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FRA BARTOLOMEO DELLA PORTA:
PATRONAGE AND CLIENTELISM AT SAN MARCO
IN THE EARLY CINQUECENTO

The single most important document for the comprehension of Fra Bartolomeo della Porta’s pictorial production during his thirteen-year residence at San Marco is a ricordo in the Libro delle Ricordanze B at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence. This detailed, though incomplete, list of pictures was compiled by the then syndic of San Marco, Fra Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, on 3 December 1516. Each work is described according to size, support, subject, approximate value, and patron or recipient of the work. Cavalcanti drew this information directly from an account book that Fra Bartolomeo himself kept, which is now lost.

I am especially grateful to Sheila Barker and Lorenzo Polizzotto for their help and suggestions.


3 Similar entries in Cavalcanti’s list are also recorded in San Marco’s Borsario: Archivio Generale dell’Ordine dei Predicatori (hereafter AGOP), XIII, 3998H, published by Verde, Giaconi, Épistolario di fra Vincenzo Mainardi, 591-598. San Marco’s volume of «Entrate ed Uscite» – Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), Corporazioni religiose soppressa dal governo francese (hereafter Conventi soppressi) 103, 73 – also includes information that help reconstruct, directly and indirectly, a number of Fra Bartolomeo’s commissions. See, for instance, S.J. Cornelison, Relocating Fra Bartolomeo at San Marco, «Renaissance Studies» 23/2 (2009), 311-334.
In the prologue of this document, Cavalcanti praised the painter’s service to the Order and elected him as an example of indefatigable religious and moral rectitude. The list of pictures that follows is a testimony of this achievement. His works not only embellished Dominican churches and convents, but also prominent collections in Florence and abroad. Though Cavalcanti’s account served practical purposes, such as marking the importance of Fra Bartolomeo’s production for San Marco’s economy, it also revealed the instrumental role played by his works in steering away this convent from perilous waters in the aftermath of Girolamo Savonarola’s death.

In his definitive study on the Savonarolan movement, Lorenzo Polizzotto demonstrated the measures taken by lay and religious Piagnoni to stave off attacks leveled at San Marco from various fronts. By doing so, he unraveled the Gordian knot of Piagnonism, identifying its multiple ramifications, whether mystical, militant or moderate. Fra Bartolomeo was very much active in this defense of San Marco, albeit in subtler ways than his more outspoken brothers. As vectors of devotion, his pictures consolidated moral and religious fervor within convents still adhering to Savonarolan reform; on the other hand, as we shall see, a great number of works also served as instruments of reconciliation.

Cavalcanti’s list follows a loose chronological order and divides the works into two sections: pictures commissioned or sold for profit and pictures presented as gifts. Fra Bartolomeo received no personal compensation, though reference is made to works produced during the successful partnerships with Mariotto Albertinelli. Apart from fresco works executed for San Marco and its satellite hospices – especially Santa Maria Maddalena in Pian di Mugnone – he seems to have only produced large altarpieces intended for public display and smaller works for private devotional use: the former, for the most part, represented *sacre conversazioni*; while the latter consisted of devotional subjects like Nativities, Crucifixions, and Holy Families.

The section of the ricordo entitled *Dipinture che se n’è tratto danari* features patrons with no strong ties to the convent such as Bernardo del Bianco, Salvatore Billi, Giovanni Bernardini, Domenico Perini, and Girolamo Casio, as

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4 «MDXVI: Ricordo si fa qui di sotto in tutte le seguenti carthe di tutte le dipinture che farà Fra Bartholomeo di Pagholo da Firenza frate di San Marcho di Firenza, le quali lui ha dipinte tanto in tavole de legno, come di tela, o vero in muri, o in quadri grandi et piccoli. Et in una faccia saranno e’ lavori fatti de’ quali se n’è cavato el prezzo; et nell’altra faccia al dirimpetto, tutti e lavori che sono fatti per lui, di che lui non ha cavato prezzo alcuno, e quali si sono fatti per le nostre chiese, o vero si sono donati a diverse persone: et questo ad perpetuam rei memoriam, et acciocché e’ frati presenti et futuri vegghino le opere sua, et come non è stato otioso, et che utilità ha fatto et (Domino concedente) farà, et che honore al convento et frati. Dominus qui incepit, ipse perficiat. Et tutte le infrascripte dipinture sono segnate a un libro che tiene detto Fra Bartholomeo dipintore s[egnato] A. a’ luoghi sua et carthe diffusamente qui dette. Et io Frate Bartholomeo Cavalcanti syndico del detto convento et frati ho fatto questa scriptura, et tutte le infrascripte tavole et lavori di mia propria mano per fede del vero ho scripto». BMLF, San Marco 903, f. 127 v; Marchese, *Memorie dei più insigni pittori*, 2, 158-159.

