

The Story of Joseph



Biagio d'Antonio
Italian, about 1485
Tempera and gold leaf on panel
26 1/4 x 58 3/4 in.
70.PB.41

Background Information

Drawn from the Old Testament, a series of continuous narratives depicts episodes from the life of Joseph, the favorite son of the Hebrew patriarch Jacob. To make the story easier to follow, Biagio d'Antonio included inscriptions identifying the main characters.

In the left-hand loggia, Jacob, seated on a throne, sends Joseph to his half-brothers tending sheep in the field. In the far left corner, the brothers, jealous of their father's love for Joseph, strip him of his jacket and throw him into a pit. Passing merchants purchase the young boy from his brothers for twenty pieces of silver. In the background to the right, the merchants board the ship that will take them and their cargo to Egypt. In the right-hand loggia, the brothers show a blood-smeared coat to their father as evidence that Joseph is dead. With his head in his hand, Jacob mourns his son, whom he believes to be dead.

A companion panel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art depicts the next sequence of events in Joseph's life. Originally framed next to one another, these two panels would have been inserted into the paneling of a room in a Tuscan family's home.

The Story of Joseph, Biagio d'Antonio

About the Artist

Biagio d'Antonio
b. 1446 Florence, Italy, d. 1516 Florence, Italy
painter
Italian

Biagio d'Antonio was trained in Florence, where he was first influenced by the elegant, linear style of Fra Filippo Lippi. By 1476 he had established himself as an independent painter in Faenza, where he remained for at least thirty years and built a large *bottega*, or workshop. He continued to work in other parts of Italy as well. Biagio collaborated with Domenico Ghirlandaio, considered the best fresco painter in Florence, incorporating Ghirlandaio's compositions and facial types into his own paintings. Biagio favored the bright, crystalline colors, carpets of flowers, genre details, and landscape backgrounds of northern European art, though scholars are uncertain about precisely how he became exposed to Flemish and German painting. Biagio painted many religious subjects, particularly the *Madonna and Child*, and he may also have made miniatures for a Bible. In his mythological and classical subjects, Biagio animated his pictorial narratives with rich and highly colored costumes and armor. He created many panels for *cassoni*, the elaborately carved and decorated marriage chests that held a bride's trousseau.

Questions for Teaching

Look carefully at the painting and notice each scene. While written in Italian and may be difficult to read, the artist included the names of important characters.

Look closely at the two figures inside the left room of the building, Jacob, and his son Joseph. What do you think they are doing?

Where else do you see these two figures? What are they doing now?

Describe the setting. Where is this taking place?

Follow the figure of Joseph, wearing a blue tunic (a gown like outer garment that is often belted) and leggings, throughout the painting. Describe what he is doing each time you see him.

How does each scene combine to tell the story of Joseph?