

## The Guido Riccio controversy in art history

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### Introduction

The Guido Riccio is a fresco, or wall painting, in the city of Siena in Italy. Guido Riccio is short for the full name, *Guido Riccio da Fogliano at the Siege of Montemassi*. The standard view has long been that Simone Martini, a famous painter from Siena, painted the entire fresco in 1328-1330, a view adopted by generations of scholars and repeated in many textbooks, guidebooks, reference books, and classroom lectures. This was also our own view until 1977, when we proposed that a portion of the fresco, namely the horse and rider, was painted by a close follower of Simone Martini in 1352, while still attributing the rest of the painting to Simone.

On the face of it, it would seem that the Guido Riccio discussion would be an obvious candidate to remain limited to a small group of academics with a specialization in Siennese painting, with discussion involving fine points of an intellectual, if not erudite, nature. After all, a portion of a painting was being dated 20 years later than commonly believed, and this specific portion was being attributed to a close follower of a famous painter, rather than to the famous painter. Yet, for various reasons, the issue became hotly contested, immediately got into the mass media, and swiftly escalated into what several writers have described as “the case of the century,” or the “enigma” of the century in art history.

The controversy — or “war,” as one scholar put it — over Guido Riccio has raged for more than a decade. Hence, this chapter can be no more than a progress report, revealing some highlights from the history of the controversy. We hope to provide some insights into how experts react to upsetting hypotheses and also into how their various tactics and manoeuvres

can be challenged both inside and outside academia.

The lengthy duration of the Guido Riccio controversy has given us the time and the opportunity to study other academic controversies of the past and present, and to compare notes with other scholars who are involved in ongoing disputes of their own. Such comparisons have enabled us to detect, even predict, patterns of behaviour on the part of experts as they attempt to overcome challenges. These patterns include: the suppression and censorship of the challengers’ ideas from scholarly conferences, symposia, and journals; personal attacks, including insults, retaliation, and ostracism, against the challengers; and secrecy, instead of open discussion and debate.

### Vested interests and motivation

As the Guido Riccio controversy has progressed, an increasing number of persons have taken an interest in it, including undergraduate and graduate students, art students, alumni groups, culturally minded tourist groups, and local Siennese civic groups. Frequently we are asked: “Why can’t they accept the truth?”; “Why can’t they admit Simone didn’t paint the famous Guido Riccio fresco?”; “Why wouldn’t they let you be on the program of the Simone Martini conference in Siena in 1985?”; “Why don’t they want to uncover the fourteenth century frescoes that might be hidden under the plaster on the walls of the same room where the Guido Riccio painting is located?” “They” in these questions are the various persons who have vested interests in confirming the standard view of the Guido Riccio.

The famous fresco is located in the main council room of the museum of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, situated on one side of the

famous town piazza known as the “Campo.” A large wall painting or mural, painted in the fresco technique, it is one of the most — if not *the* most — famous painting in Siena, and in the history of Italian Renaissance art. It is listed in many art history textbooks, reference books, and monographs, as well as guidebooks and brochures, as one of the few documented works of the fourteenth-century Siennese painter Simone Martini. Simone, in turn, is regarded as one of the most famous and important painters of the Late Medieval and Early Renaissance period both in Siena and in Italy.

Reproductions of the famous Guido Riccio — particularly its image of the horse and rider — are found on posters for the local Siennese tourist agency, on the covers of guidebooks and textbooks, postcards, plates, ash trays, cookie box covers, lampshades, bathroom tiles, calendars, wine bottle labels, and even blankets. It seems clear that much of the popularity of the image of Guido Riccio on horseback stems from the belief that it was painted by Simone Martini. In fact, generations of Siennese children have been brought into the Palazzo Pubblico museum in Siena by their school teachers and told that Simone Martini painted the image of Guido Riccio on horseback for the glory of the Siennese Republic of the fourteenth century, or some remark to that effect. The painting has become as part of Siennese pride in its history and artistic patrimony and heritage. Moreover, the local Siennese government controls, as a virtual monopoly, the touristic guided tours of the city and its museums and grants licenses to only a select and limited number of official guides who claim exclusive rights to show groups of tourists around the city. Over the years, these “official guides” have told many thousands — if not millions — of tourists that the famous Guido Riccio fresco was painted by Simone Martini, and some continue to do so. And, to be sure, for many years, numerous art history professors in art history classes in universities around the world have waxed eloquently about the painting, describing it as Simone’s masterpiece.

The producers of Chianti Classico and Brunello wines have a vested interest in Guido Riccio since he appears on their wine labels. Even more so the city government officials who are the “owners” of the painting located in their city hall and the officials of the Soprintendenza (the federal Italian government agency with responsibility for preservation of works of art in Italy) who must preserve it have a vested interest in the Guido Riccio. Obviously the local tourist board has a vested interest in it, since the painting is one of the big attractions of Siena. And the citizens of Siena themselves, and their cultural institutions, such as the Accademia degli Intronati, have vested interests based on their pride in their city, its history and its artistic heritage. As the Guido Riccio controversy developed, other persons and institutions became involved, such as the powerful Monte dei Paschi Bank, which financed a monograph book on the Palazzo Pubblico, certain art libraries and art library associations which in turn involved the German government, the editors of scholarly journals and specialized encyclopedias, and certain academic professional societies, such as the College Art Association of America, a member of the American Council of Learned Societies.

Rather than trying to guess what prompted the actions, reactions, and manoeuvres of these persons and organizations, we will describe and analyze events and situations that have actually taken place. Readers can then decide for themselves what the motivation might have been.

### **Historical and art historical background**

Siena is a small city in central Italy, about an hour’s drive south of the larger and more well-known city of Florence (Firenze), its historic rival. Siena’s history most likely extends to Etruscan times, and it is referred to in Roman literature and historical writings. In Medieval times, Siena developed into something of a political and economic power in its own right, in part through international banking. In fact, in the fourteenth century Siena was a flourishing city-state, expanding its territory in all directions, to the west as far as the Mediter-

ranean coast, to the north to the Chianti region, to the south as far as Mt. Amiata, and to the east into the Val di Chiana. This territorial expansion revived centuries' old conflicts with the leaders of the feudal lords who owned the castles and territory in the areas of the Sienese countryside. During the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries military conquests or financial transactions by the Sienese government brought many castles and their surrounding land into its jurisdiction and under its military control.

