applique. If other examples used the same model or were cast using the present example as its model, the lower portion must have been excluded in favor of allowing the Virgin-Child group to sit evenly along the base of other pax frames rather than float openly as a central relief.²⁶

The winged-putto-head applique appears unique to the present pax and was probably cast contemporaneously with the accompanying Virgin-Child. Stylistically it is by the same hand and is likewise congruent in style with the flanking angel appliques observed on the NGA and Berlin paxes. Independent examples of these angel appliques are also known, such as one at the NGA,²⁷ however, to the present author's knowledge, no independent examples of the winged-putto-head

applique have been documented elsewhere. Unlike the Virgin-Child group, these appliques are not cast with an incuse reverse. However the appliques correspond with their partially gilt surface treatments and the mutual integration of old rivets on their reverse used for application onto paxes (Fig. 11).²⁸



Fig. 10: Detail of the integral lower extension on the reverse of the Virgin-Child applique (Kollenburg Antiquairs)



Fig. 11: Reverse of an angel applique with integrated rivets, ca. 1440s-1450s, here attributed to Maso di Bartolomeo or his workshop (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Inv. 1957.14.393)

DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIRGIN-CHILD MOTIF

The Virgin-Child group was first given a Venetian association by Emile Molinier,²⁹ followed later by a minority of scholars.³⁰ Wilhelm von Bode was first to suggest a Florentine origin³¹ and this has been accepted by modern scholarship.³² In particular, Bode gave an association of the relief to Michelozzo (1396-1472), citing the child Christ's relationship with Michelozzo's lunette on the Church of Saint Agostino's facade in Montepulciano (Fig. 12).³³ While Bode's association with Michelozzo's terracotta group is noteworthy, the dynamism of Michelozzo's sculpture and the pensive stoicism of the pax group do not entirely conform.

The Virgin-Child motif portrayed by Michelozzo in his Agostino terracotta group has early origins in the Italian Renaissance when Gothic styles receded and



Fig. 12: Detail of a terracotta lunette featuring the *Virgin and Child* on the Church of Saint Agostino's facade in Montepulciano, attributed to Michelozzo, ca. 1437-38



Fig. 13: *The Virgin and Child* by Masaccio, 1426 (altarpiece for the Church of the Carmine, Pisa)

transformed to a soft and humanized portrayal of the Virgin and Child. While the Virgin tips her head inwardly in a melancholic manner the child Christ gestures naively and naturally with his finger pressed to his mouth.



Fig. 14: *The Virgin and Child* attributed to Filippo Lippi, ca. 1437-38 (Utah Museum of Fine Arts)

The first known appearance of this novel portrayal of the Virgin and Child is found on the central panel of the *St. Giovenale Triptych* in Cascia di Reggello, painted in 1422 and largely accepted as a work by Masaccio (1401-28).³⁴ Masaccio's later 1426 altarpiece for the Church of the Carmine in Pisa also reproduces the motif to much praise, as the painting was contemporaneously celebrated for its ingenuity (Fig. 13). Filippo Lippi's (1406-69) painting of the *Virgin and Child* (Fig. 14) indicates a sensitive development of the motif in closer proximity with Michelozzo's terracotta group in Montepulciano, sharing also a similar dating for its realization, ca. 1437-38. In discussing Lippi's inspiration for the *Virgin and Child*, Laurie Fusco suggests the possible reliance on a sculpted source noting the foreshortening used on the child Christ's head.

In sculpture, an early appearance of the motif is found on the *Orlandini Madonna* (Fig. 15), largely attributed to Michelozzo, ca. 1426.^{35 36 37} Fusco, noting those active



Fig. 15: *The Orlandini Madonna* attributed to Michelozzo, ca. 1426 (Bode Museum; Inv. 55)



Fig. 16: *The Virgin and Child with Two Angels* attributed to 'Niccolo' after a model by Luca Della Robbia, 1428/29 (Ashmolean Museum; Inv. W A 1888.CDEF.S10)

within Lippi's circle, observes the possible influence from his associates Michelozzo and Luca della Robbia (ca. 1399/1400-82).³⁸ While Michelozzo's use of the motif on the *Orlandini Madonna* and Agostino terracotta have been discussed, another early reproduction of it appears on a polychromed stucco roundel relief at the Ashmolean Museum, attributed to Luca, and dated January 17th 1428 (Fig. 16).³⁹ The roundel features the Virgin-Child group sitting upon clouds supported by three winged-putti-heads and flanked from behind by prayerful angels. John Pope-Hennessey suggested the Ashmolean roundel documents a lost bronze relief by Luca made before 1428 and this observation may place the roundel's origins at the time of, or before, Michelozzo's *Orlandini Madonna*.⁴⁰