well as others who were closely associated with San Marco such as Sebastiano da Montecatini and Giovanni Maria Canigiani.

For Bernardo del Bianco, Fra Bartolomeo painted a *Vision of Saint Bernard* (fig. 1), originally for the Florentine Badia and today displayed at the Uffizi. According to Giorgio Vasari, this was the very first work that he produced as a friar, after the almost four-year hiatus when he resided at San Domenico in Prato, the convent in which he began his novitiate. The complicated vicissitudes regarding the price of this altarpiece – Lorenzo di Credi was later called to settle the dispute – and the patron’s relative indifference to Piagnone partisanship («...dicto Bernardo era qualcuno referito a’ frati, che era huomo presuntuoso da litigare et cavillare in questa cosa...») reveal that the primary aim of this commission was to make a profit. Equally priced was the large altarpiece, painted in 1516, for the Billi family chapel in the church of the Santissima Annunziata, whose central panel, *Salvator Mundi* (fig. 2), is at Palazzo Pitti, while the side panels, *Isaiah* and *Job*, are held at the Accademia. Salvatore di Bartolomeo Billi was a successful merchant who worked mostly in Naples and had no known ties with San Marco.

Slightly more complex are the cases of Giovanni Bernardini, Domenico Perini and Girolamo Casio. Bernardini, recipient of a *Nativity*, came from a prominent merchant family from Lucca and held important political offices in the 1520s and 1530s; he demonstrated strong sympathies towards

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11 On Salvatore Billi (who was the son of Bartolomeo and not of Giuliano, as Calvalcanti incorrectly indicated), see: M. LUZZATI, *Billi, Salvatore*, «Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani», Rome 1968, 10, 469-70.

12 I was not able to identify Ser Martino di Lunigiana, mentioned in Cavalcanti’s list, who purchased for Santo Stefano in Pane an unidentified framed picture: «Item una Tavola alta circa di br. 4 coll’ornamento, fatta a ser Martino de Lunigiana, stava a Santo Stephano in Pane, ebesene duc. XXVII. lar. d’oro, come al detto libro... 27» (MARCHESE, *Memorie dei più insigni pittori*, 2, 161). From the Borsario, however, we learn that a number of friars from San Marco preached there in 1501, 1509, and 1510. VERDE, GIACONI, *Epistolario di fra Vincenzo Mainardi*, 593, 596, 597.
Florentine republicans. Perini, whose family had been involved in the wool trade, mostly worked in France and with the Medici during their exile from Florence, though he may have also been involved in Pignoni circles. He purchased two pictures in 1506 and 1507, a *Jesus Appearing to Mary Magdalene in the Garden* and a *Nativity*, possibly on behalf of a French patron. The Bolognese poet Girolamo de’ Marchione de’ Pandolfi (Casio) was an art collector, who had also commissioned works from Giovanni Antonio Bolltraffio and Francesco Francia. Such was his devotion to Leo X and Clement V that the former allowed him to use the Medici cognomen and the latter granted him important posts at the Studio in Bologna.

The *Madonna della Misericordia* altarpiece (fig. 3) for San Romano at Lucca, a convent known for its Savonarolan partisanship, was sold under very different circumstances from the works hitherto discussed. Though Bastiano Lambardi da Montecatini purchased this picture for his family chapel, it...
was Sante Pagnini, then prior of San Romano, who proved instrumental in masterminding this sale\textsuperscript{20}. Credited for having convinced Fra Bartolomeo to return to painting, Pagnini received the habit at San Domenico in Fiesole in 1487, served as prior in a number of Savonarolan convents, and was mostly known for his charismatic preaching and Biblical studies\textsuperscript{21}. He was also a zealous advocate of his hometown of Lucca, to such an extent that his loyalty to Savonarola was questioned when he urged that San Romano secede from San Marco’s congregation of affiliated convents\textsuperscript{22}. 

