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The Technical Evidence and the Origin and Meaning of Simone Martini's 'Guidoriccio' Fresco in Siena

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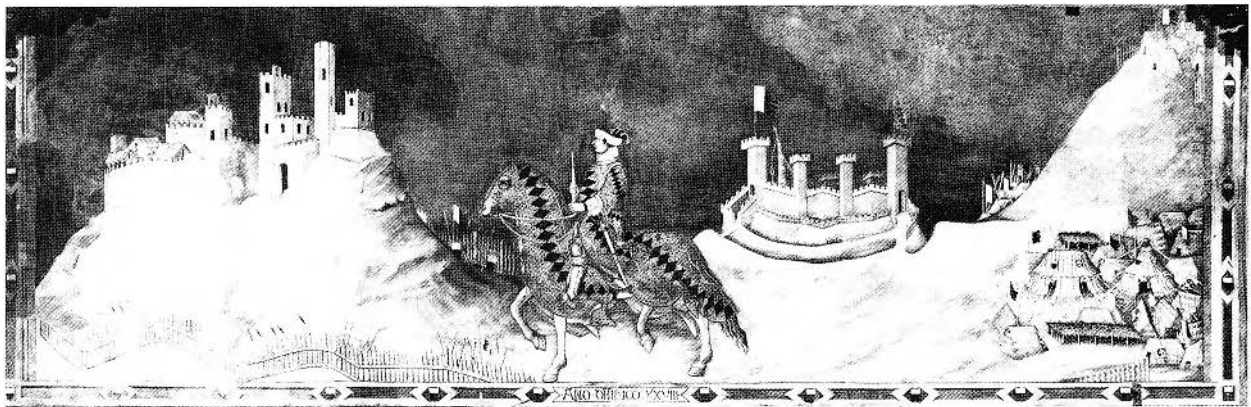


FIGURE 1. 'Guidoriccio' fresco. Siena, Palazzo Pubblico (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence).

I had not intended to speak at this symposium, nor to concern myself further with the polemic surrounding the 'Guidoriccio' fresco (Fig. 1) which has come to resemble more an Italian opera than a serious professional exchange of views and information. I have, however, changed my mind for several reasons: first and foremost, because information of a technical nature can be used in this particular case as a means of limiting the range of possible interpretation, thereby illustrating its value in relation to traditional modes of art historical discourse that involve historical or archival data, its meaning, iconography and style. Indeed, the present confused state of opinion offers an appropriate setting for showing how, and the limits within which, technical data can be used. It can, in this instance, offer a precise relative chronology, which is fixed in the coatings and abrasions evident on the wall bearing the fresco, and which, in turn, may limit, depending mostly on further controlled observations to be made, the time when the fresco would have been painted, thus restricting the range of speculation concerning its painter.

I believe everyone present here is acquainted with the polemic concerning the fresco, which has been quite widely publicized. It began with Gordon

Moran's article of 1977,¹ and has crystallized into two opposing points of view. The most prevalent sustains the traditional one that Simone Martini was the painter, and that the date, 1328, appearing on the lower frame (quite reliable although partially repainted) refers to the Siennese siege of the castle at Montemassi which took place during that year.² Accordingly, the *condottiere* appearing at the fresco's center would be Guidoriccio da Fogliano, general of the Siennese forces. On the other hand, Gordon Moran and Michael Mallory insist that the fresco is not from the trecento, but that it is a species of historic reconstruction of a later period. They have mentioned the

1 Gordon Moran, in *Paragone* (Nov. 1977), 81 ff.

2 See especially Max Seidel, in *Prospettiva* (Jan. 1982), 17-41, and L. Bellosi, 41-65; Joseph Polzer, in *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* (1983), 103-141. The coat-of-arms on the rider's cloak and the horse's *gualdrappa* is that of the Da Fogliano (or Fogliani) family. It appears, colours matching, in examples reaching from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The family derived from Reggio Emilia and its province, playing a significant political and military rôle during the dugento and trecento (see conveniently, for the family's history, Pompeo Litta, *Famiglie celebri italiane*, Series 1, c-G, 1834; and for the Da Fogliano coat-of-arms, Polzer, *op. cit.*, 108 ff.).