It is precisely during this territorial expansion program that the Guido Riccio story begins. Early in the fourteenth century, the Sienese government had decided to depict in wall paintings castles that the government had recently taken under its jurisdiction that were deemed to be important and strategic from a military/political standpoint. These castle depictions eventually covered large portions of two walls of the main council room of the Palazzo Pubblico. It is documented that at least seven castles were painted on the walls as part of this artistic-political propaganda program. The first castles were painted before 1314 and they continued to be painted at least through 1331. Simone Martini painted at least four, namely Montemassi and Sassoforte in 1330 and Arcidosso and Castel del Piano in 1331. Secondary sources state that other castles, including Ansedonia and Sinalunga, were also painted as part of this series. We feel that as many as twenty castles were painted in the room and, moreover, we believe that several — if not many — of these paintings are still preserved, hidden under the plaster of later paintings that currently decorate the room.

Until 1980, it was believed that not only was the famous *Guido Riccio at the Siege of Montemassi* one of the castle depictions by Simone Martini, but that it was the only one of the series to have survived. Specifically, it was associated with the document stating that Simone painted the castle of Montemassi in 1330. What was at best a tentative hypothesis soon was presented as fact in textbooks and guidebooks and in classroom lectures. Guido

Riccio became entrenched in the history of art as a documented masterpiece.

In 1980, a second fresco was uncovered from under modern plaster on the same wall as the Guido Riccio. This newly-uncovered painting has subsequently been regarded unanimously by all scholars who have written on the subject as being one of the castles of the castle program described above. Its discovery raised hopes that other masterpieces of fourteenth century Sienese painting might still be hidden under the plaster in the room, waiting to be uncovered for the world to see. It was also soon evident that the Guido Riccio was in every respect very different from the newly discovered work that everyone regarded as original. Doubts about the origin of the famous work began to rise.

### **Connoisseurship in art history**

In the field of art history, expert claims for intellectual and professional superiority often rest on their skills as connoisseurs. They profess to be able to “see” and to attribute works of art better than others, especially the press and the public. Perhaps the classic example of this supposed higher sensibility is illustrated by a tale involving one of the greatest acknowledged connoisseurs of Italian paintings, Bernard Berenson. It is said that a person had a painting thought to be by the famous fourteenth century painter Duccio, an earlier contemporary of Simone Martini, and brought the painting to Berenson for his opinion. Berenson, according to the story, said the painting was *not* by Duccio. When the owner of the painter asked Berenson how he could be sure of his opinion, Berenson allegedly replied that had it been by Duccio he would have swooned with aesthetic rapture.

This type of reply intimidates the nonexpert. If a group of “experts” — self-appointed or otherwise — band together and agree on attributions, it is virtually impossible to mount a challenge. When “experts” disagree with each other, however, the subjective nature of connoisseurship becomes obvious. Different attributions for the same work make it clear that one or more of the experts is mistaken. And once an expert is shown to be fallible,

doubts begin to arise about connoisseurship being *the* definitive methodology for art history.

An analysis of how connoisseurship has been applied to the Guido Riccio case was made by Joseph Falcone: "In reading all of the material of the scholarly debate between Mr. Moran and what I call the 'normative art history community,' ... I have come to some interesting conclusions about how art historians debate, including their language and acceptable criteria for evidence in support of their arguments ... The use of specific evidence is important to note in the Guidoriccio debate, as it seems to be representative of a normal research tradition ... The most important form of evidence that is considered appropriate to use in debate in the discipline of art history is stylistic evidence ... 'Normal' art historians were bounded in the Guidoriccio case, as we shall see, by this shared criterion for research ... Because Mr. Moran throughout the intellectual debate has advocated the use of technical-empirical and historical evidence as the basis for his arguments, he is operating outside of the 'normal' tradition of art history."<sup>1</sup>

The earlier-mentioned discovery in 1980 of another very different fresco on the same wall as the Guido Riccio caused havoc among the experts. The juxtaposition of the frescoes, with the Guido Riccio work overlapping the one below it, seemed to demonstrate unequivocally that the Guido Riccio was not part of the castle series and was of a more recent origin. When several experts involved in the debate were asked to state how they viewed the chronological relationships of the two works, they refused to answer. Connoisseurship may have backfired on the experts this time, for it seemed clear that many non-experts — such as students, the press, and the public — "saw" what the experts claim they could not see, or didn't want to admit that they saw.

### **Preludes to the challenge**

When, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, art history became a bona-fide scholarly discipline, the Guido Riccio fresco had already become accepted as a

documented masterpiece by Simone Martini by guidebooks published in Siena and elsewhere. Despite appeals to the authority of connoisseurship and stylistic evidence that have since been heard in the Guido Riccio debate, it appears that the Simone Martini attribution for the famous fresco slipped into the art history literature without academics and connoisseurs making close stylistic analyses to support such an attribution.

In fact, some doubts about the attribution did surface. Early in this century, a widely-recognized expert of Italian painting, Adolfo Venturi, wrote in his monumental work *Storia dell'Arte Italiana* that he did not believe that the figure of Guido Riccio on horseback was painted by Simone Martini, but rather that it was painted after Simone's death as a symbolic figure of power above a revolving map that was placed on the same wall. Venturi's doubts, however, appeared in a footnote and were not cited.

Furthermore, in an Early Italian Renaissance Art course taught in 1957-1958, Professor Hellmut Wohl expressed doubts about the Guido Riccio when he discussed Simone Martini, though he did not categorically exclude it as a work by Simone. We were both students in Wohl's course and it may well be that he planted the seeds of doubt for the sustained challenge which we mounted a couple of decades later. Who knows how many other scholars had similar questions about the painting, but did not follow up on them in a way that allowed discussion within the scholarly communication system in art history?

