

LUCID GRANDEUR IN SEARCH OF PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

WEDNESDAY 6 – MONDAY 11 MAY 2020 (6 DAYS)

LECTURERS: PAULA & GEOFFREY NUTTALL

£1925

- Discover the world of Piero della Francesca
- Itinerary includes masterpieces in Tuscany, Umbria & the Marches
- Full day in glorious Urbino
- Gentle pace with time to explore independently
- Good hotel in handsome Arezzo, with excellent food



Arezzo, San Francesco, Discovery of the True Cross Fresco

OVERVIEW

Piero della Francesca is one of the most fascinating, if enigmatic, of renaissance painters. A hundred years ago he was virtually unknown, a footnote within the narrative of Florentine painting, overshadowed by better known artists whose works were easily accessible, geographically and visually, such as Fra Filippo Lippi and Fra Angelico. Aldous Huxley changed our perception of Piero with his famous essay *The Best Picture* extolling Piero's *Resurrection*, hidden away in a then obscure town called Sansepolcro. Huxley's praise led to what first became a private cult and then grew into a stampede of enthusiasm by the 1980s. This was captured in a grotesque, if comic, depiction of hordes of Volvo owning British tourists making their way along "The Piero Trail" in John Mortimer's sardonic novel, *Summer's Lease*. Luckily, this craze has been in retreat for some years as the denizens of "Chiantishire" have moved on to other, perhaps less challenging, enthusiasms.

Piero's cool, majestic style has long attracted some of the finest art historians of our time: Roberto Longhi, Kenneth Clark and John Pope Hennessy have all written with varying levels of perception on an artist whose paintings resist simplistic, surface readings of their occasionally obscure subjects. Of course, these remarkable paintings have also attracted a few lunatic iconographers, a trait frequently found amongst younger art historians.

The artist was born, probably no later than 1420, in what was then Borgo San Sepolcro, in Umbrian territory, shortly thereafter ceded to Tuscany. He is first recorded working in Florence in 1439 with Domenico Veneziano and it is clear that this artist's work, together with that of Andrea del Castagno, Uccello and above all, Masaccio were fundamental to the creation of his style. He worked both on panel and in fresco and commissions took him to many of the most sophisticated courts of central and northern Italy, from Rome to Ferrara, Rimini and Urbino. It seems that it was at Urbino where Piero's other great skills found full expression, first as an exponent of the use of geometry in the design of paintings, and second a Netherlandish-influenced oil technique with a concomitant interest in describing light and texture.

Throughout his working life he returned repeatedly to his native town, involving himself in its civic affairs, as well as painting a number of works for various local patrons. Indeed, his major surviving work in fresco, a rare subject depicting the Legend of the True Cross, was painted for nearby Arezzo. It is in this border territory where Tuscany, Umbria and the Marches all meet, that there is much to discover. Building on all this scholarship, our six-day visit will introduce you to Piero at first hand and will, we hope, present these famous panels and frescoes via an overview of all the best in recent research.

We shall stay in Arezzo in eastern Tuscany, at the **4* Hotel Continentale**. This is ideally situated in the heart of the historic centre, within walking distance of all the sites of interest. It also has a panoramic roof terrace with fine views over this lovely city.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Wednesday 6 May – We fly from Heathrow to Rome Fiumicino arriving early afternoon. We drive to **Arezzo**, pausing for a comfort stop en route on the motorway. Having checked into the **4* Hotel Continentale**, there will be a group dinner in a restaurant in Arezzo's historic centre. Wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Thursday 7 May – Today is spent exploring **Arezzo**. First, we visit **San Francesco**, where in the choir we find Piero's celebrated fresco cycle devoted to the *Legend of the True Cross*, a theme usually associated with the Franciscan Order. A work of some complexity, it is nonetheless the finest of his mature works to survive, and one of the most important fresco cycles of the early Renaissance, reflecting Piero's knowledge of both Florentine art and Classical Antiquity. The morning concludes with a visit to the town's **Duomo**. We continue to the **Piazza Grande** where, under Vasari's wonderful **Loggia**, we pause for a group lunch. Nearby, we shall visit the **Casa Vasari**, the house which the great Mannerist painter, architect and writer, designed for his retirement – Arezzo was his birthplace. The remainder of the afternoon and evening will be free.

Day 3: Friday 8 May – We head eastwards into Umbria to **Citta di Castello**, a bustling market centre where we spend much of the day, broken by a group lunch. We shall visit the town's **Duomo** and the **Picture Gallery**, which has works by Ghiberti, Perugino and the young Raphael. After some free time for independent exploration, we return to Arezzo where the evening will be free.

Day 4: Saturday 9 May – **Sansepolcro** is a charming, small town and it was here that Piero della Francesca was born, sometime between 1410 and 1420, and where he was based for much of his life, dying here in 1482. The **Duomo** is medieval in date, much rebuilt from the thirteenth century onwards and there are a few altarpieces of local interest. The great attraction is the **Civic Museum**, originally a renaissance hospital, which contains Piero's complex *Madonna della Misericordia* polyptych, on which he seems to have worked for many years, and his outstanding depiction of *The Resurrection*. After a group lunch, we drive to the small village of **Monterchi** to see Piero's *Madonna del Parto* fresco, contained in a small votive chapel in the cemetery where the artist's mother was buried. We return to our hotel and the evening will be free.

Day 5: Sunday 10 May – **Urbino** is one of the loveliest cities in Italy. The seat of the Dukes of Urbino, Piero found in Duke Federico da Montefeltro a patron of outstanding sophistication who appreciated his many talents. Our day will focus on exploring the wonderful **Ducal Palace**, surely the finest example of renaissance palace design in Italy? It is now the **National Gallery of the Marches** and contains Piero's *Flagellation*, plus his intimate *Senigallia Madonna*, and an *Ideal City* that has often been attributed to him. As you will see, the lucid, rational architecture of the Palace's courtyard and interiors chime with the spirit of Piero's works. Urbino has other buildings of note, including the **Duomo** and you will have ample time to explore at leisure. Lunch is not included today and on our return to Arezzo, there will be a final group dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 6: Monday 11 May – Following some free time in Arezzo, we depart for Rome, pausing for a snack lunch (not included). We arrive mid-afternoon at Fiumicino Airport for the return flight to Heathrow.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £1925 **Price without flights** £1765 **Deposit** £275 **Single Supplement** £135 (Double for Sole Use)

Hotel 5 nights with breakfast at the 4* Hotel Continentale, Arezzo

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA546** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1045**, arrive Rome Fiumicino **1425**

Return: **BA559** Depart Rome Fiumicino **1730** arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1910**

Price includes 2 dinners & 3 lunches with water, wine & coffee, services of Paula & Geoffrey Nuttall, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities

Not included Travel to/ from Heathrow, 3 dinners & 2 lunches



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