

There is little known about the life of Catherine of Austria prior to her death in 1323. Born in Vienna in 1295, she was one of twelve children of Albert I of Germany and Elisabeth of Tirol. She was engaged twice before ultimately marrying Charles, Duke of Calabria in 1316, but they bore no children during their seven years together. Prior to her death, she gave a generous donation to the San Lorenzo Maggiore church in order to build a chapel dedicated to Louis of Toulouse. Due to her contribution, Tino di Camiano was commissioned to build her tomb during renovations in the church the year that she died. Unfortunately, not much has been revealed as to the cause of her death, perhaps because the details were lost during the onset of the Black Death in 1348. What is clear, though, is that the revolution of tomb building has moved forward with this creation.

The gothic tomb features a multi-tiered marble façade, covered in intricate carvings and fine mosaic work. It stands upon four columns supported by the backs of lions that look outward towards the viewer. The main columns have innovative, twisted bands of patterned mosaics between the carvings in red, gold, and green. There are also smaller supports behind the lions that feature figures partially hidden by low-relief foliage. The main focus of the tomb is clearly the cross section that connects the columns; there are three figures separated by fields of green, gold, and red mosaic work on the front of it. These are John the Evangelist, Madonna, and

Anthony of Padua.¹ The figures support the resting sarcophagus of Catherine who wears a crown and a thin, royal robe. Above her, atop the columns, a golden baldachin is decorated with more tiny mosaic work. Three more figures are within this arch, including Jesus flanked by two angels. Adorning the front of it, a fleur de lis pattern joins at the crest bringing attention to the two final figures of Mary holding the baby Jesus at the very top in a trefoil design. An overarching canopy accentuates and brings together the whole piece, with complimenting pinnacles on either side of the arch.

Tino di Camaino, probable pupil of Giovanni Pisano,² constructed Catherine's tomb beginning in May of 1323. Camaino also worked on tombs in Siena, Florence, and Pisa but, after finishing Catherine's tomb, he stayed in Naples for the remainder of his career. He was a well-regarded artist and was one of the first Sienese sculptors to be brought to Naples under commission. Within a very short time, Neapolitan tombs began to take on foreign aspects of sculpture due to this trend of importing artisans. He collaborated with Southern Italian craftspeople concerning mosaics to create a new genre of tombs altogether.³ Although Catherine was a duchess, she was not regarded as a powerful influence in the running of the San Lorenzo Maggiore. Therefore, her tomb, although treated with care, is sometimes interpreted as an experimentation with combining the skill of mosaic work with the crafting tombs. This practice was later perfected in the making of the tomb of Mary

¹ [Perkins, Charles C., and Charles C. Perkins. *Italian sculptors: being a history of sculpture in northern, southern, and eastern Italy*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868. Print.](#)

² [Warr, Cordelia, and Janis Elliott. *Art and architecture in Naples, 1266-1713: new approaches*. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Print.](#)

³ [White, John. *Art and architecture in Italy 1250-1400*. 3rd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Print.](#)

of Hungary. Traditional mosaics adorn the ceiling of the church, highlighting Jesus and Mary surrounded by robed figures and florals in vivid colors, among other scenes.

The appearance of mosaic on this tomb is highly unusual for the time. The first traces of mosaics date back to around 4000 BC in an ancient Uruk civilization in Mesopotamia. By the 4th century BC, mosaic work had moved to decorate ancient Grecian floors.⁴ Initially, artists used small pieces of shells and stones to construct an image, but then it was discovered how to paint or color glass and these were used instead. These glass pieces, or tesserae, were opaque and resemble what modern mosaics are made of. Eventually, mosaics moved to decorate churches and their ceilings. In Byzantine art, which was highly regarded in Ravenna, mosaic work was considered a privileged and private language that was only used to depict spiritual, magical scenes. Up until Catherine's tomb was constructed, the closest mosaic pieces would come to tombs would be the rooms that housed them.

Catherine's tomb was specifically built for the church of San Lorenzo Maggiore and has remained there since it was originally designed. Camaino's involvement in constructing the tomb has been contested, however, particularly due to the fact that it is not mounted to a wall like his other works. It is sometimes attributed to Gagliardo Primario, but there are some distinguishing characteristics specific to Camaino's work. For example, his simplified way of carving figures

⁴ "A Journey Into the World of Mosaics: Historical and Contemporary Use." : *Technology/Future : Publications : IIDA*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.iida.org/content.cfm/a-journey-into-the-world-of-mosaics-historical-and-contemporary-use>>.

proves that it is indeed made by him.⁵ This artist set such a trend with Catherine's tomb, particularly with the addition of mosaic, that other artists began mimicking his work throughout Naples and, eventually, all over Italy.⁶ Following the Black Death, the structure and number of tombs began to change.⁷ While there was often still a sculpted figure of the deceased, sometimes they would depict suffering in the last moments of life or simply a corpse. This transition occurred late in the 15th century, and adopted the term, "transi," which, translated, means "stiff."

Occasionally, people would have time to put in requests as to what their tomb would look like, such as a commission by Ligier Richier in 1547 that holds the corpse of Rene de Chalon. Prior to his death during battle, he ordered that a life size skeleton with pieces of skin connecting some bones adorn his final resting place. Transi figures were not limited to tombs and quickly spread across Europe; paintings also adapted to this new outlook on death.⁸ On the tomb of the Fuggers in 16th century Germany, Albrecht Durer was commissioned to make two transi-themed plaques to adorn some of the tombs. By the end of the 16th century, though, this short-lived phase of decomposing corpses is replaced with the depiction of clean skeletons.

The location of the tomb within the church itself has perplexed many, particularly during reconstruction after one of several earthquakes that shook the

⁵ Cervigno, Dino S.. "Italian Bookshelf." *Bookshelf 2012*. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 Mar. 2014. <http://www.ibiblio.org/annali/2012/bookshelf_2012.pdf>.

⁶ Bruzelius, Caroline Astrid. *The stones of Naples: church building in Angevin Italy, 1266-1343*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. Print.

⁷ "The Influence of Plague on Art from the Late 14th to the 17th Century ." *MSU Entomology Group*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Apr. 2014. <<http://entomology.montana.edu/historybug/YersiniaEssays/Medrano.htm>>.

⁸ Cohen, Kathleen. *Metamorphosis of a death symbol; the transi tomb in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance.*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973. Print.

church. Normally, Camaino constructed wall-mounted tombs, but this one is freestanding in the archway of the ambulatory. Catherine was certainly not the first to be buried in this church. Remains of frescoes and one partial carving in the south transept lead to clues of royal burials of Prince Raymond Berengar and Prince Louis beginning at around 1305. These tombs were disturbed and ultimately mostly destroyed in a reconstruction of the church a few hundred years after they were originally installed.⁹ Catherine's tomb, however, was added in a different part of the church while it was under construction in 1323, and still stands today. It is unclear if the sculptor knew the exact space the tomb would be displayed in but, since Catherine had made such a generous donation to the San Lorenzo Maggiore just prior to her death, she was ultimately buried there.

Although no details are known about the life of Catherine of Austria, she will forever be remembered as Camaino's first tomb in Naples. She will also always don the initial attempts—and successes—at incorporating the craft of mosaic work into preserving the memory of the dead. No one may ever know the truth about Catherine's mysterious life, however, in death, she will never be forgotten.