seventeenth or eighteenth century as the period of its origin without, however, having been able identify either a painter or a circle which could have reproduced, or intended to reproduce, the trecento style of the fresco with such fidelity and precision.³ Their discussion has led, however, to a closer scrutiny of the fresco by many scholars as well as of the early pictorial decoration of the Palazzo Pubblico and the contemporary history of Siena. It also led, by chance, to the discovery of the new fresco beneath *Guidoriccio*,

3 Note 1; also Michael Mallory and George Moran, in *Studies in Iconography*, 7-8 (1981-82), 1-20; idem, *Notizie d'arte* (Siena, May-June 1983), 50-54.

4 The Macdonald Stewart Foundation of Montreal generously contributed to the financing of the initial technical examination of the *Guidoriccio* fresco by Leonetto Tintori, under the auspices of the commune of Siena and the Soprintendenza per i beni artistici e storici delle province di Siena e Grosseto.

5 The use of motif punches for purposes of chronological and stylistic classification in trecento Tuscan painting has been investigated principally by Mojmir Frinta and Erling Skaug in a number of articles: Frinta, 'An Investigation of the Punched Decoration of Mediaeval Italian and Non-Italian Panel Paintings,' *Art Bulletin*, 47 (1965), 261-5; idem, 'Note on the Punched Decoration of Two Early Painted Panels at the Fogg Art Museum: St. Dominic and the Crucifixion,' *Art Bulletin*, 53 (1971), 306-309; idem, 'New Evidence of the Relationship of Central European and Italian Painting during the Fourteenth Century,' *Actes du xxix^e Congrès International d'Histoire de l'Art* (Budapest, 1972), II, 649-54; III, plates 478-9; idem, 'On the Punched Decoration in Medieval Panel Painting and Manuscript Illumination,' *Conservation of Painting and the Graphic Arts, the International Institute of Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC)*, London, *Preprints of Contributions to the Lisbon Congress*, October 9-14, 1972, 115-121; idem, 'A Seemingly Florentine yet not really Florentine Altar-piece,' *Burlington Magazine*, 117 (1975), 527-535; idem, 'Deletions from the Oeuvre of Pietro Lorenzetti and Related Works by the Master of the Beata Umiltà, Mino di Parisi da Siena and Jacopo di Mino Pellicciaio,' *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 20 (1976), 271-300; Skaug, 'Contributions to Giotto's Workshop,' *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 15 (1971), 141-160; idem, 'The St. Anthony Abbot ascribed to Bartolo di Fredi in the National Gallery, London,' *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia (Institutum Romanum Norvegiae)*, 6 (1975), 141-50; idem, 'The St. Anthony Abbot ascribed to Nardo di Cione at the Villa I Tatti, Florence,' *Burlington Magazine*, 117 (1975), 540-3; idem, 'Notes on the Chronology of Ambrogio Lorenzetti and a New painting from his Shop,' *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 20 (1976), 301-32. See also M. Frinta, 'Unsettling evidence in some panel paintings of Simone Martini' (pp. 211-237); J. Polzer, 'A Contribution to the early Chronology of Lippo Memmi' (pp. 237-253); E. Skaug, 'Punch marks - what are they worth? Problems of Tuscan workshop interrelationships in the mid-fourteenth century: the Ovile Master and Giovanni da Milano,' all three items in *La pittura nel XIV e XV secolo: il contributo dell'analisi tecnica alla storia dell'arte*, H.W. Van Os and J.R.J. van Asperen de Boer (eds.), Vol. 3, *Acts, the 24th International Congress of the History of Art, Bologna, Sept. 10-18, 1979*. I have discussed Simone Martini's punch work in papers given in 1978-9 at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, the Accademia degli Intronati in Siena, and at the British School in Rome. For Simone's later punch work on panel painting see also Polzer, in *Antichità Viva*, XIX, 6 (1980), 7-16.

itself of great interest and a centerpiece in the polemic. In all fairness, let me state that I too am committed. I am convinced that Simone Martini painted the fresco. This very conviction, however, demands that one search for objective verification which can be substantially located in the technical data.