The remarkable aspect of the \textit{Madonna della Misericordia} is that artist, patron, mediator, location and even certain elements of the subject are all distinctively Piagnoni. In fact, this overcrowded altarpiece features what seems to be Savonarola’s portrait, partly disguised underneath Mary’s protective left elbow. Despite the bans that prohibited even speaking his name\textsuperscript{23}, the anonymous author of the \textit{Vita Latina} revealed that his likeness was disseminated everywhere\textsuperscript{24}.

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\textsuperscript{23} Civil and ecclesiastical authorities sanctioned on more than one occasion the possession and propagation of all objects – images, clothes, and corporeal remains alike – related directly or indirectly with Savonarola. See: A. Gherardi, \textit{Nuovi documenti e studi intorno a Girolamo Savonarola}, Florence 1887, 329; D. Di Agresti, \textit{Sviluppi della riforma monastica savonaroliana}, Florence 1976, 30; Polizzotto, \textit{The Elect Nation}, 284-5. A known casualty of this ban was Giuliano di Domenico da Ripa, once follower of the radical Piagnone Pietro Bernardino, punished by the Otto di Guardia in 1515 for having in his house a sculpture and painting of Savonarola. \textit{Ibidem}, 287-88.

\textsuperscript{24} Biblioteca Centrale Nazionale di Firenze (BCNF), Conventi Soppressi, J.VII.28, fol. 65r. See also, the Italian biography attributed to Pacifico Burlamacchi; P. Ginori Conti, R. Ridolfi, \textit{La vita del beato Ieronimo Savonarola, scritta da un anonimo del sec. XVI e già attribuita a Fra Pacifico Burlamacchi}, Florence 1937, 189. These images were venerated almost as relics and, as such, equally outlawed. Cornelions and medals produced by Giovanni delle Corniole, and Ambrogio and Marco della Robbia circulated as early as 1495. The definitive study on the iconography of Savonarola is L. Sebregondi, \textit{Iconografia di Girolamo Savonarola 1994-1998}, Florence 2004.
The vicissitudes surrounding Giovanni Maria Canigiani’s 1515-1516 purchase of an unspecified painting on canvas – a pictorial support with which Fra Bartolomeo began to experiment with after his visit to Venice in 1508 – raises a number of questions regarding the orthodoxy of Piagnonism and its implications for artistic patronage. Canigiani joined San Marco at a very young age, quickly gaining a number of important positions within Savonarola’s constellation of convents. Shortly after moving to San Silvestro a Monte Cavallo, San Marco’s satellite convent in Rome, he embarked in a most ambitious ecclesiastical career. Thanks to intervention of Alfonsina Orsini, Canigiani was made Abbot-General of the Vallumbrosan Order by Leo X in 1515; his devotion towards the Medici pope was celebrated by an unpublished poema written a year before. Despite this and other ingratiating gestures, he would not be the first friar of San Marco to sing Leo’s praises, or to de facto abdicate the Savonarolan message of poverty. His lavish expenditures, particularly the construction of his palace on the Quirinal, almost bankrupted the Order of Saint Giovanni Gualberto. His Libro delle ricordanze indicates how funds were also redirected to members of his family and how he still maintained close ties with Pianoni networks. He gave up this position only when Paul III Farnese made him Bishop of Hippo in 1540, although he retained his close relationship with the Medici, this time with Duke Cosimo I.


26 Giovanbattista di Eduardo Canigiani received the habit from Savonarola himself on 16 June 1496 and took the name Fra Giovanni Maria. See Verde, La Congregazione di San Marco dell’Ordine dei Frati predicatori, 189; Creytens, Les actes capitulaires de la Congrégation Toscane-Romaine O.P. (1496-1530), 202. He was made prior at San Domenico in Prato (1508), San Marco (1509-1511), and San Domenico in Pistoia (1513), before becoming General-Vicar of the Tusco-Roman Congregation in May of 1514. For the Congregation records confirming these posts, see Ibidem, 156 (Prato), 158, 159 (San Marco), 160 (Pistoia).


