

Antonio Circignani

[aka *il Pomarancio*]

Italian painter of the late-Renaissance/Mannerism period
1567-1630

He was the eldest son of the painter Nicolò and of Theodora Catalucci and, like his father, he was nicknamed the Pomarancio. He was born with certainty in Unibria, probably, in Città della Pieve, around 1567, soon started painting, collaborated with his father in the numerous decorative enterprises that occupied him as a painter and painter of stories in Rome and its surroundings. The first document that concerns him is in fact an inscription that reveals him as an aid by Nicolò in the frescoes painted in 1589 in the abbey of Valvisciolo near Sermoneta. In February 1595 he married Lodovico Fetti in Città della Pieve Aurelia, from which he had a daughter the following year. On the death of his father he was the universal heir of his substance and, starting from that moment, he began his independent activity as a painter.

The first work certainly attributable to CIRCIGNANI and datable, for the data of the style still too close to those of Nicolò, in the early seventeenth century, are the frescoes, with *episodes of the life of Christ*, for the church of S. Maria della Consolazione in Rome. Subsequent, for the most complex and rich variety of figurative references, are the fresco paintings that decorate the ceiling of a room and the chapel of pal. Antici Mattei (1600). CIRCIGNANI's painting here shows that it has updated on the most important texts of the last Roman mannerism, above all it reveals interest in the work of Cavalier d'Arpino and other artists who attempt a revitalization from the tired tendencies of mannerism.

This process is even more advanced in the chapel of S. Aniceto of the Altemps palace. The paintings of the walls with *Scenes from the life of the titular saint*, and those of the presbytery with *episodes from the life of Mary* are from CIRCIGNANI

There is a simplified composition, with studied symmetry relationships, a search for a more full-bodied naturalism that determines a greater consistency of the chiaroscuro and chromatic highlights and a more lively attention to the descriptive data of the figuration. The contact with the currents of the "reformed" Mannerists such as the Passignano, the same Roncalli and the young Gentileschi appears in this work even more evident and testifies of a labor that in the subsequent works will arrive to the luministic effects of mediated Caravaggio's ancestry.

The most dense shadows in their opposition to the light rises identify in the chapel of S. Alberto in S. Maria in Traspontina the most mature outcome of the work of the Circignani.

The decoration, completed within the second decade of the seventeenth century because it was mentioned by Mancini (1617-21), consists of the altar painting with *S. Alberto* and in the frescoes that cover the walls, the ceiling and the under-arch of the chapel with the *Stories of the life of the saint, angels and prophets*. CIRCIGNANI demonstrated not only

intended to understand the new motivations of seventeenth-century painting of Caravaggesca derivation, but also to "know how to discreetly stand them up to the needs of the mural decoration".

These are the works that document the activity of CIRCIGNANI in Rome, but many others are lost. These include the decoration of the gallery of Cardinal Varallo and of three rooms in the Palazzo Lante; the second right chapel of S. Andrea della Valle (ibid.); a painting with the *Madonna es. Giuseppe* in the collection of Cardinal Giustiniani; some works in the Vatican basilica.

A further knowledge of the painter's activity is assured, as well as by the biography of Baglione (1642), of a precious public document in which CIRCIGNANI, asking to be able to complete a work in S. Pietro, left unfinished by Roncalli for his death, remembers his activity in Florence with the frescoes in the arcades of S. Maria Nuova and in Tuscany ("in many places throughout the State"), in Narni, Terni, Amelia, Spoleto, Assisi, Sezze, Modena, Urbino. The works of Umbria and Marche are either unknown or confused with those of Father Nicolò and Roncalli, nor has a precise investigation or reconnaissance been attempted until now. The activity in Emilia is better known and refers to the vigorous *Crucifixion* (1620) of the Pinacoteca Estense of Modena, coming from the church of S. Bartolomeo for which the CIRCIGNANI had shortly before also painted a *martyrdom of the saint* (Campori, 1855); an *S Carlo* in the Malatesta Temple of Rimini, lost during the Second World War (Pasini, in Marcheselli); a *Deposition*, signed and dated 1625, in the parish church of Mondaino, not far from Rimini.

Other works attributed with good security to CIRCIGNANI I am a *Hercules who ranks* in the Galleria Pallavicini in Rome, a *Supper at Emmaus* conserved in the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, and the decoration of the altar of the Rooster in S. Maria delle Grazie in Pistoia. CIRCIGNANI is attributed the author of oil paintings on the wall with the representation of the *Four Elements* in the ancient residence of Cardinal Del Monte, then Ludovisi. These paintings were published by Zandri with a cautious attribution to Caravaggio. Finally, Baglione informs about a large activity of CIRCIGNANI as an engraver.

CIRCIGNANI, now old, wanted to remarry and that he died shortly thereafter. In fact, on May 25, 1629 received the dowry of Clementina daughter of the goldsmith Antonio Garofolini; one can therefore with good approximation fix the date of the death of CIRCIGNANI around 1630.

by Michele Cordaro - Biographical Dictionary of Italians - Volume 25 (1981)

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