### **The challenge begins (by chance!)**

The Guido Riccio challenge originated by chance, almost as an afterthought. We are both specialists in Sieneese painting, particularly of the fourteenth century, and for a long time we went along with the traditional attribution. In 1976-1977, one of us (Moran) undertook a study of the overlapping of attributions to Luca di Tommé and Niccolò di Ser Sozzo of various paintings dating from the second half of the fourteenth century. Originally, the

Guido Riccio did not enter in any way whatsoever in this study.

During the course of the Luca di Tommé and Niccolò di Ser Sozzo research, Moran found a document in the Archivio di Stato di Siena referring to a payment, allegedly of 1346-1347, to “Simone dipegnitore,” for a painting on the Porta Camollia in Siena. This document aroused great curiosity, inasmuch as Simone Martini had died in 1344. There had been considerable discussion in art history literature about whether Simone Martini painted the Porta Romana or the Porta Camollia. With the discovery of this document, Moran hypothesized that perhaps there had been another painter, a close contemporary of Simone Martini, also named Simone, and that this coincidence might have caused some of the confusion about who painted Porta Camollia. Since Moran believed that this unpublished document might be an important key to resolving this art historical problem, he undertook further investigations in this direction, putting the Luca di Tommé and Niccolò di Ser Sozzo project on the back burner indefinitely. These further investigations regarding “Simone dipegnitore” eventually involved the famous Guido Riccio painting, and a series of incongruities and anomalies in this work came to light. Ironically, it turns out that there might have been an error in the compilation of the archival records and that the “Simone dipegnitore” mentioned in the aforementioned document might actually refer to Simone Martini after all. Be that as it may, the challenge to Guido Riccio was about to begin.

### **Content and form of the original challenge**

In 1977, the challenge did not include the entire painting, only the horse and rider. We hypothesized that the equestrian figure of Guido Riccio was a posthumous memorial portrait painted in 1352 or soon thereafter superimposed on the documented depiction of the castle of Montemassi.

Documentary and iconographical considerations were already becoming complex in the first year of the challenge, but at that time

we focussed our attention on two main observations:

(1) From the standpoint of space and setting, the horse and rider did not seem to be integrated into the scene of the siege of Montemassi. Instead of being part of the narrative, it looks as if the horse and rider are floating across the front of the picture plane, with the left front hoof of the horse resting on the border of the fresco at a point where the stakes of a wooden fence recede below the border, and with the other three legs of the horse suspended in mid-air above a valley which swoops below.

(2) Guido Riccio left Siena in disgrace in 1333. According to documents and secondary sources, he let the enemy escape when he had them within striking distance, he was bribed by the enemy, he let supplies get in when he had them besieged at Arcidosso in 1331, and he was accused of cowardice. Also, he left Siena with considerable unpaid debts. Based on these notices, we thought that if Simone Martini had in 1330 painted a portrait of Guido Riccio, a mercenary soldier who sold his services, this portrait would have been painted over or destroyed in 1333 or soon thereafter. (We later discovered that from around 1333 to around 1350, Guido Riccio was a leader of forces that were enemies of Siena, a fact which reinforced the theory that the Siennese government would have erased any portrait of him in their main council room after 1333.)

The Siennese hired Guido Riccio again in 1351 as their military chief, perhaps thereby buying off a threat to their security. He died in office several months later and was given an elaborate military funeral by the Siennese government, for which the services of some Siennese painters were engaged. We proposed that the portrait we see in Siena today was painted in the context of the funeral celebration as a memorial portrait of a soldier of fortune who had died while in service for Siena. But since Simone Martini himself had died in 1344, the artist of the portrait must have been someone else, perhaps a close follower of Simone. (We now prefer Venturi's

theory to our own, as does Professor Federico Zeri.)

It did not take long for the first reactions to take place.

### **The first attempts by the experts to squash the heretical theory**

One day in Siena in 1977, Moran ran into Alberto Cornice, an official of the Soprintendenza, and told him of the new theory about Guido Riccio. At the advice of Professor Ulrich Middeldorf, the former Director of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, he made an informal request to have the opportunity to study the fresco closely. Eventually a portable scaffold was put up in front of the fresco and the Soprintendenza requested the restorer Donato Martelli to make some preliminary examinations. Several scholars (experts) were also invited to view the fresco from the scaffold.

During these first investigations, Martelli removed some of the plaster on the wall just below the Guido Riccio and found traces of another fresco which extended underneath the famous fresco's lower border. Since the Guido Riccio fresco overlapped the newly discovered one, the former was later in date than the latter. When the invited scholars called up to Martelli to ask if he had found anything of importance, the restorer, with a sense of humour that might have masked his own suspicions about Guido Riccio's portrait, replied that he had not found anything unusual, merely a portrait of Garibaldi, the nineteenth century Italian military and political hero, underneath the famous fresco.

A few days later, the office of the Soprintendenza, headed by Piero Torriti, called in the famous restorer Leonetto Tintori to make further investigations. Meanwhile, Cornice telephoned to say that a friend of his, Serafina Baglioni, a journalist in Siena, was interested in knowing more about the new Guido Riccio theory. An interview was arranged in front of the fresco on the day Tintori and his colleague were carrying out their investigations.

Baglioni's article, entitled "Simone Martini Contested," appeared in the October 4, 1977 edition of the nationally distributed *La Nazione*.<sup>2</sup> The experts and the political

authorities in Siena were taken by surprise by the sudden "onore della cronaca" (honour by means of press coverage) for such a heretical theory. From this point on, the press, particularly the Siense press, has played an active role in the controversy, with well over 100 articles on the subject. For the most part, the press has shown what we consider to be a great sense of responsibility throughout the controversy, and the Siense journalists have shown an extraordinary openness for continual up-to-date coverage of our findings and ideas.

