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Carl Brandon Strehlke. Italian Paintings,
1250-1450. Reviewed by Yves Laberge.

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Carl Brandon Strehlke. *Italian Paintings, 1250-1450. John G. Johnson Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004, Pp. xi + 556.

This weighty museum catalog illustrates the famous collection of John Graver Johnson (1841-1917), an important American lawyer (who twice turned down appointments to the US Supreme Court) and graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. The donation, housed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art since shortly after Johnson's death, formed the nucleus of the Museum's initial holdings and comprises 1279 objects, including 469 Italian paintings. This impressive book focuses mainly on the Italian paintings from the medieval and early Renaissance periods (pp. 1-19). Most subjects are religious, including many versions of representations of the Virgin, Saints, and scenes from the *Bible*. There is roughly one reproduction on each page. Most of these are in black and white in a small format, although many are almost full-page and in color.

The opening section includes a historical essay about how John G. Johnson assembled his art collection beginning in the 1890s and how he became more and more fascinated by early Italian art. There are about 70 subsequent sections or chapters dedicated to specific artists or schools, from painters such as Allegretto di Nuzio (22) to Ugolino di Nerio (430). Selected artistic schools include the Sienese, the Florentine and the Umbrian. The works reproduced here are not exclusively taken from the Philadelphia Museum of Art collections, however. We find in the early sections a few small black-and-white images of paintings such as the moving "Conversion of Saint Augustine" made at the workshop of Fra Angelico, that can be seen at the Musée d'art Thomas Henry in Cherbourg (p. 60) and the beautiful "Temptation of Saint Anthony Abbot" (also from the workshop of Fra Angelico), from the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston (p. 61).

The name Boccaccio is only mentioned in the beginning of the book, in an analysis of a painting entitled *Boccaccio Reading the Decameron*; it is reproduced in a small black-and-white format on page 4. Oddly, that beautiful example is from the John G. Johnson Collection, but does not date from the Middle Ages. It was carried out in 19th century by an Italian painter, Amos Cassioli (1832-91) (Fig. 6; p. 4). It is one of the very few examples in this catalog of a non-religious subject. But there are elsewhere some more substantial elements related to fourteenth-century art in Italy (especially 403-61). For instance, in a section dedicated to the Paduan School (from the 1320s), we find black and white reproductions of paintings by Giotto, possibly Boccaccio's favorite artist, such as the *Annunciation* in the Arena Chapel of Padua (450).

Although this is not the first catalog dedicated to the John G. Johnson Collection, adjunct curator Carl Brandon Strehlke has done here a wonderful editing job in a lavish, hard-cover book that can be considered as a model in the art book genre. I see *Italian paintings, 1250-1450* as one of the most beautiful art books published in the United States during 2004. Academics in art history and religious studies will be delighted by that reading.

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