Red and White Grapes with Plums in a Pierced Ceramic Bowl

Fede Galizia
Milan or Trento 1578 - 1630 Milan

Oil on panel
27,5 x 38 cm (10 3/8 by 15 in.)

Provenance:
Sale - Sotheby's London, 12 December 1984

Exhibitions:
Forma Vera, Bergamo 1985
Lombardia 1620 circa. Natura morta delle origini, Bergamo 1989, no. 8

Literature:
Veca / Lorenzelli (1985) p.142, pl.22
Bona Castellotti (1985) pl.306
Morandotti (1989) I, p.222
Caroli (1989) p.88, no.34

Fede Galizia's fame is based on a rather considerable production of still lives with fruits and vegetables, although her catalogue raisonné accounts for some remarkable portraits and altarpieces. The altarpieces carry a distinct trademark of the Counter Reformation. With Fede Galizia the true and real birth of still lives took place on Lombardian soil even though this region had earlier witnessed the sporadic still life by Vincenzo Campi and Ambrogio Figino and as well as the arrival of the famous basket Fiscella by Caravaggio in the collection of Frederico Borromeo.

The reconstruction of Fede’s œuvre is here based on one single painting, signed and dated 1602 on the back, which had once been in the collection Anholt, Amsterdam. Unfortunately today this work can only be appreciated in the literature. A closely related version of the Anholt picture helps to understand the stylistic quality. Parting from this point of reference, today’s studies have tried to enlarge and better define the artistic production of Fede. After the pioneering work of Bottari, were the contributions by Alberto Veca and Pietro Lorenzelli, followed by the important studies by Morandotti and the most recent monograph by Caroli. Even if all the hitherto studies have increased the knowledge about Fede Galizia, the fact remains that the catalogue raisonné reveals some problems and requires additional verification.

1) see: Fede Galizia, Portrait of Paolo Morigia, 1596, canvas 88 x 79 cm, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan
2) Fede Galizia, Dish with Grapes and Plums, a Rose and Pears on a Table, panel 23 x 31 cm, signed and dated on back of the panel 1602, present location unknown
3) Benedict (1938) p.309, pl.14
4) compare: Fede Galizia, Dish with Grapes and Plums, a Rose and Pears on a Table, panel 30 x 35 cm, Salerno (1985) pp.48-49, pl.14; Caroli (1989) p.82, no.6, ill. in color; with Silvano Lodi in 1985; priv. coll. Bassano
5) Bottari (1963) pp.309-318
Veca / Lorenzelli (1985)
Morandotti (1989) I, p.222
Caroli (1989)
cat. no. II
These two paintings by Fede certainly belong to the small group of securely attributed works. The present picture and its pendant (pl.3) form probably a pair, since they are not only of the same size but they were also offered for sale together in London. The still life is painted on a panel of cherry wood. That its condition is pristine is shown by the fact that we can still appreciate the tactile quality, together with the lighting of the ceramic basket and of the grapes through to the seeds. We can also appreciate the details of the pears painted with a tender impasto in copper-green, red and yellow, while she treated parts of the plums with a silky glaze. The curious effect of transparency in the lower bunch of grapes on the right is probably caused by Fede Galizia having added these grapes later and using lighter glazes, which now permits the earlier painting to come through.

The attribution of the present picture to Galizia is confirmed by Bona Castellotti, Caroli, and Morandotti. Iconographically it relates to the signed and dated painting from the Anholt collection and in another version in a private collection in Bassano del Grappa. Morandotti has already pointed out that in these two paintings as well as in our painting, the plums in the foreground and the center are placed in very much the same way. This applies too in the slightly protruding rim of the depicted bowls.

Apart from the iconographical coincidence, the present picture clearly shows a deep affinity to the two often cited paintings. Especially when compared to the painting in Bassano, our picture bears an affinity in the chromatic scale, playing with tonality, approaching that of dusk. Furthermore the extremely controlled and severe pictorial technique, impeccable in the naturalistic handling of the objects, is at the same time synthetic and essential. To these affinities running between the two paintings the clear consonance of the poetic intonation is enhanced. The presentation of the objects is simple, silent and free from any decorative temptation. Longhi once correctly described this intonation as "sad". This artistic expression has to be seen in the light of the Counter Reformation, which was present in Milan under Borromeo. This spirit can also be found in Fede's altarpiece.

A closer analysis of the execution of the present painting provides evidence of a slightly freer brush stroke in the treatment of shadows on the pears and the grapes. The reflections of light are applied rapidly, similar in its handling to a painting by Jan Breughel the Elder which was also in the collection of Frederico Borromeo. This advanced artistic experience may indicate a very early date, as already suggested by Caroli, but definitely after the painting from the Anholt collection (1602). This hypothesis is supported by another comparison to a painting by Fede with a slightly different composition.

6) Veca / Lorenzelli (1985) p.142, pl.22
7) Caroli (1989) no.35, pl.35
8) Bona Castellotti (1985) pl.306
9) Caroli (1989) p.88, no.34
10) Morandotti (1989) p.222
11) Longhi (1950) p.35
12) Caroli (1989) p.88
13) Natale / Morandotti (1989) p.203
Pl. 1  Fede Galizia, *Fruits with Ceramic Bowl*
Private collection
The painting from the Lodi collection (pl.2) shows a cleaner, more controlled and smoother brushstroke, similar to the picture in Bassano. Therefore the present painting could be dated later, because with this well known subject Fede pays more attention, in an illusionistic sense, to atmospheric feeling than to detail. This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that in the painting in the Lodi collection the bunch of white grapes is depicted as being smaller than in the present picture, where it seems to be a later addition, made by Fede, who might have thought first of painting something similar to the Lodi painting. But when she executed the painting, she changed her mind and substituted the yellow plum in the Lodi picture with more grapes.

The fate of the above mentioned painting has been confirmed by the existence of another painting (pl.4)\(^{14}\), that basically repeats the compositions of the afore-mentioned paintings. This third painting also has a pendant (pl.1)\(^{15}\) which compares closely to the pendant (pl.3) of the present painting (cat.no.II). This further reinforces the fact of existing pendants in the œuvre of Fede Galizia.\(^{16}\)

Francesco Frangi

(Translation from the Italian by EL)

---

14) Private collection
15) Private collection
16) I would like to thank Alessandro Morandotti for having pointed out to me these hitherto unpublished paintings.
Pl.4  Fede Galizia, *Fruit with Pierced Ceramic Vessel*
Private collection