It is in Luca's Ashmolean roundel that we find the early impetus for the small bronze Virgin and Child group featured on the present pax. Lewis made this observation, noting that in addition to the correspondences between the central Virgin-Child group, the flanking angels on the stucco relief, with their prayerful poses, also inspired the separately cast flanking angel attachments on the NGA pax (see Fig. 06).⁴¹ Adding further credence to Lewis' observation is the previously unpublished winged-putto-head applique forming part of the group on the present pax which corresponds with the winged-putti-heads found beneath the central group of the Ashmolean roundel.

There is a presumed interaction between Luca and Michelozzo in the development of this Virgin-Child typology during the mid-1420s and into the 1430s. The sculptural origins of the motif appear indebted to the two artists and it's possible they may have operated from a lost model, perhaps originally by Donatello



Fig. 17: *The Virgin and Child* terracotta attributed to Michelozzo, ca. 1435-40 (Bode Museum; Inv. 73)

(1386-1466).⁴² Lewis calls our attention to a terracotta group of the *Virgin and Child*, attributed to Michelozzo, ca. 1435-40 (Fig. 17).⁴³ Its characteristics are especially close to the pax relief group though lean more closely to Michelozzo's standard for facial types. Lewis amply considers the relief an intermediary between Luca's Ashmolean roundel and the source model for the present pax relief group identified by a stucco cast in the Bardini collection that was first noted by Ulrich Middeldorf (Fig. 18).⁴⁴ Bardini's stucco cast is thought to reproduce



Fig. 18: *The Virgin and Child with Two Angels* stucco cast attributed to Luca Della Robbia (ex-collection of Stefano Bardini)

a lost original that was regarded by Allan Marquand as a possible work by Luca.⁴⁵ The Bardini stucco conforms to the pax relief group though differs in its facial features which recall Luca's style. As a result, Middeldorf, while agreeing with the pax group's Florentine origin, disregarded its earlier association with Michelozzo in favor of one with Luca.



Fig. 19: Bronze doors for the New Sacristy of the Florence Cathedral, 1446-75

A POSSIBLE ATTRIBUTION FOR THE VIRGIN-CHILD APPLIQUE

A crucible of activity during the creation of the bronze doors for the New Sacristy of the Florence Cathedral in 1445-46 (Fig. 19) may have facilitated the environment through which the origin of the Virgin-Child applique could have been realized. The execution of the doors collaboratively involved Luca, Michelozzo and the sculptor and bronze founder Maso di Bartolomeo (1406-56).⁴⁶ The upper relief panel on the left door, attributed to Luca, recalls again his earlier Ashmolean roundel depicting a Virgin and Child group flanked by angels who clasp their hands in prayer (see Fig. 16).

While the Bardini stucco reproduces facial types distinct to Luca, the figures on the pax group express an indebtedness to Donatello's influence. As a collaborator of Donatello's, it is in this context we might consider an authorship with Maso, borrowing from a model⁴⁷ provided by his collaborator, Luca. On the sacristy doors we can observe Maso's attributed relief of *St. Gregory the Great* on the lower-left panel. The characters are rigid in their composure compared with the freer form of the other reliefs ascribed to Luca. The severity of Maso's panel may compare with the austerity of the Virgin-Child pax group or the flanking angelic putti found on the NGA pax who stand erect.

An association of the pax group with Michelozzo, also involved in the New Sacristy doors, is less likely on stylistic grounds as the putti conform more closely to types specific to Maso. For example, correspondences may be drawn with Maso's *Reliquary of the Holy Girdle of the Virgin* in Prato (Fig. 20), made around 1446-48, during his work on the New Sacristy doors. The reliquary



Fig. 20: *Reliquary of the Holy Girdle of the Virgin* by Maso di Bartolomeo, ca. 1446-48 (Museum of the Works of the Prato Cathedral - Piccoli Grandi Musei)

features small carved ivory putti who, though heavier in their disposition, reflect the putti appliques on the present pax and the NGA pax, particularly with regard to the distinct rendering of their wings, hair, modeling of their faces and depth of relief (Figs. 21, 22).

