

138

CIRO FERRI  
(Rome 1634 - 1689)

Ferri, a pupil of Pietro da Cortona, was not only his most faithful disciple as a painter, but also imitated his versatility in practising as an architect. In 1659 he was summoned to Florence to complete Cortona's frescoes in the Pitti Palace, using his master's cartoons to finish the Sala d'Apollo, but his own for the Sala di Saturno. In 1665-7 he went to Bergamo to fresco the church of S. Maria Maggiore, and possibly visited Venice to improve his mastery of colour. On the death of Cortona in 1669 he vied with Baciccio and Maratta for the title of the leading painter in Rome. Having kept up his contacts with Florence, he was appointed by Cosimo III to teach drawing in the Grand-Ducal Academy in Rome, in which most of the creative generation of Florentine Baroque sculptors were trained.

The Madonna in glory with SS. Thomas of Villanueva and William

Canvas

105.5 x 67.3 cm.

This is the modello, first identified by Philip Pouncey, for the altarpiece formerly in the church of S. Maria in Volturna at Viterbo, and now in the Episcopal Palace there. This altarpiece was recorded in the 18th century as the joint work of Ciro Ferri and a Viterbese painter called Anton Angelo Bonifazi (ca. 1615-ca. 1682), both of whom had been pupils of Pietro da Cortona (cf. Gaetano Coretini, Breve Notizie della Città di Viterbo, Rome 1774, p. 132). Italo Faldi, who was the first to reconstitute the oeuvre of Bonifazi, accepts the modello as an entirely autograph work by Ferri, whilst only seeing his hand in the upper part of the final altarpiece.

Professor Faldi does not attempt to date the altarpiece, but a likely terminus ante quem is provided by the consecration of the rebuilt church of S. Maria in Volturna in 1679. The style of the modello however, and the fact of the collaboration between the two former pupils of Pietro da Cortona on the altarpiece itself, suggest a considerably earlier dating - possibly as early as 1659, when Ferri may have passed through Viterbo on his way to complete his master's frescoes in the Palazzo Pitti at Florence.

S. Maria in Volturna was the church of an Austin Nunnery; hence the presence in this picture of St. Thomas of Villanueva, a former Austin friar and Archbishop of Valencia noted for his generosity to the poor (who had just been canonized in 1658), and of St. William, frequently called "of Aquitaine". This saint is a composite figure, the result of a confusion between three Williams: the Carolingian and the last Dukes of Aquitaine, both of whom renounced the Dukedom and became hermits, continuing to wear armour over their

bare skins as a penance, and St. William of Mala Valle, the founder of the Gulielmite Order, which was absorbed into the Order of Austin Friars in 1256.

Hist: Methuen collection, Corsham Court.

Bibl: Tancred Borenius, A Catalogue of the Pictures at Corsham Court, London 1939, no. 49.

Italo Faldi, Pittori Viterbesi di cinque secoli, Rome 1970, pp. 60-2 and fig. 231.

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