28 G.M. Canigiani, «Poema in laudem Leonis Papae X (eidem nuncupatum anno 1514)», cited in Ambrosius de Altamura, Bibliothecae Domenicanae accuratis collectionibus primo ab ordinis constitutione usque ad annum 1600 productae hoc seculari apparatu incrementum et prosecutio, Rome 1677, 530.


30 Loccatelli, Vita del glorioso Padre San Giovangualberto, 310. ASF, Mediceo del Principato 345, fols. 49v-r.

31 See the index of names in the «Libro del Generale Canigiano detto Ricordanze» (ASF, Conventi soppressi 260, 144, fols. 1r-1v) for Canigiani’s financial conduct during his generalship. Compare this list with the 1497 “petition list” in Polizzotto, The Elect Nation, 446-60.

32 ASF, Mediceo del Principato 343, fol. 219v.
The *Pala della Signoria* (fig. 4) for the Sala del Gran Consiglio was undoubtedly the most prestigious assignment given to Fra Bartolomeo during his thirteen-year tenure at San Marco. Filippino Lippi had originally been asked to paint this altarpiece just five days after the Savonarola’s execution. However, by the time of the painter’s death, in the spring of 1504, little work had been carried out, with the exception of the frame (now lost) carved by Antonio da Sangallo and Baccio d’Agnolo after Filippino’s designs. Gonfaloniere Piero Soderini’s decision to appoint Fra Bartolomeo on 26 November 1510 for this commission confirms the hegemony he and his business partner, Albertinelli, exercised over the Florentine artistic market. A few years later, the Signoria purchased another altarpiece, the *Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena* (fig. 5), which was given as gift to Jacques Hurault, Bishop of Autun and French ambassador in Florence. From a diplomatic perspective, the *Pala della Signoria* celebrated San Marco’s progressive but measured policy of conciliation with inimical factions within the Republican government. Dedicated to Saint Anne and featuring saints especially dear to the Florentine cause, this commission mainstreamed the Piagnoni towards less isolationist positions within the civic establishment. Steps towards this goal were taken by Soderini when the *Piagnona*, San Marco’s bell, was returned to the friars in 1509, after it had been mockingly carried in procession through the streets of Florence in 1498 and “held captive” for more than ten years at San Salvatore al Monte. This event is duly noted by Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, who noted in the *ricordo* that two pictures about a braccia tall,
representing Jesus and Mary respectively, were given to Soderini as a token of gratitude. Polizzotto suggests that the bell was rendered in exchange for the Pignoni’s support of the Florentine government in the Pisan Campaign. In truth, even in the immediate aftermath of Savonarola’s death, lay Pignoni retained a solid political lobby within the Republican government, often forming a majority in the Signoria itself. Remarkable, however, is that the Pala della Signoria represented – for the little time it was displayed in its unfinished state in the Sala del Gran Consiglio – the first instance in which both civic space and artistic decoration had a distinct Pignone imprimatur.

The expulsion of the Gonfaloniere (31 August 1512) and the dissolution of the Republican government by the Medici (1 September 1512) virtually drained the commission of its symbolic and political importance. No longer to be housed in the Savonarola-inspired civic hall, the Medici-controlled Signoria offered to continue to finance the picture and to relocate it where they saw fit. Fra Bartolomeo would make feeble efforts to complete this work in 1517, but it remained unfinished.

The second section of the list, under the rather stark heading “Dipinture dalle quali non s’è cavato danari”, presents compelling data that mirrors many of the patterns of patronage seen in the first part of the ricordo. These entries shed precious light on San Marco’s political, propagandistic and even aesthetic agendas. The works listed can be divided into three major categories: pictures donated to fellow Pignoni and to San Marco’s benefactors; pictures used to embellish convents of Piagnone affiliation; and pictures given to significant political figures.