The following day, the Florentine journalist Wanda Lattes' article, entitled "The Mystery of Simone Martini," appeared in *La Nazione*.<sup>3</sup> She reported the opinions of various experts and acknowledged the existence of real problems of art criticism, attribution, and dating, and conservation regarding the painting. She detected two trends among the replies she elicited: one group expected an academic debate to resolve the question, while the other group was determined to defend the traditional attribution. Among the latter, Lattes quoted Professor Giovanni Previtali at length, and he soon became the unquestioned leader of the experts who dedicated themselves to defending the attribution to Simone regardless of the evidence.

The first organized attempt to squash the heretical theory about Guido Riccio occurred at a round table discussion held in Siena in early November 1977 at the Accademia degli Intronati. Invited speakers included Moran and a number of experts of Italian art. This event was open to the public and many Siense citizens who were merely curious or even shocked or outraged about the new theory also showed up. It was an overflow crowd, in some ways reminiscent of a partisan hometown crowd for a sporting event.

Although promoted as a "round table" session to discuss the issue, at least two Siense have told us that the forum was organized with the intention of refuting the heretical theory, to nip it in the bud, as it were, in a civilized and scholarly manner. And with Professor Enzo Carli of Siena acting as chairman of the event, there was every assurance that the discussion would be carried

out with open, civilized exchange among the participants. But as hard as they tried, the experts could not dispel the doubts. Most difficult to rebut was the idea that had Simone Martini painted a portrait of Guido Riccio in 1330, this portrait would have been erased after 1333 when Guido Riccio fell into disgrace. Once again, *La Nazione* covered the event with a long article entitled “Enigmatic Guido Riccio.” The last paragraph begins: “The debate is not closed.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Subsequent reactions, including personal insults**

Not all of the experts and other persons involved have abided by the same high professional standards that Professor Carli maintained at the round table discussion and subsequently throughout the controversy. Although Professor Previtali made some bitter comments, the round table chaired by Carli provided no indication of the future reactions that were to take place as the debate escalated and intensified.

Insults of various types against one or both of us became an inherent part of the Guido Riccio controversy. Here are some selected examples:

“Go back to America, by boat ... and to the next presumptuous person who comes here we’ll tell him to his pig’s snout that we don’t want to give him a little glory ...” — Arrigo Pecchioli.<sup>5</sup>

“... the absurd and defamatory accusations ... published by Gordon Moran and Michael Mallory ...” — Piero Torriti.<sup>6</sup>

“... Gordon...gets more pushy, more paranoid, more upset ... I think if he were a genuine art historian ... he would do like I would do ... He just thinks all the time about this case ... He’s become almost insanely obsessed with it. I think he has taken it over the brink.” — Professor Samuel Edgerton.<sup>7</sup>

“... It is only the invention of a non-expert who has not found anyone who agrees with him. This American was mistaken from the beginning ... then he had to eat his words, and he is spending all his life trying to demonstrate that the fresco is not by Simone. Poor man, by

now he has taken on the form of a monomaniac.” — Professor Giovanni Previtali.<sup>8</sup>

“... Professor Bellosi, in an interview, declares that perhaps Moran has become insane ...” — Giorgio Sacchi.<sup>9</sup>

“... the two ‘monomaniacs’ (I’m speaking of Gordon Moran and Michael Mallory) ...” — Arrigo Pecchioli.<sup>10</sup>

“Moran published his theories about the ‘Guido Riccio’ in 1977 ... From the start, he was denounced by the Italian art establishment in vicious terms; he was called a CIA agent, a monomaniac and a paranoid.” — Jacob Young with Lin Widmann.<sup>11</sup>

“... the tenacious attempts to contest the hypotheses of Moran ... immediately were transferred to a personal level, with bizarre objections to the effect that Moran was not a real historian, but a lightweight dilettante on the subject matter ...” — Marco Carminati.<sup>12</sup>

“Professors at the University of Siena dismissed him with thinly veiled condescension ... Zeri ... got right to the point ... ‘Moran is not a Sienese, he’s not a member of this inbred confraternity of scholars and he’s an American. Therefore, the Sienese professors feel that he has no right to his opinions.’” — Jane Boutwell.<sup>13</sup>

During the course of our research into the Guido Riccio problem, we have formulated no less than *sixty* reasons — historical, documentary, technical-scientific, stylistic, and iconographical — to doubt the traditional attribution. Despite our findings, the above list of comments indicates that some experts involved in the controversy have chosen to treat us not as scholars involved in critical inquiry and discussion concerning a subject of mutual interest but, rather, to treat us as unqualified, crazy outsiders who are trying to intrude upon their writings on and teaching of art history. As might be expected in such a case, some of the experts involved tried to censor our ideas from scholarly journals in the field.

### **Suppression and censorship**

The rhetoric of academia treats academic freedom as a sacred cow. If material that has

been censored becomes known, however, all the more attention is drawn to it.

In the Guido Riccio controversy, there have been well-documented efforts to censor our ideas. Our writings have been rejected by some leading art history journals and we have been excluded as speakers during Guido Riccio discussions. In the longer run, attempts to censor our ideas have failed miserably. If our ideas were rejected by a scholarly journal, they would appear somewhere else. And when we were excluded from the program of a scholarly conference, our absence was noted by the press and our ideas gained even wider coverage.

Leading art history journals in England (*Burlington Magazine*), Germany (*Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*), Italy (*Rivista d'Arte*), and America (*Art Bulletin*) rejected our articles on Guido Riccio. The editors did not question our evidence let alone try to refute it. Instead, they objected to the length (even though they recently published articles longer and shorter than ours), format, and style.

The editor of *Burlington Magazine* sent our paper to a referee for her opinion about whether our article should be published. The issue of Guido Riccio was so important, she is reported to have said, that the new information in our article should be accepted. In spite of this, it was rejected. The editor of *Rivista d'Arte* rejected our article on the basis that it should appear as a letter to the editor. When we rewrote the piece in the form of a letter to the editor as he had suggested, he quickly rejected it, claiming that his journal does not publish letters to the editor. And so it went.