In the observations which follow, I restrict myself to the pertinent technical data and what can be deduced directly from it. This technical information should be considered as a sieve which must be used for eliminating from the pertinent field of discourse all those arguments that are not logical.

Let us begin our consideration with the fresco's ornament. Indeed, it was the examination of Simone Martini's ornament which led me some years ago to search for financial support to initiate the technical examination of the fresco.⁴ The blanket (*quadrappia*) covering the horse and the rider's garment are wholly textured with a motif punch which creates a relief pattern on the wall. At a distance this relief pattern, which is read as alterations of shade and light, gives the impression of a certain dense material presence (Fig. 2). Simone Martini was the first painter of the proto-Renaissance to use the motif punch of substantial size in fresco painting (which is to be distinguished from the small motif punches widely evident in dugento panel painting). One can follow the first appearance of this type of motif punch, and its rapid development, in the *Maestà* (completed in 1316), which is in the same hall as the *Guidoriccio*.⁵

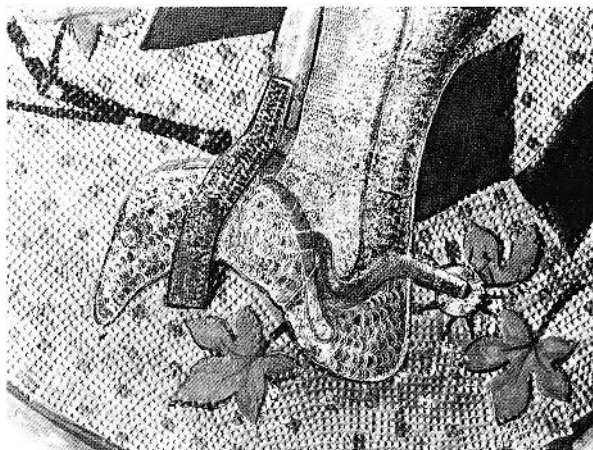


FIGURE 2. Detail from the *Guidoriccio* (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence).

Motif punches of the same design and the same size, consisting of series of small pyramids that are virtually identical to those evident on the equestrian group in question, are already found on the medallions from the lower frame of the *Maestà* (Fig. 3). Simone Martini used this type of punch repeatedly, in various sizes. Its imprint is visible in his frescos at Assisi, as well as his Neapolitan panel of *Saint Louis of Toulouse* (Fig. 4). In the latter two instances it often



FIGURE 3. Detail of a medallion from the lower border of the Martini's *Maestà*. Siena, Palazzo Pubblico.

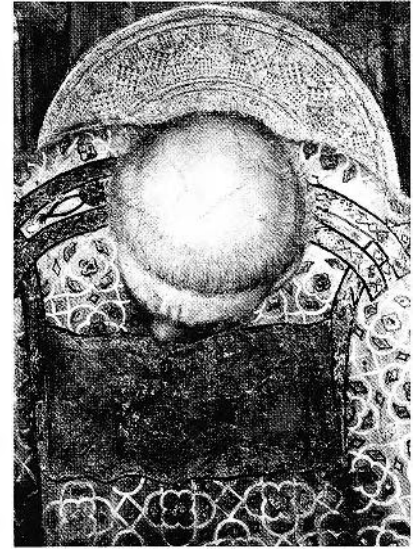


FIGURE 4. Detail of the Martini's *Death of St. Martin*. Assisi, Cappella di S. Martino (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence).

