



Ugolino Nicolini, **Bellezze da scoprire: La "Madonna del Fanciullo"**, *Il Messaggero di Perugia*, Sunday 7 June 1959, p. 5

When near Deruta, in Fanciullata, there is a chapel that invites you to stop. It is the Madonna del Fanciullo, and we also give the less poetic name and perhaps newer name, Madonna di Ranuccio.

This Maestà is almost unknown and it does not even attract the attention of passers-by, unfortunately. Yet a visit to this humble shrine can help us understand the soul of the Umbrian people.

"...] Fo facto nel 1459 e reluminata la Madonna nel [...]", today this writing is much damaged but it was perhaps put there by the devout commissioner of the painting, Ranuccio di Andrea Baglioni, who lived in the first half of the 1400s and who was the owner of a country estate at Sant'Angelo di Celle.

In the middle of the Maestà is the Madonna and standing Child who are both holding an olive branch. Six angels holding musical instruments surround the Virgin with two lower down genuflecting. On one side of these is Saint Anthony the Great and on the other Saint James the Apostle, venerated in Compostella. Outside the niche is Saint Bernardino of Siena and Saint Sebastian. Above is a type of double-curve moulding with an Annunciation where the only figure that can still be seen is the kneeling Virgin.

The local populace used the shrine for their religious offerings, as happened at most of the shrines one encounters at any country crossroads in Umbria. This is clearly portrayed by the painter in the saints he placed around the Madonna: St Anthony, St Bernardino, St Sebastian. These were the saints that the populace turned to for protection from the plague and the Perugians were especially devoted to them. The other saint that adorns the Madonna del Fanciullo Maestà is St James the Greater, shown with a pilgrim's staff, a clear allusion to the Compostella sanctuary.

Gnoli, and after him, Berenson both attributed this Maestà to Bartolomeo Caporali, or his school, but it only deigns a small mention. I hope the affection I feel for this rustic shrine that has led me to carrying out assiduous research on it, does not lead me to exaggerated conclusions, but I want to say anyway that this Maestà appears to me as one of the best things Caporali did.

Even the date of the fresco is precious: it is the oldest dated work that has come down to us from Benozzo's best student. Humidity and dust have removed the freshness from the colours but the heartfelt expressions of the Madonna and Child are sweet and delicate and are just like the stylistic poses found in the exquisite panels in the Uffizi Gallery and in the Art Gallery in Perugia (room XI, n. 125), attributed by some critics to Benozzo the Younger. The drape of the cloth at the waist, the characteristic loops in the material and the small roses in the vases can be seen in the picture in the Art Gallery which seems painted by the same hand as the Madonna del Fanciullo.



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The value of this fresco by the painter from Perugia is heightened by the consideration in which it was held by the authorities at various times. According to what is written at the bottom of the painting, the colours of the fresco were renewed in a later period.