The refusal to allow new hypotheses and new findings to be presented and discussed during scholarly conferences is another form of academic censorship. A clamorous case occurred in 1985 at a conference held in Siena to study the works of Simone Martini. The conference was jointly organized by the University of Siena, the local government of Siena, and the office of the Soprintendenza di Siena. Hearing that scholars were being requested to participate on the program of the conference, we asked permission to be on the speakers' program to present new evidence

that we had recently discovered but not yet published. The mayor of Siena, Mazzone della Stella, replied that the Organizing Committee had rejected our request. We then wrote to several members of the Organizing Committee, asking them if they had personally made a negative judgement against us in the Organizing Committee's rejection. Some of the members replied that not only had they not voted against us, but that they were not even aware that other members of the committee had rejected us. One member of the committee, Professor M. Frinta, wrote to us that he considered our rejection in this case to be an example of "foul play."

We then enquired precisely *why* our request had been denied. After all, among works attributed to Simone Martini, the Guido Riccio was currently the focus of considerable attention among art historians and we felt our new findings were significant and timely. The reason for our rejection was explained by Professor Bellosi, one of the Inner Committee of the Organizing Committee that disallowed our request to speak, to another member of the Organizing Committee, Professor Miklos Boskovits, who conveyed it to us. According to Boskovits, Bellosi stated that by then scholars knew where each side stood on the issue of Guido Riccio, that the subject had been worked over in detail recently, and that there should be a pause for reflection. Boskovits said he agreed with the reasoning behind the decision to exclude us from the program.

However, after having kept us off the program because Guido Riccio was not to be discussed, the Inner Committee included one of their own members, Soprintendente Piero Torriti, on the program to give a long talk on the Guido Riccio situation in which he attempted to refute our views. Once revealed, the hypocrisy of this particular instance of censorship was evident to many in Siena, including the media and the art historical community.

A more subtle form of *de facto* suppression existed — intentionally or unwittingly — by making certain materials far less accessible in at least one library. At the Kunsthistorisches



Institut in Florence, Italy, where Professor Max Seidel and Irene Heueck, two members of the Organizing Committee's Inner Committee cited above, hold powerful positions, all publications challenging the traditional interpretation of the Guido Riccio remained unindexed for a long period of time. Later, after Moran exposed this situation at a conference of art librarians, the Director of the Kunsthistorisches Institute tried to take retaliatory action by not renewing his library card and making him sign a declaration agreeing to keep silent in order to have it renewed.

### **Overcoming censorship and suppression**

Since academic censorship is contrary to the tenets of academic freedom, the mere suggestion that ideas have been censored might put the censors and suppressors on the defensive, while widespread exposure of academic censorship might put them on the run and might also cause additional potential future would-be censors to refrain from censorship. At the same time, within a given academic discipline there may well be some editors of scholarly journals willing to publish the material that has been censored by other journals, either out of a sense of justice and fair play, out of a desire to end up on the winning side, or out of a true belief in open academic debate. Also, some scholars who have felt the effect of censorship imposed upon them might well increase their efforts to get their views known.

In fact, some individuals went out of their way to offer to publish our views after the debate had intensified in 1980-1981. Among the first was Giorgio Sacchi, a Siennese artist who heads *Notizie d'Arte*. Although this journal appears only sporadically and is chronically short of funds, it has given extensive coverage to the Guido Riccio debate, particularly the issues of August 1981 and September 1985, the latter of which contains an article of ours giving an update on the controversy.<sup>14</sup> Sacchi became outraged by the censorship he perceived to be taking place and he has been a thorn in the side of the official group of experts. In addition, Professor

Miles Chappell invited us to publish our views in a journal, *Studies in Iconography*, for which he was Acting Editor.<sup>15</sup>

After we had been excluded from the Speakers' Program of the Simone Martini conference in Siena, and in the wake of the rejection of our article by *Burlington Magazine*, the leadership of the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence, Italy, known as Villa I Tatti, offered to give us some assistance. Professor Craig Smyth, Director at the time, and Eve Borsook, a Research Associate there, helped revise the article that *Burlington* turned down and they strongly recommended that the journal publish it. Thanks to their sense of fair play, our article appeared in the April 1986 issue of *Burlington*.<sup>16</sup>

When *Rivista d'Arte* rejected our article in which we attempted to correct Professor Seidel's incomplete transcriptions of a document regarding the 1314 submission of Giuncarico to Siena, we were invited to submit the same material to *La Gazzetta di Siena*, a local newspaper, which published it in 1983.<sup>17</sup> Eventually we managed to get some of this information in a footnote of our *Burlington Magazine* article when correcting the proofs. Thus, serious flaws in Professor Seidel's research on Guido Riccio were finally revealed in the art history literature, but only partially and in a footnote and only well after these same defects had been fully exposed in a local newspaper for all Siena citizens to see.

In Siena, we requested permission to write a short rebuttal article in the scholarly publication of the Accademia Senese Degli Intronati, *Bulletino Senese di Storia Patria*, and our article was published.<sup>18</sup> In this case, the editorial board included Professors Enzo Carli, Mario Ascheri, and Giuliano Catoni, all of whom disapproved of the censorious treatment that we had been receiving. In fact, it turned out that Professor Ascheri was on a receiving end of censorship himself in the Guido Riccio case. During the public discussion period at the Simone Martini conference in Siena, he pointed out that it was highly unlikely, if not impossible, for the large equestrian portrait of Guido Riccio to have

been painted during Simone Martini's lifetime. As a leading expert in the field of the history of Medieval law, Ascheri's arguments were based on the political and legal realities of that time. When it became apparent that his ideas supported our hypotheses and cast very strong doubts on the official view, he was interrupted by art historian Ferdinando Bologna and told, in front of the large audience, that he could not talk like that at an art history conference. Ascheri subsequently published several articles in Sieneese newspapers and magazines developing his ideas, and they were republished in a recent book.<sup>19</sup>

The censorship imposed by the experts against anyone who dared oppose their official views about Guido Riccio at the Simone Martini conference created a negative impression among Sieneese citizens, the Sieneese press, and the national media. This situation only worsened when, during his talk on Guido Riccio at the conference, Torriti repeatedly castigated the press for their interference in the Guido Riccio question. The press reaction to the experts is perhaps best summed up by the title of an article which appeared in Siena, "Guido Riccio Drowns in a Sea of Intolerance."<sup>20</sup> Soon after, we were invited to present our views at various civic and cultural groups in Siena, including Rotary Club Siena Est and the cultural clubs Hobbit and Ignacio Silone.