appears on cloth. Further, this type of punch was used exclusively by him, with the possible exception of Lippo Memmi, his brother-in-law, who used a related diamond pattern punch on his *Maestà* in San Gimignano. One should realize that the use of the motif punch in fresco painting was restricted to the Italian proto-Renaissance, and within this period, with the fewest exceptions, to the circle of Simone Martini, Lippo Memmi and Barna. It is worth noting that the latter, in his frescoes in S. Gimignano, used a type of punch for rendering the relief of the coat of mail of certain soldiers, which resembles the design evident on the armour of Guidoriccio.⁶ It is unprecedented to assume the existence of a seventeenth or eighteenth-century painter endowed with the idea (assuming the manual ability) of reproducing Simone's motif punch so precisely. Such an eventuality would extend well beyond the norms of historical imitation in fresco painting. This situation is essentially different from careful restoration, which would imitate a motif punch still evident on the surface being restored. Even in the event of such restoration, the exact replication of an original punch mark would be exceptional.⁷

The evidence of the motif punch is difficult to dismiss. We should look as well at other kinds of evidence and specifically at the wall on which the fresco is painted (Fig. 5). The wall consists of a brick support covered with diverse and successive layers of plaster and colour, which often overlap at the margins of their respective fields. Their superposition has been examined by Leonetto Tintori⁸ and by Giuseppe Gavazzi,⁹ who recovered the fascinating new fresco representing a fortified site on the top of a hill. This new fresco is located directly below the *Guidoriccio* fresco; its discovery constitutes one of the

most significant finds of the last decade in proto-Renaissance Siennese art (Fig. 6). Most scholars have placed its origin close to the completion of the rebuilding of the Palazzo Pubblico, around 1314, and have identified its painter as Duccio, Memmo di Filippuccio, or someone close to them.¹⁰ Essentially, this would conform to my notion of its style and date. Here again, however, Mallory and Moran stand sharply apart; for iconographic reasons, they identify the site with Arcidosso. Since the documents relate that Arcidosso was painted by Simone Martini in the Palazzo Pubblico, they insist that he is the painter of the new fresco.¹¹ Frankly, I am among those who find this point of view incomprehensible on stylistic grounds.

6 A more detailed study of Simone Martini's ornament, including that evident on his frescoes, is in progress.

7 Verbal and written information has been offered me by Erling Skaug, Mojmir Frinta and Norman Muller.

8 Leonetto Tintori, *Ricerche tecniche su Guido Riccio e gli altri affreschi nella Sala del Mappamondo del Palazzo Pubblico di Siena*, 1979, typescript, library, Deutsches Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence; *Seconda ricognizione degli affreschi sulla parete del Mappamondo nella sala grande del Palazzo Pubblico di Siena*, typescript, n.d.

9 Giuseppe Gavazzi, *Realizzazione tecnica dell'affresco di Simone Martini raffigurante Guido Riccio da Fogliano*, 1981, typescript, library, Deutsches Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence.

10 A review of various attributions concerning the recently rediscovered Siennese fresco is given by G. Borghini in *Il Palazzo Pubblico di Siena, vicende costruttive e decorazione* (Siena, 1983), 218, with bibliography. I place the fresco close to the style of Memmo di Filippuccio (see also Enzo Carli, verbal information; idem, *La pittura senese del trecento* (Venice, 1981), 160, n. 64).

11 Recently Mallory and Moran, in *Notizie d'arte* (Siena, May-June 1983), 52 ff.

But let us return to the technical data. It is useful to quote Gavazzi: 'The wall is like a book: it is composed of leaves superposed one on the other.' Let us read the book together. The earliest fresco which one still sees on the wall is the one which has been recently uncovered (Fig. 6). Its upper edge extends beneath the lower edge of the *Guidoriccio*. This is certain. The *Guidoriccio* represents the second visible fresco. A recent Ultrasonic examination of the *Guidoriccio* by Maurizio Seracini seems to indicate the presence of an earlier fresco below.¹² This presumed fresco would have been the first one painted.

