



ST. FRANCIS RECEIVES THE STIGMATA

1487, TEMPERA ON PANEL

A document, now lost, testifies the commission of this panel to Bartolomeo della Gatta by the Santa Maria della Misericordia fraternity of Castiglion Fiorentino, to be exposed with the Stigmata altar in the local church of San Francesco. The money for this work had been donated by the devoted Giovan Battista di Niccolò Beroardi in 1479. Originally, the painting also featured a gilded frame, made up of two grooved pillars with carved capitals, and a predella depicting a Pietà. The frame was later removed and the panel was used as door for a closet which contained sacred furnishings, by means of a rope and pulley system.

The scene takes place in a mountain landscape – an obvious reference to La Verna mountain, place of the miracle: in the centre, in the foreground, St. Francis is receiving the Stigmata, next to him is Brother Leo, in disbelief of what is happening. In the background, the landscape, the vegetation and the animals (above all the barn owl) are illuminated by a miraculous light, enhanced and “consecrated” by the golden rays irradiated by the Christ on the Cross, on the right.

This work is universally recognised as Bartolomeo della Gatta’s most important and emblematic, a summary of different cultures that results in a new language, which unites Florentine naturalism and its clear and tidy design, Piero della Francesca’s volumism and his attention to details, typical of Flemish painters.

Pierpaolo Mangani

www.museicastiglionfiorentino.it - info@museicastiglionfiorentino.it



PINACOTECA COMUNALE
CASTIGLION FIORENTINO

NOTES ON THE LIFE OF BARTOLOMEO DELLA GATTA

His real name was Pietro. He was the son of Antonio di Giovanni and Margherita di Piero Benivegni and was born in Florence in 1448. He is known as Bartolomeo, the name he took at his ordination, and the nickname Della Gatta, as he is remembered by Giorgio Vasari. His real name, Pietro Dei, was discovered by some art historians in the early XX century, who gave importance to a document, revealed for the first time by Giuseppe Ghizzi in 1887, dated October 2nd, 1486, where a panel representing St. Francis who receives the Stigmata was commissioned to don Piero d'Antonio Dei da Firenze, priore al presente di San Chimento d'Arezzo dell'Ordine di Camaldoli..." (Piero d'Antonio Dei from Florence, Prior at San Chimento d'Arezzo of the order of Camaldoli) for the church of San Francesco in Castiglion Fiorentino. Later, Other interesting documents were found: the first one is a statement to the register, dated 1451, where Pietro's father declares to have a second son, 5 years old, Other than Giovanni. Another document testifies that the future painter was registered in the goldsmith corporation of Pieve Santa Maria in Florence, where also the Other Dei family members were registered, in 1453. Moreover, Other documents certify the monastic life of Dei in Arezzo: he was a professed monk at the S. Maria in Gradi church in 1470 as "Dom. Pierus Antonii de Florentia", he was defined as S. Clemente abbot "Dominus Petrus Antonii de Deis de Florentia prior sancti Clementis de Aretio ordinis camaldulensis..." in 1482. Lastly, in two occasions in a Libro dei censi (annuity register) Dei declares himself abbot: in 1495 "In Dei nomine amen. Qui in questo libro fatto e cominciato il 22 dicembre 1495... da don Piero d'Antonio Dei da Firenze abbate del Monastero di San Chimenti dell'Ordine di Camaldoli..." and on June 4th, 1502 "con licentia da me don Piero abbate di San Chimenti e di Santa Maria in Grado..." Dei died in 1502, probably in Florence.

ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL 1480 CIRCA, TEMPERA ON PANEL

As mentioned by Vasari, the painting was the organ door shutter in a Chapel of the ancient Pieve di S. Giuliano. It was recovered by Del Vita in 1920, reassembled (the work was in bad conditions and was divided in eleven pieces) and restored, even though it is clear that the painting was originally larger. It shows the blessing Archangel Michael, the patron saint of Castiglion Fiorentino, triumphant over the defeated Dragon, symbol of Evil. The background shows a hilly landscape with the view of a lake or river on the right. Next to the Saint, in smaller size, is a young woman holding a newborn Child in her arms: she is Teodora, daughter of Lorenza Guiducci (who commissioned the work) and Paolino Visconti, member of the Milanese troops that were in Castiglion Fiorentino during the war against Florence. The coat of arms under the feminine figure belongs to the Visconti family (a giant snake eating a man); above it, an angelic figure holds a scroll that cites the commission: *Laurentia fieri fecit*, that means Lorenza had it made.



ALTARPIECE OF ST. JULIAN 1486, TEMPERA ON PANEL

This panel was painted by Bartolomeo della Gatta in 1486 and was exposed in the main altar in the ancient Pieve di S. Giuliano. It remained there until 1576, when it was moved into the nearby Cappella delle Campane. Later, the work underwent many events: it was divided in two parts, then reunited, recovered and exposed in the third altar of the right nave of the church of Collegiata in Castiglion Fiorentino. At the centre of the painting is a dainty Virgin sitting on a throne, with the baby on her knees. Under them an inscription bears the name of the benefactor (Cristiano di Piero di Cecco, maniscalcho from Castiglion Fiorentino) and the execution year, 1486.

Next to the Virgin are St. Peter and St. Paul, who can be recognised by their usual attributes (the keys for the former and the sword for the latter) and by the representation of their martyrdom on two bas-relief: St. Peter crucified upside-down and St. Paul beheaded. On the foreground, St. Julian, penitent and facing the Virgin, is on the left, and St. Michael, the patron saint of Castiglion Fiorentino, is on the right, piercing a dragon, representing Evil, with a spear.

In the centre, two putti play with some flowers (roses, representing the Virgin; lilies, for purity; and carnations, representing the Passion of the Christ). Originally, the panel comprised four predellas depicting the life of St. Julian, two of which were stolen in the early XX century and never found; the remaining two are exposed at the Museo della Pieve, next to the church of Collegiata.