The Kunsthistorisches Institut's selective indexing of the Guido Riccio literature was presented as a case study for art librarians at the 2nd European Conference of the Art Libraries of the International Federation of Library Associations in Amsterdam in October 1986. A few years later, the papers given at the conference were published. As mentioned above, Joseph Falcone later wrote about this situation, as did John Swan, Head Librarian at Bennington College, and a leader in Intellectual Freedom Roundtable activities of the American Library Association.<sup>21</sup>

It seems to us, then, that attempts at censorship and suppression in the case of Guido Riccio have turned out to be counterproductive and embarrassing for the experts. This does

not mean, however, that they will not try again.

### **Falsifications and stonewalling**

It is our opinion that some of the research put forth by the experts in most Guido Riccio studies contains serious falsifications of evidence. Whether these misleading errors were made intentionally or unwittingly is not for us to say. It does appear that our attempts to describe and expose falsifications that we have detected results in our censorship by those in authority. An attempt to illustrate *all* of the falsifications we have detected so far would take up more space than this chapter allows, so we will give one example to indicate just how preposterous some of the scholarship of the experts has become and how difficult it has been to make this known to art historians.

In the March 1987 issue of *Burlington Magazine*, we pointed out in a letter to the editor that a portion of the lower border of the Guido Riccio fresco had been destroyed during the 1980-1981 restoration and that this destroyed portion of the fresco constituted crucial evidence that could no longer be studied by scholars.<sup>22</sup> Piero Torriti wrote in reply that we had made "absurd and defamatory accusations" and in his letter he purported to "refute" them "once and for all."<sup>23</sup> He included a color photograph as part of his letter and claimed that the portion of the fresco in question still exists in its original form. But anyone who looks at either the fresco or the photograph that Torriti published can easily see for themselves that the portion of the border in question has disappeared. As in the fable *The Emperor's New Suit of Clothes* by Hans Christian Anderson, art historians are asked to "see" something that has been removed.

We regarded Torriti's charges against us as completely false and we attempted to publish a rebuttal in which we pointed out the obvious. We were met with adamant and persistent stonewalling by *Burlington* editor Caroline Elam, who wrote no less than five rejection letters in her efforts to keep our response out of the journal. We countered with a series of

letters and open letters to a widening group of academics interested in problems of peer review, scholarly communication, and academic ethics. Eventually the Board of Directors of *Burlington Magazine* reversed Elam's decision and we were allowed to publish our reply.<sup>24</sup>

In the *Burlington* case, stonewalling was not confined to the editor. Among other officials of the journal, we wrote to Sir Brinsley Ford, a Trustee of The Burlington Magazine Foundation, enquiring if he thought that scholars who had been charged with having made "absurd and defamatory accusations" should be allowed to reply to the charges. He quickly responded: "You have made accusations to which Professor Torriti had the right to reply, and that, in my opinion, should be the end of the matter so far as the Burlington is concerned." Just what, in his opinion, did our accusations consist of and against whom were they made, we replied. Despite a follow up letter, we never heard from him again. Eventually Elam intervened, requesting that we not "badger" Brinsley Ford further because he was about 80 years old and did not have secretarial help. So here we had a situation in which a *Burlington* Trustee was in no way prevented by age or lack of secretarial help from firing off an immediate reply that leveled false charges against us, but when he was requested to back up his charges, suddenly age and lack of secretarial help prevented him from doing so.

In his recent monograph on Simone Martini, Professor Andrew Martindale wrote that he believes the famous Guido Riccio fresco and the fresco discovered in 1980-1981 were both commissioned to Simone Martini in a time span of about eighteen months between 1331 and 1333.<sup>25</sup> At one point, believing that the reviewers and supporters of Martindale's views were perpetuating an obvious error in the scholarly literature, we wrote specific questions to some of Martindale's reviewers and supporters. We received few replies. We feel that this sort of stonewalling is very revealing about what is currently going on concerning a crucial aspect of the Guido Riccio story.

### **How and when will the controversy end?**

Debate and discussion about the two frescoes have been raging for more than a decade without resolution. Hundreds of writings, including newspaper articles, letters to the editor, articles in scholarly journals, and articles in popular magazines have been devoted to the subject. It is very unusual in art history that a question of attribution and dating for two works of art should occupy so much time and space in the scholarly literature and in the mass media.

We should recall at the same time that the Guido Riccio is a kind of secular icon, the delight of museum-going tourists and student groups who discuss it and read about it every year. Also, there has been the desire among many Sieneese citizens to be kept up to date on any new developments in the controversy. Moreover, the Guido Riccio case has expanded beyond a narrow art historical issue of dating and attribution to enter the arena of academic ethics, peer review, scholarly communication, and the sociology of higher education. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the controversy will die down in the near future.

More likely, it will intensify. If so, two consequences seem likely. On the one hand, the multiple attributions for the fresco discovered in 1980 might well lead to confusion among scholars and even to distrust on the part of younger scholars of the traditional methodology of connoisseurship relied upon so heavily by the experts. On the other hand, there might well be a widening gap between a growing number of students and members of the public who no longer accept the Simone Martini attribution and the experts such as Bellosi, Seidel, Polzer, Christiansen, Martindale, Liedtke, Strehlke, and Torriti who seem further and further committed to defending it.