12 I am puzzled why indirect scientific means are used when the evidence can be examined directly, in this case by means of the extraction of a core reaching to the brick (removed in unobtrusive places). Concerning the existence of an earlier fresco beneath the *Guidoriccio*, I refer to the important observations by Leonetto Tintori in his *Seconda ricognizione...* (see note 8):

'Partendo dal reperto più importante rimasto nascosto per secoli sotto lo scialbo: la resa del Castello, non ancora identificato ed intorno al quale vertono appassionate ipotesi, dovremo collocare questa scena ad un secondo posto per quanto riguarda la precedenza nel tempo. Prima di questo Castello conquistato, altri ne erano stati dipinti precedentemente nella zona soprastante. Purtroppo, per queste pitture demolite per far posto al Condottiero a cavallo, possiamo solo produrre un argomento tecnico che ritiene come le pitture murali si inizino sempre partendo dall'alto: tesi apparentemente smentita dalla presenza del *Guidoriccio* al posto d'onore. Però, se consideriamo il *Guidoriccio* un inserimento posteriore quale è risultato dalle recenti ricerche, possiamo ritenere attendibile la sequenza proposta, tanto più che in alto a destra, vicino al soffitto, è stata trovata, durante il restauro, una zona di intonaco con caratteristiche molto diverse dall'intonaco nuovo fatto per il *Guidoriccio*, che possiamo presumere appartenesse alla vecchia pittura.'

'Questo grande frammento di intonaco, un triangolo irregolare alto due metri che si protende a sinistra per circa tre metri, conserva poche tracce dei colori appartenenti alla pittura più antica e questi sono confusi e coperti da una tinta grigia data quale preparazione per l'azzurrite del fondo del 'Cavaliere'. Su questo grigio esistono, tracciati rapidamente con un grigio un po' più chiaro, due vessilli molto simili a quelli adottati per coronare le torri del 'Battifolle': soltanto sono assai più grandi e di una proporzione impossibile per decorare delle torri incluse nella scena. Per questo dovrebbero essere considerati quali esempi destinati ad essere coperti dal colore finale del fondo.'

'Assai più importanti sono invece i resti di un accampamento militare in alto sul colle ed i tetti di due tende minori inclusi nell'accampamento dipinto sull'intonaco nuovo. Questi avanzi di vecchia pittura si distinguono dal nuovo per l'uso di un colore diverso e per l'espressione dei tratti assai più forti e semplici.'

'A sostegno dell'ipotesi che attribuisce l'appartenza di questo intonaco alla pittura precedente, precedente anche a quella della Resa, esiste il fatto che l'azzurrite del fondo qui si è comportata in modo diverso da quella stesa sull'intonaco nuovo, dove ha potuto usufruire dell'ausilio della carbonatazione della calce non perfettamente secca come quella del vecchio intonaco.'

The partial use of a plaster layer belonging to an earlier fresco, following Tintori, and also the unusually large *giornate* (underscored by Gavazzi in his technical report; see note 9) would indicate the hurried painting of the *Guidoriccio* fresco, for reasons to be considered under separate cover.