The unique knotted design featured on the Virgin's halo on the NGA pax (see Fig. 06) suggests the work of an artist interested in patterns and shapes. Maso would have been suitable for this type of treatment considering his adventurous ability to dress utilitarian objects, such

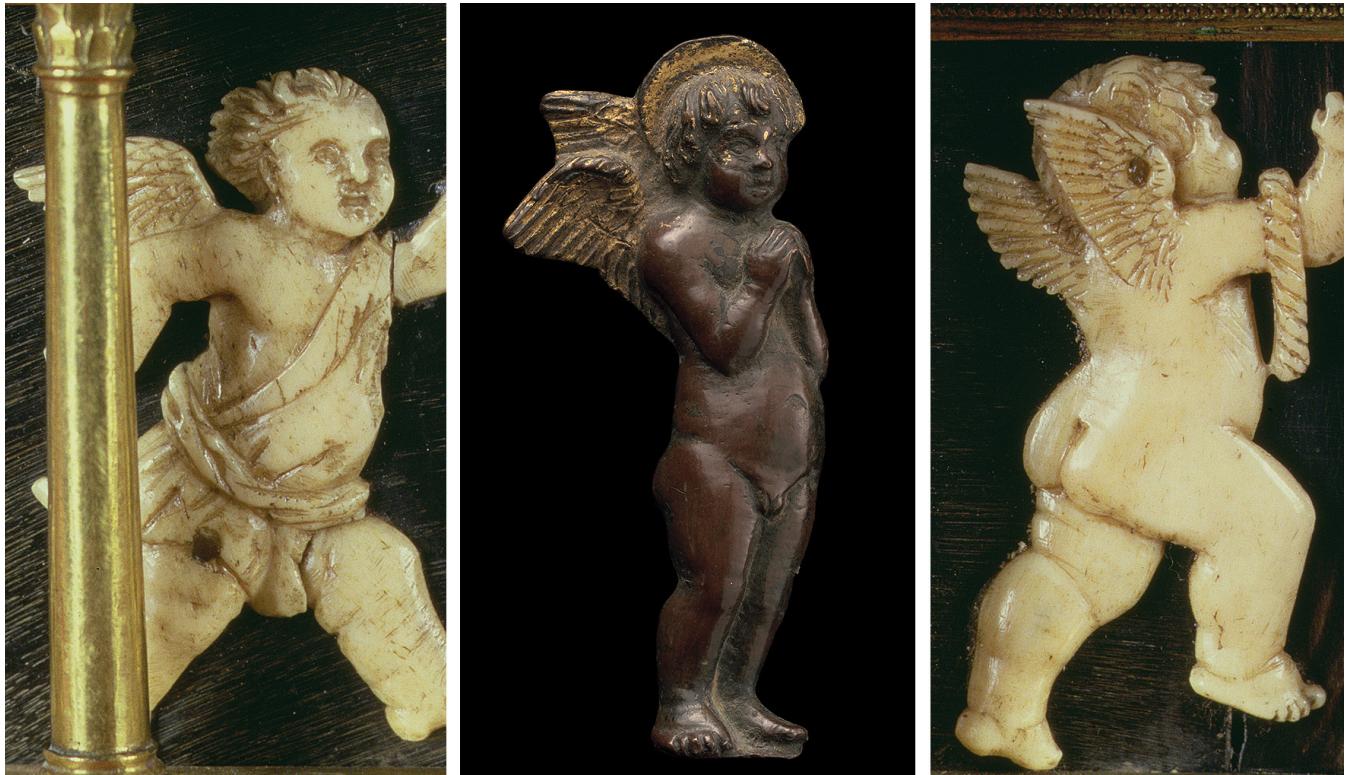


Fig. 21: Details (left, right) from the *Reliquary of the Holy Girdle of the Virgin* by Maso di Bartolomeo (Prato Cathedral); Angel applique (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Inv. 1957.14.393), here attributed to Maso di Bartolomeo and his workshop (center)

as the Prato grille and candelabra, with innovative patterns inspired by classical designs.

Though observationally generic, the engraved hatching treatment on Maso's reliquary recalls some of the hatching observed on the decorative backplate of the NGA pax or comparatively on the engraved halos of the Berlin pax and Louvre applique. The Cloth of Honor engraved onto the decorative background plate of the NGA pax also broadly recalls the low-relief Cloth of Honor carved into Luca's marble *Santa Maria a Peretola* made in 1443 just prior to his work on the New Sacristy doors with Maso. The same style of bracketed swag drapery is featured along with a floral motif while the

cloth likewise terminates along the lower edge with a fringe.

