

Enguerrand Charonton Biography

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Biography

The French painter Enguerrand Charonton (ca. 1410-still active 1466), or Quarton, was one of the finest masters of the school of Provence. His "Coronation of the Virgin" is the most magnificent French altarpiece of the 15th century.

The origin and training of Enguerrand Charonton are unknown. He left Laon for the south of France in 1444 and worked in Aix, Arles, and Avignon until 1466. The contract for his *Virgin of Mercy* (1453), a long rectangular panel, is still preserved; it states that it was to be painted by Charonton and Pierre Villate of Limoges as a votive offering to a convent in Avignon.

The detailed contract for Charonton's *Coronation of the Virgin* (1454) has also survived. It specified that the zones of hell and purgatory, earth, sky, and paradise should be shown and that paradise was to be the locale of the crowning of the Virgin Mary by God the Father and the Son, identical in appearance, and by the dove of the Holy Ghost. This Trinitarian coronation expresses the Filioque doctrine (the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son), which had become Church dogma in 1439.

On either side of the Virgin are ranks of adoring angels, saints, innocent children, and the blessed--in short, the entire Christian community. The apparition occupies more than three-quarters of the surface of the panel. Below, on earth, Jean de Montagnac, commissioner of the work, kneels before a crucified Christ. Against a Provençal landscape Jerusalem appears at the right and Rome at the left, both cities being abbreviated fantasies of Charonton. On the side of Rome, as the contract specified, are two revelations of God to man: the Mass of St. Gregory and Moses and the burning bush. The bottom stratum reveals many little figures in the zones of hell and purgatory. The composition is dogmatically and hieratically conceived, like a sculptured Gothic tympanum, and it is iconographically related to St. Augustine's *City of God*.

The picture is a blaze of bright color, especially red, blue, white, and gold. Noteworthy aspects of Charonton's style are the simplified, sculptural forms, linear patterning, stereometric construction of the distant landscape, balancing of hues, delicacy of shadowing, and an elegance that has always been a hallmark of French art. These characteristics are also evident in the great *Pietà* from Avignon (ca. 1460), with which Charonton has been credited.