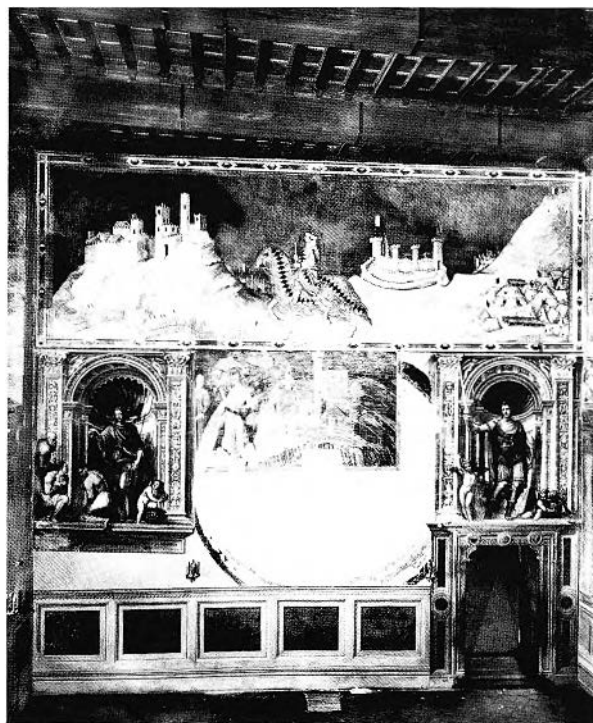


FIGURE 5. Wall for the *Guidoriccio* (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence).

In its present condition the *Guidoriccio* comprises two phases. The principal section is original. However, the left section, with the view of Montemassi, was repainted, on account of damage sustained by water seeping from the roof. Tintori believes that this restoration took place quite early in the Renaissance. This restored section with its rougher style and clearly evident overlapping edge can be easily distinguished from the original part. All this was recorded by Tintori and confirmed by Gavazzi.¹³ It is generally assumed that the Renaissance restorer faithfully copied what had been there before, because two structures resemble those still *in situ* at the fort of Montemassi, in their respective locations.¹⁴

The next object set on the wall was not a fresco, and it no longer exists. It was Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *mappamondo*, which was mounted on a wooden circular disc so that it could be turned. It was completed in 1345. Its repeated rotation has left grooves on the wall, constituting a regular series of concentric circles. Until it disappeared at about the end of the eighteenth century, this *mappamondo* occupied the central space on the wall. It was large, having a diameter of close to five meters. When it was installed it

13 See Tintori's and Gavazzi's technical reports (notes 8 and 9).

14 For the topographical resemblance of Montemassi and the site to the north of it to the landscape and the architecture on the fresco, see Uta Feldges, *Landschaft als topographisches Porträt* (Bern, 1980), 25 ff.; and I. Moretti, in *Prospettiva* (1980), 62-72. I am investigating this problem further.

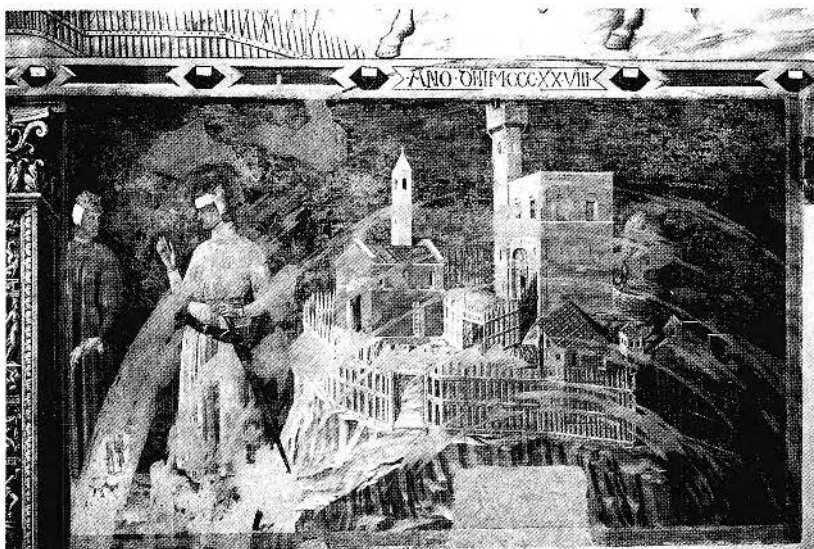


FIGURE 6. Fresco recently uncovered beneath the *Guidoriccio* (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence).

