



# ORATORY OF SAN ROCCO Villafranca di Verona



## The frescoes

At Saint Rocco, the fresco painting reaches its highest level of expression of the whole of Villafranca, both in terms of the artistic level and the dimension of the painted surfaces. The cycle is the work of artists of the school of Domenico Morone (late 15<sup>th</sup> century), one of the most important masters of the time. The recent restoration has partially recovered this cycle, which is very ruined. Left of the entrance door: *Crucifixion* with the Virgin Mary and Saint Antonio at the foot of the cross and with Saint Sebastian (on the left) and Saint Rocco (on the right). Right, above the window, *the Virgin Mary enthroned with Saint Rocco and Saint Sebastian*, fresco no longer legible. Above the entrance door, *Saint in a landscape with the castle of Villafranca*. Above, at the centre of the tympanum in a wreath of leaves and fruit, within a medallion, *Christ blessing*.

Inside, another cycle of frescoes included between painted architectural elements. Three on the upper level: *Flight to Egypt* with Saint Rocco (with the recently discovered inscription, under the painting, of the commissioner Matteo del fu Bartolomeo de Crescimbeni), at the centre, on the triumphal arch, the *Annunciation*. From the oculus to the centre of the pediment, *God the Father who sends the dove of the Holy Spirit to the Virgin*. On the right side, *San Rocco*.

On the lower level, from the left: *The Virgin Mary enthroned with Child and Saint Rocco*, *The Virgin Mary enthroned with Child*, *Saint Rocco and kneeling worshipper*, *The Virgin Mary enthroned with Child*, very ruined picture.

In the west lunette of the presbytery: *Virgin Mary of Mercy* with patrons. In the cross vault, in the *vele* between the *clipei*, the symbols of the four evangelists.



COMITATO di SAN ROCCO  
VILLAFRANCA di VERONA

## The paintings and the statues

The paintings. The most important is the altarpiece by Giuseppe Le Grù (1715-1775) with *Saint Rocco*, *Saint Girolamo* (or *Saint Onorio*) and *Saint Sebastian*, commissioned perhaps after the plague of 1630. Also *The Virgin Mary with Child and Saint Filippo Neri*, lobed oval, attributable to Antonio Perotti (1712-1793). *Saint Carlo Bartolomeo*, by unknown of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. *Friar with breviary* by unknown of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. *The Last Supper* and *Meeting on the road to Emmaus*, recently attributed to the painter Giuseppe Le Grù. The statues. *Saint Rocco* and *Saint Sebastian*, painted wooden sculptures by an anonymous artist of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. *Crucifix* of 1700, recently restored and placed on the altar. *Virgin Mary with Child*, recently restored and placed (2014) in a case on the left of the altar. Sculpture in polychrome wood of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, attributed to the Veronese sculptor Badile III: it is the most precious work of the Oratory and one of the most important expressions of the period.



## The Church

It was 1480 when, after the plague that had decimated the population in the last two years, Villafranca decided to celebrate on the day of Saint Rocco, the holy thaumaturge. To him the pleas of the community had been addressed, to him was dedicated the oratory built at one end of the main street of the town to look at the castle and the great wall, border of the territories of the Serenissima. The oratory of Saint Rocco presents a simple gabled architectural structure with a modest tiburium above the presbytery cross and an open aedicule with a small bell next to the roof, in line with the concept of poverty brought forward by Franciscanism. It is the only expression, in the area of Villafranca, of the piety and art of the years between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore, it is an "ex voto" oratory to the saint who had been venerated throughout the Middle Ages to pre-

vent or overcome illnesses. The worship of San Rocco (along with that of other protectors of the people against epidemics, such as Saint Hadrian and Saint Sebastian) had been disseminated by the Confraternities, also present in the oratory of Villafranca. But the oratory is also a tangible example of the Marian devotion that had grown at the end of the Middle Ages; it is no coincidence that the Virgin is present throughout the sequence of the frescoes. Particularly significant, in this sense, is the choice, among the many possible iconographies, of the Virgin Mary of Mercy, visible in the west lunette of the presbytery's cross area. "Under the protective and reassuring mantle of the Virgin" wrote Giuseppe Fagagnini and Graziano Tavan in "L'immagine del sacro nel territorio villafranchese dal XIII al XIX secolo", "actually the people found ideal comfort during the great epidemics, against which they invoked her maternal intercession".

