



Cappella Gentilizia
di San Nicola da Tolentino

VILLA SABATINI - CORTONA

NOBLE CHAPEL OF SAN NICOLA OF TOLENTINO

ZABARELLI, ADRIANO (Cortona, September 1608 - September 1678)

'Madonna con il Bambino in gloria con villanella di ritorno dal pozzo e la beata Margherita.'
Virgin Mary with Child in Glory with a Country Girl Returning from the Well and Blessed Margherita.

Post ~ 1667.

Oil on canvas, cm. 194,5 x 152

Private Collection.

Signed at the bottom right ADRIANUS/ ABARELLIUS /CORTONENSIS

Villa Sabatini near Teccognano was established by Carlo Lucci, a nobleman from Cortona, who built the attached chapel in honor of St. Nicholas of Tolentino. Born in 1753, Lucci pursued an ecclesiastical career, becoming a canon at the Cathedral of Cortona. The chapel's construction was part of broader renovations to the villa.

After Lucci's death, the estate passed through several ecclesiastic owners, eventually being sold to Domenico Sabatini in 1910. The Sabatini family has maintained ownership since, with the current resident being Filippo Sabatini, Domenico's great-grandson.

VILLA SABATINI and CHAPEL of SAN NICOLA da TOLENTINO

The former owner of what is now Villa Sabatini near Teccognano and builder of the attached family chapel, Carlo Lucci, was born on July 30, 1753. He was the son of Cristofano Lucci, a nobleman from Cortona, and Eugenia di Flaminio Saracini, a noblewoman from Arezzo and his legitimate wife...

The Lucci family belonged to an ancient lineage and was already recorded in the earliest known catalog of noble families from Cortona, compiled by Canon Tommaso Braccioli in 1583. Manuscript 389, housed in the Library of the Municipality and the Etruscan Academy of Cortona, contains the family's coat of arms and an entry dedicated to their history.

Carlo Lucci, the fourth-born child and third son, as was often the case with younger sons, pursued a career in the Church. On September 21, 1775, at the age of just twenty-two, he was inducted into the Chapter of the Cathedral of Cortona as an "extraordinary canon." Seven years later, on March 3, 1782, he was appointed as a regular canon, a position he held until his death, which likely occurred in March or April 1813. In addition to his ecclesiastical role, Carlo Lucci was affiliated with the Etruscan Academy of Cortona, the city's most prestigious cultural institution, with records showing his association by 1807. Little is known about his life, and the reasons behind his deep devotion to St. Nicholas of Tolentino remain unclear. However, his devotion was evidently strong, as it inspired him to construct a new chapel in the saint's honor—an exceptional act without parallel in Cortona.

The construction of the chapel likely took place as part of a broader renovation of the main property. In the villa's main floor living room, a stone fireplace was installed during the first

decade of the 19th century, bearing the date 1808, which likely marks the year the fireplace was completed. Upon Carlo Lucci's death, the property passed to his heirs (given Lucci's ecclesiastical status, these were likely his brothers and/or nephews), who transferred it to Francesco di Domenico Berti before 1830. By that year, Berti was listed as the sole owner of the villa and the chapel in the newly established Tuscan land registry.

Until 1870, the estate remained within the Berti family, when Ottavio and Giuseppe Berti, sons of Francesco, sold it to another priest, Don Pasquale Matini. Don Matini passed away in 1897, leaving the estate to his nephew, also a priest, Don Carlo Matini, who in turn sold the property in 1898 to another clergyman, Don Giuseppe Guidi. Don Guidi died on January 15, 1908, and the estate then passed to two other priests, Don Egisto Migliorini and Don Ugo Polani, who sold it in 1910 to Domenico Sabatini, son of Giuseppe. The property has remained in the Sabatini family ever since, spanning over a century and four generations. Filippo Sabatini, Domenico Sabatini's great-grandson, currently resides in the villa.

Madonna con il Bambino in gloria con villanella di ritorno dal pozzo e la beata Margherita (Adriano Zabarelli, Cortona 1608- 1678)

The painting presents a tranquil rural setting, featuring three central figures - Santa Margherita, a young peasant girl, and the Madonna - each depicted with meticulous adherence to traditional iconography. Amidst the backdrop of a summer landscape with ripe wheat being harvested, the scene unfolds with the graceful terracotta amphora resting miraculously on the girl's head, filled with water from the nearby well.

This event is a depiction of the Miracle of Castel Rigone, a narrative rooted in the municipality of Passignano. Dating to the late 1660s, the painting reflects influences from the renowned painter Pietro da Cortona, particularly evident in the depiction of the Madonna in Glory and santa Margherita. These inspirations are drawn from Pietro Berrettini's works, which were accessible for study by the painter, Adriano Zabarelli. Additionally, the portrayal of Santa Margherita resonates with Pietro da Cortona's rendering, albeit with subtle differences in hand positioning and the absence of a crucifix. The composition of the painting subtly intertwines two distinct devotions—Margherita a Cortona and the miracle of Castel Rigone. This connection is symbolized by the presence of a divided coat of arms, potentially suggesting an alliance between the Passerini family of Cortona and a noble family from Passignano or the Perugia region. However, the exact origins of the painting remain speculative. Interestingly, despite its thematic alignment with the Miracle of Castel Rigone, it is improbable that the painting was originally commissioned for the chapel at Teccognano, constructed in the early 1790s and dedicated to San Giovanni da Tolentino. This discrepancy suggests that the painting was likely placed on the altar at a later date, possibly by Carlo Lucci himself or a subsequent owner, rather than being specifically commissioned for that purpose.