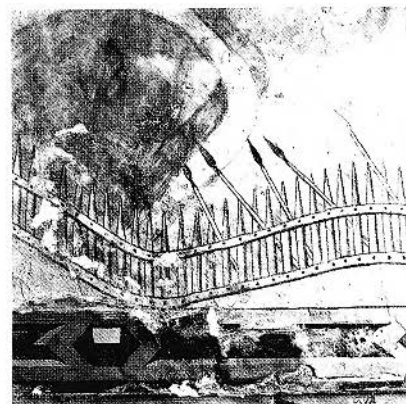


FIGURE 7. Detail of the *Guidoriccio* (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence).

covered the recently rediscovered fresco. The fresco was probably plastered over since it was no longer needed. The examination of certain circular grooves at the extremity of the *mappamondo*'s location, which are not concentric with the rest, indicated that the *mappamondo* was moved shortly after it was initially put in place. This may have been done because in its first location it would have hidden the central portion of the lower frame of the *Guidoriccio* with the date, 1328 (Fig. 1).¹⁵ Around the beginning of the cinquecento the size of the *mappamondo* was reduced, before Sodoma painted his frescoes of *Sant' Ansano Baptising* and *Saint Victor* at the lower sides of the wall. They were painted in 1529.¹⁶ This is quite clear because these frescoes cover the side portions of the circular grooved area.

Recently, Moran proposed that the *mappamondo* of Ambrogio Lorenzetti was a smaller mobile object once located in the *sala dei nove*, rather than the large disc in the hall which still carries its name.¹⁷ This seems a difficult argument to sustain in light of many references to the *mappamondo*. Be this as it may, what is clear is that a large circular mobile object occupied the center of the wall, that it was put over the newly discovered fresco, and that it preceded the Sodomas. This chronology is incontrovertible.

We have now arrived at a point where the chronological stance of Mallory and Moran seems logically absurd. Both Tintori and Gavazzi agree in their careful scrutiny of the *Guidoriccio* fresco that the Sodomas extend above it (Fig. 7). Certainly, Sodoma's *Sant' Ansano* extends over the repainted portion including Montemassi. This was also my observation when I examined the wall some years ago. At the time I never thought anyone would contradict this. And there were others on the scaffold who observed the same evidence. Yet this chronology has been denied

by Mallory and Moran, with reference to Vasari, whose account concerning these frescoes does not quite mesh with what one now sees, and with the suggestion that the sword of Saint Victor extends beneath the *Guidoriccio*.¹⁸ One hardly needs to affirm the obvious logical absurdity of this stance. Adjacent frescoes can only be simultaneously above and below each other in case of their absolute coetaneity, and this is not the case here. Moran and Mallory say that they often were on the scaffold. I wonder what they did there. Why did they not check this necessary technical fact when their late chronology of the *Guidoriccio* hinges on this very examination? If necessary, the pertinent examination can be repeated and documented. One needs but remove a bit of plaster at the juncture of the two frescoes in order to ascertain which one was painted first.

This leads me to the final issue of what still ought to be done: namely, the careful scrutiny of the right corner where the *Guidoriccio* meets the large fresco by

- 15 This theory seems convincing. See Seidel, 22 ff., fig. 4 – he bases himself on Gavazzi's findings; concerning the *mappamondo* generally, see Edna Carter Southard, *The Frescoes in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico, 1284-1539, Studies in Imagery and Relations to other Communal Palaces in Tuscany* (New York and London, 1979, Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, June 1978), 237-241.
- 16 Concerning the two frescoes by Sodoma beneath *Guidoriccio*, see A.M. Hayum, *Giovanni Bazzi 'Il Sodoma'*, 1976 (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1968), 217; Enzo Carli, *Il Sodoma* (Vercelli, 1979), 65 f.
- 17 Moran (note 11), 52; idem, in *Notizie d'arte* (Siena, Feb. 1982), 6 f. Significantly, the *mappamondo* was already substantially restored by Bartolo di Fredi, Cristofano di Bindoccio and Meo di Pietro in 1393. The pertinent document is quoted by Carter Southard, 237. This early restoration project involved substantial expenses for colours and is hardly compatible with work on a smaller object.
- 18 Verbal information given repeatedly and in public by Moran and Mallory.

