

DOMENICO BECCAFUMI

SAINT CHRISTOPHER

The fresco was painted in monochrome (black and white) by one of the most important mannerist artists in the 16th century, Domenico Beccafumi (1486-1551).

It portrays St. Christopher, the protector of the wayfarers and the pilgrims; it was also believed that the image of the Saint would protect from a violent death.

St. Christopher appears as a powerful and muscular man, with a pilgrim's stick. He carries the child on his shoulders because, according to the legend, he ferried Christ, in the child shape, on a river.

The monumental figure, the draperies windblown and the strong chiaroscuro remind the works of Michelangelo, which Beccafumi had seen in Rome. Beccafumi's painting is characterized by the very refined use of the light.



Bottom left, we can see that part of the painting layer has been lost.

The fresco has been dated, for stylistic reasons, between 1540 and 1545.

We do not know which was its original collocation, since it was probably detached and brought back on this wall.



Coat of Arms of the Hospital
Tombstone, St. Niccolò in Sasso Church
17th century

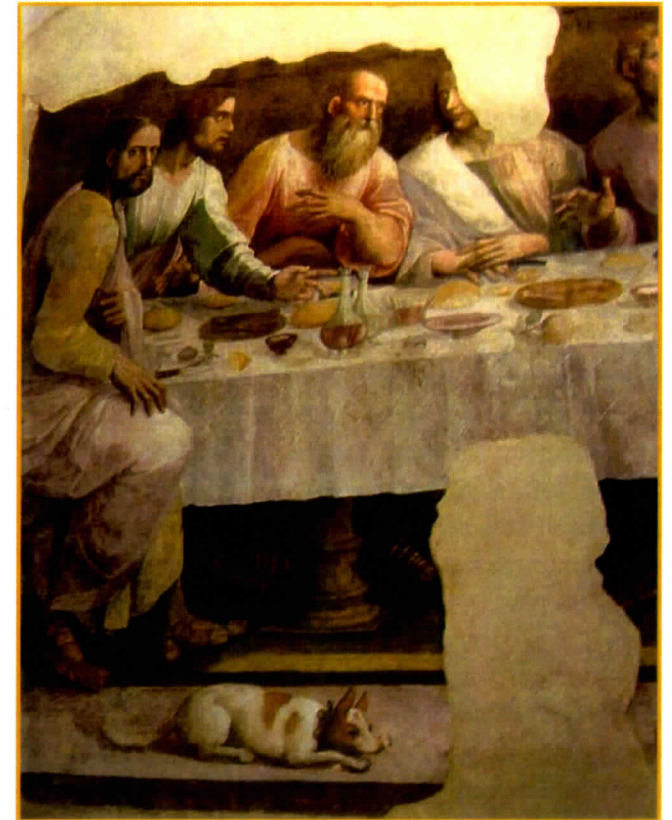
English Translation by class 3BL

On the trails of the ancient Hospital Open days 2015

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The frescos of Monna Agnese



THE HISTORY

The first notes about the “Spedale” of Monna Agnese date back to the 13th century. In 1278 a woman called Agnese asked the city government for an economic help to heal the poor and the sick. The sources in archives witness, later on, the consolidation of the Hospital, named after the founder Monna Agnese, or after the nearby church St. Niccolò and Gregorio in Sasso. The Hospital was a place of assistance in a broad sense: it received the sick, the poor and the pilgrims and specialized then in the assistance of the women in labour. Here lived a community of oblate, mostly women, under the guidance of a Rector. The Hospital had agricultural properties which guaranteed a certain autonomy. In the first half of the 16th century important renovation works took place, as witnessed by the courtyard’s inscription (1533). Beccafumi’s and Riccio’s frescos, among the best known artists in Siena, are probably dated after those repairs.

After the end of the Republic of Siena, Ferdinand I of the Medici, grand duke between 1587 and 1609, reformed the Hospital. In the atmosphere of the Counter Reformation, much stricter rules converted the institution into a convent: only women were allowed to live here, specialized in the assistance of women in labour. In 1783 Pietro Leopoldo from Lorena, Tuscany’s Grand Duke, transformed the Monna Agnese Institution into a school which gave the basic education to the young maidens from Siena. Textile production activity, already important for the oblate, went on throughout the so called Leopoldine Schools; in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century a historical-artistic specialization was experimented with the formation of professions specialized on textiles repair.

Nowadays the school’s heritage includes paintings and canvas, frescos and also instruments textile artifacts.

BARTOLOMEO NERONI CALLED “IL RICCIO”

THE LAST SUPPER

The fresco was realized for the refectory of the Hospital by Bartolomeo Neroni called “Il Riccio” (1505/1510-1571), a famous artist in the 16th century Siena. A student and then Sodoma’s son-in-law, Il Riccio was a painter and also an architect, designer, miniaturist, civil and military engineer. The fresco was probably painted around 1540. Il Riccio had to adapt to the pre-existing architecture, thus conceived the device of painted columns. The Last Supper follows the traditional iconography, with Judas placed, on his own, on one side of the table. Blessing Christ, in the centre, is surmounted by the angels with the instruments of the Passion.

The details of a daily life objects – food on the table, the dog and cat – are made with care and have, at the same time, symbolic meanings. The theatrical setting up is emphasized especially by the angel, who is moving the tent aside like a curtain. Despite some of the parties are now damaged beyond repair, the last restoration (1998) returned its readability and bright and vivid colours to the work.

The Last Supper occupied, as always in convents, the back wall of the refectory – the room where the community of the Hospital would gather for the meals. The complex underwent radical changes after 1783; the refectory was divided by a wall and the fresco is today placed in a corridor.

