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The Polyptych of Ottana: the Life of Saint Francis on a Painted Panel of the Fourteenth Century

The altarpiece of Ottana represents an important part in the reconstruction of historical and artistic landscape of the Middle Ages in Sardinia. The purpose of this paper is to verify whether on the polyptych was used conventional iconography or whether there may have been elements of discontinuity and difference from the art that developed simultaneously in the Italian peninsula. The altarpiece is now kept in the former Romanesque cathedral dedicated to San Nicola, at the entrance of Ottana, located in the province of Nuoro. The work has been unequivocally attributed to the Master of the Franciscan Temperas, painter active in Naples between 1325 and 1375. An inscription, placed on the base of the throne of the Virgin, allows the identification of the commissioners of the work: Sylvester, bishop of Ottana and member of the Franciscan order, and Mariano, Crown Prince of Arborea. The painting, tempera on wood with a gold background, is divided into three main parts: the central one depicting saints Nicholas and Francis, to the right are the stories of the life of St. Nicholas, from the birth of the saint until his death, and to the left the stories of the life of St. Francis. The themes represented in the altarpiece are: *Noturnal Vision*, *Renunciation of Wordly Goods*, *Dream of Innocent III*, *Confirmation of the Rule*, *Vision of the Chariot of Fire*, *Sermon to the Birds*, *Stigmata* and *Saint's Death*. This analysis illustrates the author's choice of episodes from the life of Francis, omitting the miracles *post mortem*, in which he seems to follow the models encoded by Giotto at Assisi in the images derived from the translation of the *Legenda Maior* of St. Bonaventure. However, the adherence to the dictates of Giotto is only apparent, or not complete: it prevails in some scenes a different tradition, in accordance with other written sources or iconographic principles. We can not overlook the role of commissioners: the bishop of Ottana, Sylvester, was most probably advising on the approach in illustrating the life of St. Francis. The fact is that in Sardinia between the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Franciscans commissioned a number of works of great importance for the art scene on the island.