Some indications of these latter developments can already be detected. For example, in a recent monograph on Simone Martini, Cecelia Jannella writes about the fact that various scholars have written different attributions for the fresco discovered in 1980: "This incredible difference of opinions ... The

observer may be surprised by this variety of attributions, especially since the artists mentioned are all so different. But for the public in general, informed by the unusual amount of space the press devoted to the matter, and also for those who take a professional interest, the main problem was how to form one's own opinion. How disorienting ... when learned art historians contradict one another so drastically."<sup>26</sup> It seems to us that these contradictions among art historians in this instance, and the disorientation that results among the public, students, and scholars themselves, all serve to prolong and draw attention to the controversy.

The official guidebooks in Siena, the signage in the Museum of the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena, and the audio-visual guide machines in the museum that museum-goers use, all maintain the traditional attribution for Guido Riccio, with hardly a word that there has been a long and ongoing controversy. Also, some if not many of the official guides who are licensed by the local government of Siena and who have virtual monopolistic authority to show tourist groups around Siena, spout the official views about Guido Riccio when describing the paintings to the tourists in the Sala del Consiglio of the Palazzo Pubblico. But many of the guides have shown a keen interest in following the controversy closely and somehow the tourists in their groups hear something of the other side of the story and get a pretty good idea of how things stand. Moreover, some guidebooks from outside of Siena, particularly those published in England, report the challenge to the official view. For example, "The Rough Guide" to Tuscany and Umbria relates the following: "The fresco on the opposite wall ... *Guidoriccio da Fogliano* ... was until recently also credited to Martini ... Art historians, however, have long puzzled over the anachronistic castles — much later in style than the painting's supposed date of 1328 — and in the mid-1980s further evidence was found when, during restoration, an earlier fresco was revealed underneath. The current state of the debate is confused, with a number of historians — led by the American Gordon Moran (whom the council for a while banned

from the Palazzo Pubblico) — interpreting the *Guidoriccio* as a sixteenth-century fake, the others maintaining that it is a genuine Martini overpainted by subsequent restorers. The newly revealed fresco below the portrait, of two figures in front of a castle, is meanwhile variously attributed to Martini, Duccio and Pietro Lorenzetti."<sup>27</sup> Two standard textbooks, Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* and Hartt's *History of Renaissance Art*, have excluded Guido Riccio as a work by Simone Martini in their most recent editions, with Hartt acknowledging our view that Guido Riccio is a post-sixteenth century work. Also, several other scholars have written their doubts about the traditional Simone Martini attribution, including Zeri, Briganti, Jannella, Frugoni, Redon, Parronchi, and Ascheri.

It appears we are headed for a confrontation between the experts and their official guides on the one hand, and a growing number of students, art historians, Siennese citizens, and museum-goers from outside Siena on the other hand. Aleana Altmann, a student from near Geneva, Switzerland, has recently written a term paper on the Guido Riccio controversy. In the course of her studies, she was at a gathering at which some Siennese residents were present. When she approached a man who by appearance seemed quite cultured and asked him what he thought about the Guido Riccio question, he replied to the effect that the officials in Siena were trying hard to maintain and sustain the traditional attribution, but that everyone in Siena knew that the painting is a fake! If this is an accurate assessment, a "show down" may occur sooner than we ever imagined, with further embarrassment for the experts.<sup>28</sup>

But there is another possibility. If discoveries are made which bring to light other hidden fresco masterpieces from the painted castle cycle in the Palazzo Pubblico, much progress toward resolution of the Guido Riccio question could easily take place. In our view, the combination of these potential additions to art history and the artistic patrimony of Siena as well as to the new chapters in art history that will have to be written might well result in a sort of cultural euphoria that would allow the

past bitterness of the controversy to fade away. And in the end everyone would turn out to be on the winning side, including the experts themselves.

#### **Methods of research and related activities**

Research for the Guido Riccio painting began with the discovery of a document in the Siena archives (Archivio di Stato). At that point, the research proceeded in a manner that would be considered normal for art history studies. In addition to a stylistic analysis and study of the painting itself, studies were undertaken to determine what other scholars have observed and written about the painting in the past. Such studies were carried out in art history libraries such as I Tatti (of Harvard University) and the Kunsthistorisches Institute (of the German government), both located in Firenze.

As the studies progressed and as a controversy developed around the painting, the nature of the research involved expanded. Anomalies and anachronisms were detected in various aspects of the painting. As Alice Wohl observed, "But the questions are many, and they are not resolved ... The range of issues, involving not merely Trecento painting in Siena but also heraldry, costume, seals, military architecture and the history of warfare, political and social history, topographical illustration, technical expertise, and the interpretations of documents, engages every aspect of the discipline of art history."<sup>29</sup>

Questions relating to genealogy, heraldry, political alliances, etc. led to research being conducted in the archives and libraries in various cities of Italy, including Bologna, Modena, Reggio Emilia, Ferrara, Padova, Milano, and further investigations might include study trips to Verona and Venice.

Other research activity included several on-site inspections and investigations of various castles historically linked, in one way or another, to the Guido Riccio controversy, including Arcidosso, Montemassi, Giuncarico, and Castel del Piano. These investigations revealed what we consider to be gross errors, if not serious misrepresentations, in the published studies of Italo Moretti relating to

the topography and orography of Montemassi, and in the studies published by Max Seidel regarding the fortifications of Arcidosso and the topography of Giuncarico.

As the controversy intensified, the mass media, which was involved locally from the start, began to take an interest on an international level, and in addition to submitting our findings and rebuttals for publication in art history journals, we also gave such information during interviews with magazines and newspapers, during TV shows and news broadcasts, and also during press conferences that we held recently. *Newsweek* (international edition), *International Herald Tribune*, *The Economist*, *The Observer* (London), *The London Times*, RAI (Italian national television), and ABC television are among some of the more widely known members of the mass media which asked to hear our side of the story. Several leading national Italian newspapers also interviewed us, including *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa*, *Il Giornale* and *La Nazione*.