In considering Maso as the potential author for the Virgin-Child group, it is possible his younger brother Giovanni could have been involved in its production, as he accompanied Maso as an assistant on all his major projects and also assisted the same sculptors belonging to his circle.⁴⁸

A further influence from Luca may also be suggested by the spot-gilding of the Virgin-Child appliques which leaves the flesh areas of the bronze exposed. This approach echoes Luca's choice for a simplified palette



Fig. 22: Detail (left) of a winged-putto-head applique from a remarkable Florentine pax, here attributed to Maso di Bartolomeo and his workshop (Kollenburg Antiquairs; detail (right) from the *Reliquary of the Holy Girdle of the Virgin* by Maso di Bartolomeo (Prato Cathedral)

as on his tin-glazed terracottas in which the colors of a character's drapery is juxtaposed against the white used for the flesh tones of his sculptures, becoming the signature of his work.

There also remains the possibility Luca could have had a hands-on involvement in the creation of the Virgin-Child group. While he is less known for his work in bronze, he was active with the medium into the 1440s and his origins as a goldsmith would have made him qualified to execute such an artwork. Luca's success with the serial production of sculpture would likewise relate to the idea of serially producing bronze appliques for varied uses. The diverse objects produced by his workshop ranged from minor works like baptismal fonts to complicated large-scale masterpieces.⁴⁹ It would therefore have been within his scope to take an interest in the production of minor objects like paxes and small reliefs. However,

apart from stylistic concerns, this ambition would have been considered the territory of any bronze sculptor pursuing the diversification of their art and income.

POSSIBLE ADVANCEMENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PAXES

In theory, an epiphany for the potential of serially made paxes may have been an afterthought in Maso's workshop, spurred by the success of his occasional collaborator Luca who began realizing achievements in the serial nature of his glazed terracottas during the 1440s. In particular, the NGA pax (see Fig. 06) may indicate early ideas in the construction and assembly of Italian metal paxes that became standard by the late 15th century and early 16th century.

The NGA pax is ambitious in reproducing in small bronze the larger private devotional altars serially made in less durable materials. Its closest small-scale metallic relative would have fallen in the realm of gilt metal reliquaries, which in consideration of the *Reliquary for the Holy Girdle of the Virgin*, places the idea in Maso's imaginative sphere. One of the few comparable metal paxes of early Florentine origin is a ca. 1430 *Virgin and Child before a Niche* attributed to the circle of Donatello (possibly Michelozzo).⁵⁰ The pax is primarily known by surviving casts of its central relief which would have been inserted into a niche-style frame.⁵¹ However, its simplicity is unlike later architectural paxes which, by unspoken standard, included a base, central relief, flanking columns and a pediment. The NGA pax possibly documents one of the earliest employments for this architectural formula making greater use of cast bronze parts rather than a reliance on goldsmith arts involving more valuable metals and fine materials like gemstones and other irreproducible components typical to mid-15th century paxes.⁵²

Already discussed is the suggestion the present Virgin-Child applique was made using the direct casting process and that successive examples are the result of aftercasting.⁵³ During the process of preparing the NGA pax its author may have realized the value in further reproducing its parts for use on additional examples of the same pax or for use on other objects. This could have resulted in a quantity of aftercasts made within the same workshop.^{54 55} This practice also explains why a relief, cast much earlier, could appear on a later pax like the present one. The present applique certainly remained relevant for reusing. There is an apparent importance given to it, exemplified by the fine craftsmanship found on its updated frame.

The potential aftercasting of appliques within the same workshop for use in the assembly of paxes would have foreshadowed the indirect casting of parts that became standard practice by the last quarter of the 15th century and into the 16th century. For the preparation of paxes a workshop would have made universally applicable pre-cast parts like handles, relief plaquettes, decorative appliques or backplates. Pre-made molds of frames and their decorative embellishments could also have been resourcefully prepared for on-demand casting of diverse yet generally uniform designs. The stimulus for this type of efficiency likely originated through the experience of early Quattrocento workshops responsible for producing paxes like the NGA pax, itself a rare surviving example from the 1440s-50s.⁵⁶

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Endnotes

1 For an example and further references see: Timothy Newberry (1990): *Italian Renaissance Frames*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; No. 11, p. 43.