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41 “YHS. MARIA. Richiardo chome addi’ [...] di giugno 1513 fu fatto uno stantiamento dalla Magnifica et Excelsa Signoria di Firenze al charmarlingo del Monte, che ci dovessi pagare fiorini cento larghi d’oro in oro per conto della tavola cominciata per la sala del Consiglio, chome abbiamo strumento di mano di publicho notajo; e quali ducati ci debbe pagare per tutto ottobre proxico advenire 1513. - duc. 100 larghi d’oro in oro. / El sopradetto stantiamento hebbi io Fra Gerolamo d’Andrea Gini; come sindacho et procuratore del Convento, addi’ 17 di giugno 1513. Et addi 19 di luglio giunse detto stantiamento dagli ufficiali del Monte et dal loro Cancelliere sottoscritto. / Et più, di poi fu sotto scrito dal provveditore di detti Dieci et da Giovanni Nicolini uno degli ufficiali. – Posto debitore el Camarlingo al Libro segnato C., a car. 129». This document published by Marchese (Memorie dei più insigni pittori, 2, 417) is also in BMLF, San Marco 903, Libro delle Ricordanze B, fol. 55r.
Among those who received gifts as gestures of appreciation for the services performed to Savonarola’s congregation, Zanobi di Agnolo Gaddi is particularly worthy of attention. Direct descendant of the Trecento painters Gaddo, Taddeo and Agnolo, he is reported in Rome in the 1490s, serving as one of the papal bankers under Alexander VI. Along with his brothers Giuliano and Giroamo, he signed the 1497 which petitioned the Borgia pope to lift Savonarola’s excommunication. Recent archival findings document his activity at the Archconfraternity of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini and his artistic patronage at the Piagnoni convents of Santa Maria della Quercia in Viterbo and San Silvestro a Monte Cavallo, the latter earning him title of benemeritus ordinis Praedicatorum, as can still be read on his tombstone in San Silvestro.

Piero di Niccolò Cambi also belonged to a family traditionally devoted to Savonarola. His brother Giovanni – not to be confused with Savonarola’s detractor, Giovanni di Bernardo Cambi – was among those political leaders who publicly defended the Frate and who, along with his other brother Guido, signed the 1497 petition. Their family chapel at San Marco was dedicated to Saint Peter Martyr and featured a large Sacra Conversazione (fig. 6) by Fra Bartolomeo which, according to Cavalcanti, was donated by the friars to Piero.

Baldo di Francesco Inghirami was a law professor at Studio Fiorentino and held a number of important political posts. He took up arms to defend San Marco from the attack of the Arrabbiati on the night of 8 April 1498 and was put on trial shortly thereafter. For this reason, he was banned from public office for two years.

Like the Cambi, members of the Pugliese family had been traditionally loyal to the Piagnone cause. Francesco di Filippo, who lived in the family palace on Borgo Stella, was a close member of Savonarola’s lay entourage and had suffered a ten-year exile after his conviction in 1513 for addressing

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44 SAVONAROLA, The Elect Nation, 452.

45 ASSONITIS, Art and Savonarolan Reform at San Silvestro a Monte Cavallo, 243-48.


47 SAVONAROLA, The Elect Nation, 449.


49 «Item un quadro a mess. Baldo Inghilanj, donatogli; di valuta di duc. XV: al detto libr. 15». MARCHESE, Memorie dei più insigni pittori, 2, 162.

Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici as “el Magnifico merda”\textsuperscript{51}. As gesture of gratitude for his continuous support of San Marco, he first received an unfinished \textit{Saint George} painted by Fra Bartolomeo in oil\textsuperscript{52}; a few years later, the then Prior of San Marco, Filippo Strozzi, donated to him a small \textit{Crucifixion}, probably at the time when Francesco was in exile\textsuperscript{53}.

