

*Ghirlandaria: Un manoscritto di ricordi della famiglia Ghirlandaio.*

Lisa Venturini, ed.

With Nicoletta Baldini. Biblioteca storica toscana I.76. Florence: Olschki, 2017. xviii + 472 pp. + 16 color pls. €55.

The drawings, paintings, and frescoes of the Ghirlandaio brothers, Domenico and Davide, the former sibling much better known than the latter, have had a wide popular appeal in the modern age, especially to the multitude of American students who take a study-abroad semester with one of the scores of programs offered by American universities in Florence. And nearly half a century ago, Michael Baxandall, in his brief but monumental *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, translated in full the contract between Domenico Ghirlandaio and the prior of the Ospedale degli Innocenti, demonstrating the extent of patrons' sophistication and knowledge about artistic techniques and materials, which in this case extended to prescribing the exact quality and cost of ultramarine. Scholars such as Jean Cadogan, John Paoletti, and Gary Radke have exploited the rich documentation of various artistic commissions undertaken by Domenico and Davide. It is not merely accessibility and popularity that make the Ghirlandaio workshop worthy of study; it was there that Michelangelo himself served as apprentice.

The present volume results from the happy circumstance that in 1911 the Archivio Segreto Vaticano acquired the archives of the Roman Archconfraternity of the Gonfalone. Among the archconfraternity's treasures was a *fondo* known as the Eredità Ghirlandari, which had been a testamentary gift to the archconfraternity in 1734. Consisting of forty-two *buste* and twenty-five codices, this collection documents the history of the Bigordi family from 1336 to 1734, a branch of which became identified with the surname Ghirlandari. The part of the collection dealing most directly with Domenico and Davide was compiled in the middle of the sixteenth century by Ridolfo di Alessandro, Domenico's great-grandson, from an inventory left by Alessandro, Domenico's grandson, which Ridolfo directly copied and described. As one might expect from the genre of *ricordanze*, we are left with a welter of details about births, marriages, deaths, apprenticeships, and accounts. So far as the professional lives of Davide and Domenico are concerned, the Vatican manuscript poses no serious challenges to Vasari's account in the *Lives of the Artists*—so much so that the editors argue, for good reason, that the two documents are in dialogue with one another.

This is not to say that that discovery and publication of the documents in the Ghirlandaria yield no new or useful information about artistic activity. The genealogical table, handsomely reproduced in figure 2, gives the precise birth and death dates of all the members of the Ghirlandaio family. Thus, we learn that Domenico was born on 2 June 1448, a Sunday, hence his given name. The Ghirlandaria manuscript fully corroborates Vasari's story that the family's change of name from Bigordi to Ghirlandario came about because one of their workshops became famous for the garlands it produced

for rich young Florentine women. The manuscript also narrows the window for the painting of the fresco of the Saint Francis cycle in the Sassetti Chapel, in Santa Trinità, to the dates 17 June 1483 to the end of December 1485, a project involving both Davide and Domenico Ghirlandaio.

Nearly as remarkable as the Vatican manuscript itself is the all-too-brief life of the leader of the transcription project, Lisa Venturini (1960–2005), whose life work Nicoletta Baldini has admirably carried on in her introductory essay and notes to the manuscript. The introductory section does not merely summarize the documents at some length but evaluates their importance in the light of all the other known documentation about this remarkable family, doing justice to both Italian and anglophone scholarship. The introductory essay meticulously documents the history of the papers themselves. There is only one very minor error I wish had been addressed: Domenico Ghirlandaio's initial annual salary as an apprentice is quoted as "fiorini 11 e soldi 4 per fiorino" (56). The transcription of the document makes this puzzling entry somewhat clearer: "fiorini 11 a soldi 4 per fiorino," only to raise another puzzle. Surely the correct exchange rate would have been four lire per florin. Was the quotation of soldi dutifully transcribed from the original, or was it transcribed incorrectly?

Regardless, the introductory material makes frequent reference to works executed by Domenico, Davide, and Ridolfo, often in collaboration with Alessio Baldovinetti, and the Olschki publishing house has been generous in publishing full-color photographs of the major art works mentioned in the text. The introductory essay will be of immense interest and help to scholars and is punctuated with occasionally arresting detail. There is reason to be grateful for this illuminating exposure of the ordinary details of the lives of this well-known artistic family. Domenico and Davide, who often pleased their patrons by depicting them as attending personages in grand religious narratives, would surely have approved of both the detective work of their immediate descendants and of Venturini and Baldini's detailed social, economic, and familial contextualization.

Philip R. Gavitt, *Saint Louis University*  
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*Still Life before Still Life*. David Ekserdjian.  
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What exactly is a still life? The question is not really asked or answered in this book, and that's probably for the best. David Ekserdjian recognized that a labored definition would not have been productive, because we know well enough what "still life" means. Or so we think. Reading the essay and savoring the images in this substantial, handsomely produced volume coaxes reflection. The *before* of the title gently insists there is something different about the *Still Life* on either side of it. A notional dividing