

FRANCESCO DI SIMONE FERRUCCI
(Fiesole 1437 - Florence 1493)

Son and pupil of the sculptor Simone Ferrucci, Francesco was employed by Desiderio da Settignano, on whom he thus became stylistically dependent, for decorative carvings in the Badia at Fiesole (1460-6), and thereafter worked together with his brother Bernardo for the Annunziata in Florence (1467-78). His masterpiece in Desiderio's manner is the tomb monument of Barbara Manfredi (d. 1467) in S. Biagio in Forlì. Subsequently, he came increasingly under the influence of Verrocchio. This is particularly visible in his Madonnas, and in his work in Bologna, notably the tomb monument of Alessandro Tartagni (d. 1477) in S. Domenico (despite the fact that the schema of this is that of Desiderio's Marsuppini tomb), and the Albergati and Fieschi monuments in S. Francesco. Characteristic of Francesco di Simone is an increase in the ornamental component of such designs.

FRIEZE WITH THE ARMS AND DEVICE OF THE RICASOLI OF FLORENCE.

Pietra serena

H. 40.5cm., L. 299.5cm.

The coat of arms in the central wreath is that of the Ricasoli (cf. H. Wills, Florentine Heraldry, London 1901, pp. 167, 199; "Or, three bars, gules, over all a lion rampant azure"). The device at each end, comprising a twist-drill with its tip resting on a diamond in a mount, is the impresa of the Ricasoli. The entwined ribbon would have borne the motto: RIEN SANS PEINE. Of the palaces of this family in Florence, that on Piazza Goldoni, near the Ponte alla Carraia, the design of which is attributed to Michelozzo, is the most likely provenance.

The present frieze probably adorned the lintel of a fireplace, as it is typical of such pieces. It still reflects the manner of Desiderio da Settignano, as in the famous Boni- Marsuppini chimney-piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum (cf. J. Pope-Hennessy, Catalogue of Italian Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London 1964, vol. I, pp. 135-8, cat. no. 113, vol. III, figs. 131-4). The idiosyncrasies of style in the treatment of the putti—the hair which hangs

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about their faces in points, almost as though wet, and the deep folds between the rolls of fat on legs and arms - are precisely paralleled in a similar pietra serena frieze with an unidentified coat of arms in the Bardini Museum, Florence, where it is described as "Maniera di Desiderio" (cf. A. Lensi, Il Museo Bardini, III; Marmi e pietre, in Dedalo, VI, 1925-6, pp. 767-72). Another frieze on the art market a decade ago was decorated with two putti apparently carved from precisely the same model as ours. Within the general class of such fireplace friezes, this group was evidently carved in a single Florentine workshop. This workshop is in all probability that of Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, whose early works betray a stylistic dependence on Desiderio, while later he was strongly influenced by Verrocchio. The closest analogies for the style of the putti and the incisive detailing of the wreath of vegetation are to be found in the documented works of Francesco di Simone, most relevant being the monument to Alessandro Tartagni in San Domenico, Bologna. There, closely similar putti support a wreath with an erased coat of arms, just below the signature of the sculptor. A derivative frieze in marble, with Veronica's veil substituted for the arms, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum. A stylistically related fragment of a frieze in pietra serena with the arms of the Trenta family of Lucca in the same museum was formerly ascribed to Francesco di Simone (cf. J. Pope-Hennessy, op. cit. vol. I, pp. 171, 282, cat. nos. 144, 293, vol. III, figs. 156, 156a, 290). A coarser frieze of the same type, thought to have been executed in the workshop of the Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, is in the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris (cf. cat., Sculpture Italienne, 1975, no. 55).

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