

Correggio in San Francesco Church

By: Gianluca Nicolini

Translated by: Francesca Chiussi

In 1534, in the death year of Antonio Allegri, at least two of his pictorial masterpieces were on the altars of San Francesco. The first work that came to the church was the oil painting entitled *Madonna di San Francesco* (299 x 245,5 cm)—nowadays exhibited in the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden. The painting is signed on the wheel of Santa Caterina ('ANTO N IVS/ DE/ ALEGRIS/ P.'). It was completed in 1515. This painting embodies the main breaking point in the art of Allegri. While its first works show how firmly anchored he was in the Mantuan and Bolognese tradition, the last ones show his full integration in the Emilian Renaissance. The altarpiece was commissioned on the 30th of August of 1514 from the guardian of the church Frà Girolamo Cattania, thanks to Quirino Zaccardi's legacy. This prestigious and demanding task attests the young artist's renown in this area. The other masterpiece preserved in San Francesco church is the famous *Rest on the Flight to Egypt with Saint Francis*, an oil on canvas (129 x 106 cm) painted around 1518. It was destined to the chapel called Cappella del Paradiso—that later would be dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. At present it is exhibited in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. A recent study by Valter Pratissoli has proved that the painting was not commissioned from Francesco Munari for his own chapel—as Pungileoni claimed—, showing the way forward to new interpretations. As he used to do in all his works, Correggio gathered in a masterly way a series of significant meanings in a composition made of just four characters. Contrary to what recent studies maintain, the topic of this painting is not the Immaculate Conception. The artwork deals with Joseph as 'foster-father of the Son of God' and as 'guardian of the Holy Family'. This thesis seems to be confirmed by another altarpiece with the same subject, the famous *Madonna della Scodella*, painted in 1528 for the confraternity of Saint Joseph and now exhibited in the Galleria Nazionale in Parma. After the Principality of Correggio was annexed to the dominion of the Este family of Ferrara, Francesco I d'Este took away both paintings from San Francesco church and put them in his own gallery. At a later stage, they were brought to Dresden and Firenze, where they are now exhibited.