A number of Fra Bartolomeo’s pictures were donated or relocated to other Savonarolan bastions like the monastery of Santa Lucia in via San Gallo in Florence (\textit{Holy Family})\textsuperscript{54}, the convents of San Domenico in Prato (\textit{Holy Portraits of Jesus and Mary})\textsuperscript{55}, San Romano in Lucca (\textit{God the Father with Saint Catherine of Siena and Mary Magdalene}); this picture was originally intended for the convent of San Pietro Martire in Murano; fig. 7)\textsuperscript{56}, and San Silvestro a Monte Cavallo (\textit{Saint Peter and Saint Paul}; fig. 8)\textsuperscript{57}. This dissemination of paintings within the Savonarolan strongholds had a number of precise functions. Primarily, these works endowed satel-
lite convents with San Marco’s distinctive *imprimatur*. After all, Fra Bartolomeo was, in all effects, the artistic voice of Savonarola’s reformational headquarters and, as Bartolomeo Cavalcanti stated, the artistic and moral model for all friars. Unlike Fra Angelico’s strictly intramural works at San Marco – the permanent, private, almost inaccessible frescoes in the dormitories – which sought to reinforce the inner-strength of fifteenth-century Observant friars and novices, Fra Bartolomeo’s pictures divulged San Marco’s message to its constellation of allied convents. Much like Savonarola’s texts and illustrations, particularly the ones whose publication the Frate himself seemed to have supervised, these paintings also served as propaganda. They conveyed San Marco’s rebirth and productivity despite the severe post-1498 bans, many of which were enforced even after Savonarola’s death. Most importantly these pictures underscored the convent’s politics of normalization and reparation with the political and ecclesiastical institutions alienated during Savonarola’s isolationism, even though manifestations of visual dissent – above all, Fra Bartolomeo’s portraits of Savonarola – were still proliferating.

Aside from the *Pala della Signoria*, another example of this normalization trend can be evinced from the *Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena* altarpiece, for a brief time in San Marco, now at the Louvre. The embrace of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis – an event recounted by Giacomo da Varazze and frequently depicted in Fra Angelico’s *predelle* – was originally placed in the foreground, as we can see from the preparatory drawings, and only later tucked into the background (fig. 9 & 10). This pictorial *abbraccio* should be read as an attempt at reconciliation between the Dominican Observants and Franciscans Observants in Florence after the fierce hostility that characterized the two Orders during Savonarola’s pastoral tenure. Among the Frate’s first public detractor was the Observant Franciscan Domenico da Ponzo, who in 1495 challenged the truthfulness of Savonarola’s prophetic message and therefore the very basis of his reformational project. Even more vicious were the attacks of another Observant Franciscan, Samuele Cascini,
who placed Savonarola in 1497 on the schismatic and heretical map. Tem-
ers irrevocably flared when Francesco di Puglia from the pulpit of Santa
Croce challenged any friar of San Marco to a public “trial by fire” as a means
to ascertain the truthfulness of Savonarola’s doctrine. Luschino’s Vuln-
era diligentis not only described the implications of this incident but also syn-
thesized the Franciscan hostility towards Savonarola. Due to a series of pre-
varications and mishaps, this event, which had been meticulously planned
in Piazza della Signoria on 7 April 1498, did not take place. Afterwards, the
political enemies of the Frate, including the Franciscans, did not miss the op-
portunity to cast doubts on Savonarola’s prophetic message in the eyes of the
Florentines.

San Marco initiated a large-scale reconciling campaign towards the more
distinguished members and affiliates of the Medici family. This consisted
mostly of small mementos for favors sought and received, and of thanksgiv-
ing presents for their goodwill and protection. Cardinal Giovanni was given
a Nativity with Angels before he was elected Pope on 9 March 1513. During
his almost nine-year pontificate, he took a number of Piagnoni friars under
his wing, though some may interpret this generosity as a way of distancing
them from Savonarola’s cause. Zanobi Acciaioli was made Prefect of the Vat-
ican Library; Giovanni Maria Canigiani, as discussed earlier, became Abbot-
General of the Vallumbrosan Order; Mariano Fetti was put in charge of Pa-
pal Seals (Plumbator Apostolicum). Leo X was also a patron of San Silvestro
a Monte Cavallo, where Fetti, Acciaioli, and Canigiani resided extensively.

Other recipients of pictures by Fra Bartolomeo also include Alfonsina Or-
sini, wife of Piero di Lorenzo (Madonna and Child), who was especially close
to Francesco Maria Gondi, a Piagnone friar who served as her procurator.

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63 S. Cascini, De modo discernendi falsum prophetam a vero prophetam inter reprehendam falsam
prophetiam atque visionem fratris Hieronimi, Milano 1497. On Cascini, see: Ridolfi, Vita di
Girolamo Savonarola, 351; Polizzotto, The Elect Nation, 79-82.