2 For a likeness in the technical virtuosity of the present pax, compare its complexity with the assembly of Moderno's 1513 pax for Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga (1469-1525) at the Museo Diocesano in Mantua (see Lucia Mazzola [2013]: *Il restauro della Pace del Moderno, 1513 (?)*. Mantova, Museo Diocesano, Restituzioni; No. 27).

3 The recipient's name was probably Francesco or Filippo though the "K" is perplexing having few possibilities in Latin. Robert G. La France (private communication, January 2017) interestingly suggested it may refer to a Greek family motto and Mischo van Kollenburg (private communication, January 2017) suggested it might be associated with the term, *kalandarium*, referring to the bookkeeping of bankers.

4 A shortening of Philippians 4:7 from the Latin Vulgate: *Et pax Dei, quæ exuperat omnem sensum, custodiat corda vestra, et intelligentias vestras in Christo Jesu.*

5 For example, see John Pope-Hennessy (1965): *Renaissance Bronzes from the Samuel H. Kress Collection. Reliefs, plaquettes, statuettes, utensils and mortars*. Phaidon Press, London; No. 301, Fig. 393, p. 86, to which the present author most recently suggests a Roman origin given to Lautizio di Meo de' Rotelli (d. 1527) or his circle, ca. 1511-25.

6 The lunette also recalls ca. 1500 plaque reliefs of a Paduan-Venetian origin, such as one *St. Jerome* in Berlin (see Ernst Bange [1922]: *Die Italienischen Bronzen der Renaissance und des Barock. Zweiter Teil: Reliefs und Plaketten*. Vereinigung Wissenschaftlicher Verleger Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin and Leipzig, Germany; pp. 6-7; No. 36), discussed as Venetian by Leo Planiscig in L. Planiscig (1921): *Venezianische Bildhauer der Renaissance*. Wien, 1921.

7 The right capital has been lost and is substituted by a modern cast replacement (not shown in this article).

8 Research indicates this armorial has been given to a variety of family names in Italy and presently requires more lengthy and detailed investigation beyond the scope of the present article.

9 This generic background motif of stars was probably inspired by mid-15th century polychromed stucco cast tabernacles of the Virgin-Child such as two art market examples, one reproducing a stucco cast of Donatello's *Pazzi Madonna* and another of the *Virgin and Child Surrounded by Two Angels* by Neri di Bicci (1419-92). Neri uses the same motif as a surround for his painted *Coronation of the Virgin* at the Chruch of San Giovanni dei Cavalieri in Florence which he borrowed from his father, Bicci di Lorenzo (1373-1452) who employed it along the upper baldachin-type frame for his painted *Nativity* in the same church.

10 The thoughtful design of the pax is evidenced by modifications made to the group applique for the purpose of mounting and the specific care given to the niello background plate which features an ovular silhouetted cut-out allowing the goldsmith to carefully align the applique against the background without damaging the finished niello. An additional small rectangular corrective niello plate is fixed across a portion of the silhouetted cut-out in order to continue the niello background behind the opening between the necks and faces of the Virgin and Child (Fig. 23).

11 For an analysis discussing the prominence of copper in Florentine bronzes of the early Renaissance see: Salvatore Siano and Juri Agresti (2015): *Archaeometallurgical characterization of Donatello's Florentine copper alloy masterpieces using portable laser-induced plasma spectroscopy and traditional techniques*, Studies in Conservation, 60: sup1, S106-S119, DOI: 10.1179/0039363015Z.000000000215.

12 Doug Lewis: *Systematic Catalogue of the Collections, Renaissance Plaquettes*. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC (unpublished manuscript, accessed January 2017); No. 14 (Inv. 1957.14.392)

13 Of Lewis' typology, Types A-I, A-III and a Virgin-Child applique at the Louvre (Inv. OA 2554) belonging to Type B all represent casts of good quality. Type A-II is an aftercast recycling of the applique cast integrally with a rare pax frame and Types B and C are weaker aftercasts of the applique (see D. Lewis, *op. cit.* [note 12]).

14 To the present author's knowledge, the highest quality example identified is the present applique, belonging to Lewis' Type B.

15 Formerly in the Ubertazzi collection and belonging to Lewis' Type B. A later cast, with traces of gilding, heavily rubbed.

