

Giovanni Paolo del Colle

Italian painter
c.1518-1556

Giovanni Paolo almost certainly began his career as an apprentice in the workshop of his famous uncle, Raffaellino del Colle. This probably occurred during the 1530s, possibly in 1532, soon after Raffaellino returned from Pesaro, where he had been assisting in the fresco decoration of Duke Francesco Maria della Rovere's Villa Imperiale. He probably was also engaged, toward the middle of the decade, in the decoration of the Oratorio del Corpus Domini at Urbania, where Giovanni Paolo, if he were with him, would perhaps have been introduced for the first time to fresco painting. In March 1536, Raffaellino traveled to Florence at Vasari's invitation to assist Vasari in preparing the apparati for the entry of Charles V into Florence. Again, if Giovanni Paolo had made the trip with Raffaellino, the young apprentice would have probably met Vasari, his future employer.

In 1538, Giovanni Paolo was presumably back in Sansepolcro, where he was party to the "scrittura nuziale" for his sister Lodovica. His first major project upon completion of his apprenticeship may have been in collaboration with Raffaellino, who, in 1540, was hired to decorate a chapel in the Benedictine church of S. Pietro in Gubbio. The decorations display features that are new in Raffaellino's work and may be accounted for by assuming that part of the painting was given over to Giovanni Paolo.

The June 28, 1544, document first published by Bombe does place Giovanni Paolo in Perugia. However, at this point, it seems more likely that he was on his way to Naples with Raffaellino to assist Vasari in the decoration of the refectory at Monteoliveto. Possibly he had been invited at the last moment as a substitute for Cristofano Gherardi, who had been unable to go because of illness. Upon the completion of these decorations in 1545, Giovanni Paolo, still in the company of Raffaellino, traveled north to Rome, where, as Vasari himself reports, he assisted in the decoration of the Cancelleria.

The frescoes in the Sala dei Cento Giorni were completed by October 1546, the month Vasari says he left Rome and returned to Florence. Raffaellino del Colle, probably in the company of two other Vasari assistants and concittadini, Giovanni Battista Cungi and Cristofano Gherardi, almost certainly returned around the same time to Sansepolcro or, in Gherardi's case, to nearby San Giustino. They were most likely accompanied by Giovanni Paolo, who, on his return, may have collaborated with his uncle in painting a *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* for the church of S. Maria dei Servi in nearby Città di Castello.

By May 17, 1549, Giovanni Paolo had returned to Rome, where, according to the contract drawn up on this date, he was commissioned to paint rooms in the Palazzo di S. Callisto, the residence of the Portuguese cardinal Miguel de Silva in the Piazza di S. Maria in Trastevere. The contract specifies first that he paint "le due camere da basso verso il giardino nuovo, palchi, fregi et mura fino a terra." The palchi in these rooms were to be decorated according to a design already agreed upon, while the friezes were to have "almeno quattro storie et termini alii cantoni," with the remaining surfaces given over to grotesques. Grotesques were also to be painted on the walls down to the level of the basement, "che sara di chiaro e schuro conveniente alia stanza." The contract also refers to painting in the "loggia acanto alia fontana" and in the "sala grande di sopra." All these decorations, however, were apparently destroyed when the palace was converted into a Benedictine monastery by Paul V in 1615.

It would appear that, immediately upon completion of these frescoes, Giovanni Paolo was commissioned by the heirs of Cardinal Ascanio Parisani to decorate the family chapel in the church of San Marcello al Corso in Rome. According to the contract, dated November 15, 1550, Giovanni Paolo was responsible for painting the altarpiece—a Pietà—as well as for executing two prophets on

the walls, a portrait of Cardinal Ascanio Parisani (who had died in 1549), two sepulchers, and various decorations in wood and stucco. The contract also makes it clear that he was completing work initiated earlier by Flemish painter Lorenzo da Rotterdam. Unfortunately, little of Giovanni Paolo's work survives or can be securely identified. His altarpiece was apparently replaced in the early eighteenth century with another, by Giacomo Triga (active 1710-1746), depicting Saint Mary Magdalen, the saint to whom the chapel is dedicated. The two prophets and the portrait of Ascanio Parisani also seem to have been lost around this time. Although parts of the vault have been attributed to Giovanni Paolo-the four long rectangular panels with grotesque decoration incorporating oval cartouches with representations of the Evangelists, the four smaller rectangles with Old Testament scenes, and possibly the sottoarco paintings at the chapel entrance-it is difficult to distinguish his contribution from that which may have already been executed by Lorenzo da Rotterdam.

With regard to the lost Pietà, which Filippo Titi described shortly before its removal as "Il Cristo Morto con quantity di figure," it is tempting to suggest that a drawing by Giovanni Paolo in the Louvre, probably from Vasari's *Libro dei Disegni*, was preparatory for the painting. Interestingly, the drawing displays not so much the influences of Vasari and Raffaellino, as might be expected, but, as Catherine Monbeig-Goguel points out, more those of Daniele da Volterra and, to a lesser extent, Francesco Salviati, whose influence has also been recognized in the frescoes in the vault of the Parisani Chapel. This would not only place the drawing close in time to the Parisani Chapel altarpiece, but would also show Giovanni Paolo responding quickly to recent artistic developments in Rome.

The Parisani Chapel was apparently completed in 1551. Giovanni Paolo's career, however, came to an end only a few years later, with his death in 1556. Vasari may have been prompted to add Giovanni Paolo's drawing to his collection as a remembrance of one of his assistants and perhaps also as one of the last and most significant accomplishments of the still relatively young artist.

Source:

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