64 B. Luschino, Vulnera diligentis, edited by S. Dall’Aglio, Florence 2002, 95-122. Compare
this account with Ginori Conti, Ridolfi, La vita del beato Ieronimo Savonarola, 140-54 and
with S. Filipepi, Estratto della cronaca di Simone Filipepi, in P. Villari, E. Casanova (eds.),
Scelta di prediche e scritti di Fra Girolamo Savonarola, Florence 1898, 481-82.

65 J. Schnitzer, Savonarola, Milano 1930, 2, 55-82; Ridolfi, Vita di Girolamo Savonarola,
191-97.

66 «Item un quadro circa d’un braccio, nel quale era una Natività et Angioli et paesi, di prezzo
di ducati cinquanta, donato al Cardinal de’ Medici hora papa, el quale gli donoro el padre
prio et padri: al d’ lib. s. A... 50». Marchese, Memorie dei più insigni pittori, 2, 163.

67 Polizzotto, The Medici and the Savonarolans, 1512-1527, 135-50; Assonitis, Art and
Savonarolan Reform at San Silvestro a Monte Cavallo, 210-12, 217, 218, 221-22, 231-44, 256-
60, 265-72.

68 «Un quadro di br. 2 ½ alto, drentovia una Madonna col Bambino, donata a madonna
Alfonsina, di valuta di duc. XXV lar. d’oro in oro, ... 25». Marchese, Memorie dei più insigni
pittori, 2, 165. N. Tomas, Alfonsina Orsini de’ Medici and the “Problem” of a Female Ruler in
Early Sixteenth-Century Florence, «Renaissance Studies» 14, 1 (2000), 70-90; S.E. Reiss, Widow,
Mother, Patron of Art: Alfonsina Orsini de’ Medici, in S.E. Reiss, D.G. Wilkins (eds.), Beyond
Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy, Kirksville, MO 2001, 125-157. On
Francesco Maria Gondi, see: Verde, Giaconi, Epistolario di fra Vincenzo Mainardi, 288-9.
her son, Lorenzo, just recently elevated to the dukedom of Urbino (Madonna with Angels)\(^6^9\); and Leo X’s close adviser, Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena (Madonna and Child)\(^7^0\), who intervened on behalf of San Marco at the time when Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici, later Clement VII, was threatening to curtail their religious freedom\(^7^1\).

Cavalcanti’s list of pictures illustrates the intense production of one of the most successful Florentine workshops of the early sixteenth century. From the year he resumed his artistic career (1504) up to the months just before his death (1517), Fra Bartolomeo earned the convent well over 700 gold ducats, a considerable amount if compared the convent’s other sources of income. The precise financial contribution that the friar-painter made to his convent can be tabulated after a thorough analysis of the pittoria’s expenses as they appear in San Marco’s Borsario and Libro di entrate e di uscite. In this respect, two other matters should be taken into account. Cavalcanti’s list omits a number of important commissions, including the Pietà for the church of San Gallo (fig. 11)\(^7^2\) and the Assumption of Mary for Santa Maria in Castello at Prato, now in Capodimonte (fig. 12), as well as works, mostly frescoes, painted at San Marco’s satellite hospices, «per suo spasso essendo qui per ricreatione et per sublevarsi dalla sua infermità» (fig. 13)\(^7^3\). In addition to this, the painter’s graphic production suggests, as Chris Fischer has demonstrated, that a numbers of works, mostly Crucifixions, Depositions and Pietas, have not survived\(^7^4\). Secondly, the author of the ricordo is especially laconic about the earnings reported during the almost four-year final partnership with Albertinelli, which should be read alongside the agreement sanctioning the division of goods, drawn up shortly before their compagnia was dissolved\(^7^5\).

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\(^6^9\) «Un quadro di br. et ¾ per ogni verso coll’ornamento, donato al Magnifico Lorenzo de’ Medici con Madonna et Angeli, di valuta di duc. cento d’oro in oro lar. 100». Marchese, Memorie dei più insigni pittori, 2, 164.