16 A good quality cast belonging to Lewis' Type A-III. The relief is set into an arched frame with a wide palm-scale border. It is mounted to a later marble base inscribed: AVE MARIA. For reference, see Thomas Richter (2003): *Paxtafeln und Pacificalia: Studien zu Form, Ikonographie und liturgischem Gebrauch*. Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, Weimar; No. 19, Fig. 18; pp. 133-34, 350, 372, 626.

17 For seventeen documented examples see: D. Lewis, *op. cit.* (note 12). A possible eighteenth example (Type A-I) is included by Lewis, formerly with the Maurice Leclanché collection (see footnote 6 in D. Lewis, *op. cit.* [note 12]) and the present author adds three previously undocumented examples.

18 The Berlin example was unfortunately lost during WWII.



Fig. 23: Background niello plate on a remarkable Florentine pax, dated 1518 (Kollenburg Antiquairs)

19 T. Newbery (1990), *op. cit.* (note 1); pp. 19-22 (in particular, see Fig. 14)

20 Compare with the pitting of the bronze found on the NGA and Berlin examples.

21 While this perspective has occasionally been debated, for a discussion on the prevalence of the direct casting method in 15th century Florence see Richard Stone (1981): *Antico and the Development of Bronze Casting in Italy at the End of the Quattrocento*. Metropolitan Museum Journal, Vol. 16, NY; pp. 93-94.

22 The updating of extant pax frames from the 15th century were sometimes modified in later decades to fit the tastes of their time, particularly in the rapidly developing artistic milieu of Florence but also with some regularlity in Venice and Milan.

23 A detailed inspection of the Louvre example may possibly indicate that the present Virgin-Child applique could have served as its model. Some of the stroked treatment on the Virgin's drapery, below the child's proper left arm corresponds on both examples. This idea may further suggest the present Virgin-Child applique could be a direct-cast and possibly the example from which other aftercasts derive. This idea is further suggested by the lack of any other casts of equivalent quality.

24 Sotheby's auction, 10 May 1985, Lot 220 (see footnote 10, D. Lewis, *op. cit.* [note 12]), presently with the dealer-collector: Sam Fogg (London, UK).

25 Upon close inspection there does not appear to be any obvious indication a wax or clay extension was added and fused later with a model of the Virgin-Child group. The extension appears part of the original model.

26 It should be noted that this sloped extension on the Virgin-Child applique is not the type of thin flange found on other appliques or plaquettes intended for setting into the lower base of paxes.

27 For the NGA applique (Inv. 1957.14.393), see J. Pope-Hennessy (1965), *op. cit.* (note 5); No. 282, pp. 81-82, Fig. 26.

28 These rivets may have been the casting sprues, conveniently trimmed to serve as a mounting device.

29 Emile Molinier (1886): *Les Bronzes de la Renaissance: Les Plaquettes*. 2 Vols. Paris, France; Vol. 2, No. 425, p. 55

30 Scholars supporting a Venetian origin include: Gaston Migeon (1904): *Catalogue des bronzes et cuivres*. Louvre, Paris, p. 30; Seymour de Ricci (1931): *The Gustave Dreyfus Collection: Reliefs and Plaquettes*. Oxford University, No. 268, p. 194; Cott (1951): *Renaissance Bronzes, Statuettes, Reliefs and Plaquettes, Medals and Coins from the Kress Collection*. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, p. 146.

31 Wilhem von Bode (1904): *Königliche Museen zu Berlin, Beschreibung der Bildwerke der Christlichen Epochen, vol. II, Die Italienischen Bronzen*. Berlin, Germany; p. 51, Nos. 639-40

32 Scholars supporting a Florentine origin include: Eric Maclagan (1924): *Catalogue of Italian Plaquettes*. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, p. 18; Ulrich Middeldorf (see note 44); J. Pope-Hennessey (1965), *op. cit.* (note 5), No. 281, p. 81, Fig. 25; *et al.*

33 W. Bode (1904), *op. cit.* (note 31)

34 Laurie Fusco (1982). *An Unpublished "Madonna and Child" by Fra Filippo Lippi*. The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal, Vol. 10; pp. 1-16

35 Neville Rowley (2016): *Virgin and Child (called the Orlandini Madonna)*. SMB-digital Online-Datenbank der Sammlungen; No. 55

36 Giovanni Toscani (d. 1430) shortly thereafter borrows from this relief for his painting of the same subject. (N. Rowley [2016], *op. cit.* [note 35]).