Lippo Vanni, which represents the victory of the Sienese over the *Compagnia del Capello* in Val di Chiana, in 1362 (Fig. 8). The fresco is signed and dated 1363 (the date has also been read as 1373 – but this difference does not affect the issue here considered). At the left of this military panorama, next to the corner of the wall, appears Saint Paul, protector of the Sienese forces. Clearly, the superposition of these adjoining frescoes, if it still can be observed, would reveal whether Simone Martini, who was long dead when Lippo Vanni painted his fresco, could have painted the *Guidoriccio*. I should like to illustrate the importance of this examination by reference to an analogous situation in the south-eastern corner of the cloister of the Campo Santo in Pisa where the famous *Triumph of Death* met the *Crucifixion*. It will be recalled that toward the end of the last world war the roof of the Campo Santo burned down so damaging the frescoes that they had to be removed from their walls. One saw, and one still sees, that the *arriccio* of the *Crucifixion* leans directly on the brick that once supported the *Triumph of Death*. The plaster of the latter was not applied on the wall directly, but on a woven matting of reed which was nailed to the brick – an exceptional proto-Renaissance example of such an architectural insulation. Accordingly, the pigment extended some centimeters beyond the brick. Obviously, the *Crucifixion* was painted first. For many years art historians thought the opposite, and this interfered with our grasp of Pisan trecento painting.¹⁹

This comparison should not, however, be overstressed, for the situation in the right-hand corner of the wall of *Guidoriccio* is much more complicated. The corner has been repaired for its entire length, on account of the separation of the walls at an unknown time and for unknown reasons. In addition, here we have a situation of conflicting information. Giuseppe Gavazzi insists that when he examined one opening in the corner of the wall toward the lower portion of the frescoes, he could observe that the plaster belonging to the fresco by Lippo Vanni reached the very brick of the adjoining wall.²⁰ This would mean that the Lippo Vanni's fresco therefore preceded the



FIGURE 8. Detail, right corner of the *Guidoriccio* (Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence).

Guidoriccio. The opening was closed in the normal course of the restoration program, without further scrutiny and documentation. Clearly, the superposition of the plaster layers in this corner should have been examined under appropriate scientific conditions. Since it was not done then it should be done now. My doubts concerning Gavazzi's interpretation of what he saw are shared by a significant number of scholars and restorers.

This discussion leads to the following conclusions: any explanation of the *Guidoriccio* fresco, whether it accepts or denies the hand of Simone Martini, must accept that it precedes the Sodomas and that it therefore dates before 1529. A partial confirmation or absolute denial on technical grounds of Simone's authorship of the *Guidoriccio* fresco can be ascertained under appropriate scientific conditions if it can be shown, on the basis of their respective superposition in the corner where they meet, whether Lippo Vanni's or Simone's fresco was painted first. If it is decided to penetrate into the corner, this should be done by expert and impartial parties. If the original plaster of just one of the frescoes can be located in its original extension toward the corner, then the relative chronology of the two frescoes can be deduced.²¹

19 Meiss, in *Art Bulletin* (1933), 144, considered the principal master of the *Crucifixion* to be deeply influenced by Francesco Traini, whom Meiss considered the painter of the adjacent *Triumph of Death*. He retained this opinion in *Burlington Magazine*, CXXIII (1971-1), 181, but acknowledged at the time the priority of the *Crucifixion* on the basis of the technical evidence indicated here (182, n. 15).

20 Giuseppe Gavazzi (note 9). From what can be seen on fig. 8, his conclusion seems doubtful.

21 This paper restricts itself to aspects of technique. I shall consider other unresolved and questionable problems concerning the *Guidoriccio* fresco elsewhere.