\(^7^0\) «Item un quadro circa due br. et ¾, nel quale è una mezza Vergine col Bambino in collo, el quale donò el padre priore a ser Bernardino Cancelliere de’ Medici. ...16». Marchese, Memorie dei più insigni pittori, 2, 164.

\(^7^1\) The incident in question relates to Giulio de’ Medici’s intention to reintegrate San Marco, then part of the Tusco-Roman Congregation, into the much abhorred Lombard Congregation, whose religious fervor was substantially more relaxed than the one envisioned by Savonarola’s reformational program. J. Pitti, Storia fiorentina, edited by A. Giorgetti in «Archivio storico italiano», Serie I. (1842), 123. Cardinal Bibbiena – who was close to a number of friars at San Marco, including Mariano Fetti and Vincenzo Mainardi – prevented this union from taking place by reporting to Giulio de’ Medici that such a measure would have triggered the fierce opposition of the Piagnoni. G. L. Moncallero, Epistolario di Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena, Florence 1955-65, 1, 512.


\(^7^3\) Another important ricordo documents Fra Bartolomeo’s work at Santa Maria Maddalena in Pian di Mugnone in July of 1514. Marchese, Memorie dei più insigni pittori, 2, 422-3.

\(^7^4\) Fischer, Fra Bartolommeo: Master Draftsman of the High Renaissance, 261.

\(^7^5\) «Item d’una Compagnia fatta con Mariotto di Biagio dipintore se n’è cavato duc. ducet vari d’oro in oro lar., nella quale compagnia [vi si incluse] fu la Tavola che andò in Fiandra
Despite their sheer monetary worth, Fra Bartolomeo’s works incarnated a more valuable currency. They served as instruments of consolidation of faith, especially for the friars who were attempting to live by Savonarola’s tenets of simplicitas during times of hardship. They were meters of recognition of Piagnone allegiance, particularly among lay Florentine and Tuscan circles. They were agents of placation and diplomacy, staving off attacks from a number of inimical constituencies; on other occasions, they were thanksgiving offerings for protection received. They also represented the artistic expression of Savonarola’s convent, just as Zanobi Acciaioli and Sante Pagnini’s scholarly contributions were evidence of San Marco’s ongoing intellectual activity.

His fellow friars, as Cavalcanti reminds us, acknowledged Fra Bartolomeo’s work as a kind of apostolate76. This finds confirmation in Fra Bartolomeo’s obituary in the Libro dei Morti, where the friar-painter is inducted in the pantheon of Dominican Observance77. Cavalcanti’s ricordo testifies to this pastoral achievement, almost as if he were tracing an outline for a hagiography, written at the time when the painter’s physical condition was beginning to deteriorate78. Dominican and non-Dominican biographies relate how Fra Bartolomeo and his work never caused tribulation or scandal – the Saint Sebastian at San Marco being perhaps the sole exception79. He was exempted from the customary duties of a Regular friar which were particularly ardu-
ous in Savonarola’s convents and within the Dominican Observance in general. He never received the priestly ordination, remaining deacon all of his life. Nevertheless, he still managed to serve as a mediator of divine revelation. This mediation, which in the Dominican Order was best carried out via preaching, occurred thanks to Fra Bartolomeo through painting. Like those friars at San Marco who were immersed in their scholarly research but also preached and taught, Fra Bartolomeo was both a practitioner and teacher of his trade. He trained friars, lay brothers, and secular apprentices while, at the same time, keeping religious and lay parties separate. Furthermore, he made sure that his legacy and that of San Marco’s pittoria remained alive. His vast corpus of drawings was passed on to his favorite disciple, Fra Paolino da Pistoia, and, in turn, to Suor Plautilla Nelli.

80 As deacon, he could not officiate mass but he could read and sing the Holy Gospel, preach, administer baptisms, distribute communion to the sick and, in dire times, hear confessions and deliver extremeunctions. Marchese, Memorie dei più insigni pittori, 2, 423-24.

81 V. Alce, Tre documenti su Fra Bartolomeo della Porta, «Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum» 56 (1986), 74-77. A number of these documents were first published in Ridolfi, Notizie sopra varie opere di Fra’ Bartolomeo da San Marco, 124-126.