In addition, many scholarly groups and universities asked us to give updates on our studies. Mallory gave talks, illustrated with slides, to the annual meetings of the College Art Association of America and of the International Foundation for Art Research as well as to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, New York University Institute of Fine Arts, Temple University, Wesleyan College, etc. We gave joint lectures at Harvard University as well as at their I Tatti study center in Firenze. Moran has been requested to speak to various university groups that made field trips to Siena as part of their academic program, including groups from Toronto University, Zurich University, Bokum University, Syracuse University, Pennsylvania State University, Georgetown University, American Institute for Foreign Study, Association of Midwest Colleges, Tulane University, Lewis and Clark College, California State University, and Williams College. Tour groups such as Butterfield and Robinson and the Smithsonian Institute have also shown an interest, as have study groups, including Art History Abroad (London).

Since the range of topics extends beyond fourteenth century Siense painting, as Alice Wohl, cited above, mentions, we have come across much information not directly related to the Guido Riccio painting. Some of this information pertains to artists other than Simone Martini. In fact, in the course of our research for the Guido Riccio case we have come across rather startling information relating to studies about the famous sixteenth century painter Beccafumi and the fifteenth century Siense painters Giovanni di Bindino and Stefano di Giovanni (known as "Sassetta"). We intend to publish more on these subjects in the future, in addition to whatever new significant findings come to light relating to Guido Riccio.

#### Notes

1. Joseph Falcone, *Is Knowledge Constituted by Power? The Politics of Knowledge in the Art History Community: A Case Study of 'The Guidoriccio Controversy'*, Honors Thesis in Anthropology, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York (3 May 1991): 3, 7, 8.
2. Serafina Baglioni, "Simone Martini contestato," *La Nazione* (4 October 1977): 4.
3. Wanda Lattes, "Il mistero di Simone Martini," *La Nazione* (5 October 1977): 3.
4. "L'enigmatico Guido Riccio," *La Nazione* (5 November 1977): 4. The quoted sentence was "Il dibattito non é chiuso."
5. Arrigo Pecchioli, "E adesso signor avvocato," *Il Campo* (25 May 1979) (our translation from the Italian).
6. Piero Torriti, *The Burlington Magazine* (July 1989): 485.
7. See Falcone, op. cit.: 49.
8. Eleonora Mariotti, "Da Modì a Guidoriccio," *Nuovo Corriere Senese* (19 September 1984): 6, 7 (our translation from the Italian).
9. Giorgio Sacchi, letter, *Nuovo Corriere Senese* (21 September 1988) (our translation from the Italian). In the interview that Sacchi refers to, published in *Nuovo Corriere Senese* (3 August 1988): 13, it is reported that Bellosi states that it seems to him that Moran has suddenly become insane. Bellosi's words are, "... mi sembra che a Gordon Moran abbia dato di volta il cervello."
10. Arrigo Pecchioli, "La Storia Dice: È di Simone," *Il Campo* (29 September 1989): 12 (our translation from the Italian).
11. Jacob Young with Lin Widmann, "Italy's Great Fresco Fracas," *Newsweek* (International edition) (4 February 1985): 49.
12. Marco Carminati, "Un 'affresco un po' frescone," *Il Sole — 24 Ore* (31 December 1989): 13 (our translation from the Italian).
13. Jane Boutwell, "Fiasco al Fresco," *Domino* (March 1989): 131-133, 147.
14. Michael Mallory and Gordon Moran, "Aggiornamenti sulla Controversia su Guido Riccio ad il Ciclo di Castelli Dipinti nel Palazzo Pubblico di Siena," *Notizie d'Arte* (September 1985).
15. Michael Mallory and Gordon Moran, "Guido Riccio da Fogliano: A Challenge to the Famous Fresco Long Ascribed to Simone Martini and the Discovery of a New One in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena," *Studies in Iconography*, Vol. 7-8 (1981): 1-13; Gordon Moran, "Guido Riccio Da Fogliano: A Controversy Unfolds in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena," *Studies in Iconography*, Vol. 7-8 (1981): 14-20.
16. Michael Mallory and Gordon Moran, "New Evidence Concerning 'Guidoriccio,'" *Burlington Magazine* (April 1986): 250-256.
17. Michael Mallory and Gordon Moran, "Interessante documentazione sul Guido Riccio e sul ciclo di castelli dipinti nel civico palazzo," *La Gazzetta di Siena* (5 November 1983): 4.
18. Michael Mallory and Gordon Moran, "Precisazioni e aggiornamenti sul 'caso' Guido Riccio," *Buletino Senese di Storia Patria* (1985): 334-343.
19. Mario Ascheri, *Dedicato a Siena*, Siena: Edizioni Il Leccio (1989): 61-80, in the chapter "Arte: Guidoriccio e dintorni."

20. Duccio Balestracci, "Il Guidoriccio annega in mezzo all 'intelleranza,'" *Nuovo Corriere Senese* (3 April 1985).

21. John Swan, "Ethics Inside and Out: The Case of *Guidoriccio*," *Library Trends* (Fall, 1991): 258-274. Among his research sources, Swan uses Alice Sedgwick Wohl, "In Siena, an Old Masterpiece Challenged, a New One Discovered," *News from RILA* (February 1984), an important bibliographic survey that helped make our views known in the midst of efforts to suppress them in various scholarly forums and settings.

22. Michael Mallory and Gordon Moran, letter, *Burlington Magazine* (March 1987): 187.

23. Piero Torriti, letter, *Burlington Magazine* (July 1989): 485.

24. Michael Mallory and Gordon Moran, letter, *Burlington Magazine* (January 1991): 37.

25. Andrew Martindale, *Simone Martini*, Oxford: Phaidon Press (1988).

26. Cecelia Jannella, *Simone Martini*, Firenze: Scala (1989): 63.

27. Jonathan Buckley, Tim Jepson and Mark Ellingham, *Tuscany and Umbria (The Rough Guide)*, London, Harrap Columbus (1991): 282.

28. Our latest publications on the subject of the Guido Riccio controversy include: "The Guido Riccio Controversy and Resistance to Critical Thinking," *Syracuse Scholar* (Spring 1991); and "Did Siena Get Its *Carta* Before Its Horse?," *The Journal of Art* (May 1991): 76. In these articles we describe some of the tactics of the experts that are discussed in this chapter.

29. Wohl, op. cit.: 11.