37 The *Orlandini Madonna* is also later followed in 1432 by Andrea di Lazzaro di Cavalcanti (called Buggiano; 1412-62) for his *Medici Madonna* in the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo in Florence.

38 L. Fusco (1982), *op. cit.* (note 34)

39 1429 by our modern Gregorian calendar.

40 The idea that bronze models were used for the serial reproduction of painted stucco casts is supported by Charles Avery, Anthony Radcliffe and most recently by Jeremy Warren (Jeremy Warren [2014]: *Medieval and Renaissance Sculpture in the Ashmolean Museum, Vol. 2, Sculptures in Stone, Clay, Ivory, Bone and Wood*. Ashmolean Museum Publications; No. 97, pp. 382-89).

41 D. Lewis, *op. cit.* (note 12)

42 The *Pietra Piana Madonna*, known by several variations and featuring this motif, has at times been given to Donatello's authorship but has more frequently been given to an unidentified follower. See the terracotta tabernacle at Via Pietra Piana for which it is named or examples at the Louvre (Inv. 2431) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (Inv. 7412-1860).

43 D. Lewis, *op. cit.* (note 12)

44 Ulrich Middeldorf (1944): *Medals and Plaquettes from the Sigmund Morgenroth Collection*. Donnelley & Sons Co., Chicago, IL; No. 300, p. 42

45 Allan Marquand (1914): *Luca della Robbia*. Princeton University; No. 96, pp. 243-44, Fig. 163

46 In 1450-51 Luca again collaborated with Maso and also with Pasquino di Matteo da Montepulciano (d. 1485) on the portal of San Domenico in Urbino (Keith Christiansen, ed. [2005]: *From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca, Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; p. 282).

47 A cast of, or the prototype for, the Bardini stucco (see Fig. 18).

48 Maura Picciao (2011): *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 55, Giovanni di Bartolomeo. Treccani.it (accessed January 2017)

49 Marietta Cambareri (2016): *Della Robbia, Sculpting with Color in Renaissance Florence*. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

50 For the most thorough and recent discussion of the *Virgin and Child before a Niche* plaque see Jeremy Warren (2016): *The Wallace Collection Catalogue of Italian Sculpture*. The Trustees of the Wallace Collection, UK; Nos. 4 and 5, pp. 36-39).

51 A possible surviving example in one such frame is discussed in the present author's catalog: *A Renaissance-Baroque Treasury of Minor Arts: Riddick Collection, Vol. 1*, manuscript (2017) (see entry: *The Virgin and Child Before a Niche*).

52 It should be noted there is already a unique feature on the NGA pax in the form of the engraved halos of the Virgin and Child and the engraved background plate of the NGA pax, an idea that precipitates the practice of engraved reverses for paxes found toward the end of the Quattrocento and into the 16th century.

53 Suggested by the lack of multiple pristine examples. However, the present pax applique, and examples like the Louvre cast (Inv. OA2554) and NGA pax show that descendant aftercasts are not necessarily the adaptation of later workshops plagiarizing the object, as was common in the 16th century and even in the 15th century, but rather that they may have all been products of the same contemporaneous workshop realizing the value of serial production.

54 Examples suggestive of this include, at minimum, the NGA pax and the Louvre applique (Inv. OA2554) with attached halos.

55 The Berlin pax (Fig. 24) might also be added to this list, though it is either a plagiarized piece or one cast by a less qualified hand within the workshop. It appears cast using the NGA pax as a model or one like it. In particular, its assembly is less refined. For example, the pediment is cast integrally rather than separately. The exposed rivets on its obverse are chunky and lack the subtlety of the NGA example. In fact, the Berlin pax attempts to conceal the location of the earlier refined rivets by modeling small squared concealments on the wax model where the refined rivets were formerly located. The halos appear to be cast integrally on the Berlin example and do not conform to their original size, indicating the maker took only a mold of the Virgin-Child and added their own halos.

56 Lewis offers a dating of the NGA pax to the 1440s-50s, congruent also with the present author's assessment for the possible period of origin with Maso during the last half of the 1440s.



Fig. 24: Pax with the *Madonna and Child, Two Adoring Angels, and God the Father Blessing*, here attributed to the workshop of Maso di Bartolomeo and/or cast by a later foundry/follower (Staatliche Museen Berlin; destroyed/lost)