Set in a summer rural landscape, defined by ripe, golden wheat being harvested in the background by two peasants, the three depicted figures are rendered in clear adherence to their traditional iconography. On the left stands santa Margherita, while a young peasant girl is positioned on the right. Both face the centrally placed Madonna, creating a harmonious tableau. Adriano Zabarelli, the painter who crafted and signed the artwork in the bottom right corner, sought to create an authentic and enigmatic composition. The graceful single-handled terracotta amphora, carried by the young peasant girl, is depicted in unconventional manner. Filled with water from the well

behind her, it rests miraculously on her head by its neck rather than its base, without spilling a drop. The illustrated episode is, in fact, the Miracle of Castel Rigone, a hamlet of the municipality of Passignano, approximately 30 km from Cortona. Following such miracle, the Sanctuary of Maria Santissima dei Miracoli di Castel Rigone was built between the late 15th century and 1532. Outside the village walls, near the Sanctuary, the ancient public well, dug in 1367, still stands today. According to the story, in 1490, Marietta, young caretaker of the parish priest Don Mariotto, went to draw water from this well when an elegant Lady emerged from a dense grove. The "Lady" reportedly asked Marietta to inform the townspeople of her desire for a small chapel to be erected at that spot. When the young maid recounted the incident, she was dismissed as a heretical mystic. However, after repeated apparitions, the "Lady" revealed her true nature to the incredulous villagers, sending the girl home with the jug overturned on her head, yet still full of water. At that point, the inhabitants decided to inspect the site of the apparitions to cut down a thorny bramble, revealing the remains of an old crumbling wall upon which was a fresco depicting the Madonna. The miraculous event was still being described in documents as late as 1724.

In the painting, likely dating to the late 1660s, the Madonna in Glory at the center and santa Margherita on the left clearly show their reliance\ draw inspiration from compositions by the renowned painter Pietro da Cortona. These compositions were readily accessible for study by Adriano Zabarelli. The Madonna in Glory draws from Pietro Berrettini's "Apparizione della Madonna a San Francesco d'Assisi" in the church of the Santissima Annunziata in Arezzo, as well as "Madonna in gloria con i Santi Luca, Martina e la Beata Margherita" by Pietro Berrettini and his nephew Luca Berrettini, in the Institute of Santa Caterina in Cortona. Zabarelli depicted this subject on at least one other occasion, in "Apparizione della Madonna a Sant'Antonio da Padova", which bears his signature and is dated 1664. This artwork can be found in the church of the Madonna del Carmine in Mercatale di Cortona.

The preacher Santa Margherita on the left is evidently influenced by Pietro da Cortona's significant painting portraying "Santa Margherita da Cortona orante davanti al crocifisso". Although this work, created between the late 1630s and early 1640s, has since been lost, its existence is confirmed by an engraving by Giuseppe Testana shortly before 1667. The resemblance is striking, with minor differences such as the position of the hands — here, brought to the chest, whereas in the original model they are left open on the lap — and the absence of the crucifix. In this depiction, Margherita directs her adoring gaze towards the Madonna. Notably, the recent restoration process has revealed the previously imperceptible grid pattern of large rectangles on Margherita's robe, characteristic of the "taccolino," the fabric of the saint's dress, which is clearly visible in the Cortonese model.

The Madonna in glory serves as a subtle connection between two distinct devotions, each tied to a specific territory: Margherita of Cortona and the aforementioned miracle of Castello Rigone of Passignano. The coexistence in the composition - likely a unique feature - suggests a deliberate intention on the part of the painting's patronage, as indicated by the presence of a divided coat of arms. This heraldic emblem, split vertically through the center, combines two distinct family crests. On the left is the coat of arms of the Passerini family of Cortona, featuring a reclining bull with the Medici coat of arms positioned above, now clearly recognizable after the cleaning process; while the right side bears the coat of arms of a currently unidentified family.

The coat of arms could potentially allude to an alliance between the Passerini family of Cortona and a noble family Passignano (or from the Perugia area with interests in Passignano), possibly

formalized through a marriage, which might have prompted the commissioning of the painting. In this scenario, Santa Margherita would symbolize the homeland of one spouse, while the miracle of Castel Rigone would represent the homeland of the other. However, these hypotheses, although plausible, remain speculative. As for the painting's origin, its dating rules out that it was commissioned for the chapel, which constructed in the early 1790s at Teccognano by its owner Carlo Lucci, a nobleman from Cortona and a canon of the Cortona Cathedral.

The painting, lacking any thematic connection to san Giovanni da Tolentino, to whom the chapel has been dedicated since its consecration in 1794. It is plausible that the painting was subsequently placed on the altar, either by Carlo Lucci himself, possibly sourced from his private art collection or acquired from the market, or by a subsequent owner of the chapel.

Acknowledgments

Arch. Mariateresa Iaria, Dr. Bruno Gialluca, Dr.ssa Serena Nocentini, Dr.ssa Nadia Innocentini, Dr. Luca Tiezzi (Tiphys), Chiara Sabatini, Isabella Sabatini

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