

# Tarquino Ligustri

Italian painter  
(c.1564-1615/21)

He was born in Viterbo, where he was baptized on the 8th of August, 1564, by Giovan Pietro and Faustina Laziosi (Angeli). There is no information on his artistic training which is likely to have occurred between Caprarola and Bagnaia, where the Farnese palace and the villa of Cardinal Gianfrancesco Gambara offered numerous examples of updated late Mannerist painting, in particular in the landscape genre that was favored by Ligustri.

It is documented starting from 1587, when an important series of works for the Palazzo dei Priori in Viterbo began.

At first he signed a contract for the decoration of all the walls of the Regia room; then, the following year, he painted with Giovanni Antonio Mussi and Ludovico Nucci the vault of the access stairs to the main hall and in 1588-89 he collaborated with Baldassarre Croce, who had had the main task (initially assigned to Ligustri himself), to the decoration of the walls. Although the documents do not specify it, it is possible that Ligustri dealt with the fake architectural structure, seen in perspective, and perhaps also with the views with Etruria Urbs and Viterbo. In 1592 he was commissioned to paint the ceiling of the hall, always together with Nucci, with the depictions of the castles subjected in antiquity to the city of Viterbo, where the representation of the landscape already assumes an unusual importance, demonstrating an evident assonance with the production by Antonio Tempesta.

In 1596 he made three important engravings: the City of Viterbo, dedicated to Cardinal Odoardo Farnese; the Villa di Bagnaia, with a dedication to the new owner, the rich and powerful cardinal Alessandro Peretti; and a series of architectural corbels, offered to the architect Ottaviano Mascherino. The importance of the aforementioned characters attests to a widening of the painter's horizons, who had by now turned his attention to Rome. In 1598 his presence in the papal city is attested by two notarial deeds, but already the previous year he was absent from Viterbo. In this period of time, his transfer must have taken place, even if both short previous Roman stays and temporary returns to his place of origin are possible.

In the sparse biography of Baglione, some of the works performed in sacred places by Ligustri after his arrival in Rome are mentioned, including the decoration of the chapel dedicated to the Conception in S. Silvestro in Capite, granted under patronage in 1596 to the bishop Antonio Maria Manzoli who undertook to have it decorated.

In the absence of documents and the possibility of examining the destroyed paintings, depicting perspectives and cherubs, it seems more appropriate to keep their dating close to the date of granting the patronage, rather than moving it up to 1604-05, as has been proposed.

Baglione also attested the participation of Ligustri in the decoration, "with various compartments", of the left aisle in the church of S. Cecilia, as part of the works promoted starting from 1599 by Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrato which saw the participation of a large group of painters. The intervention of Ligustri could be identified in the false oculi of the vaults, with little angels foreshortened in the manner of Giovanni and Cherubino Alberti, and in the architectural aedicules painted on the walls of the left aisle.

Precise documentary indications allow us to date the intervention of Ligustri in the decoration of the church of S. Vitale to 1599. Critics agree in recognizing the ten large landscapes with scenes of martyrdom - where the landscape, similar to that of Paul Bril, dominates the small human figures, but contributing to historicize the events and to underline their tragic, with harsh and sometimes unreal forms - and, with less certainty, interventions in the frescoes of the presbytery area. A payment for unspecified works also took place in 1603.

In 1600 he painted twice in the palace of Asdrubale Mattei (Palazzo Mattei di Giove), with fake architectures in perspective, within a vast team of painters led by Cristoforo Roncalli. The works were particularly appreciated and reveal, in addition to a wise use of light sources, a perspective virtuosity linked to the contemporary Roman examples of the Alberti brothers.

Still in that jubilee year, Ligustri collaborated in the decoration of one of the rooms overlooking the square of the same name in the Palazzo della Cancelleria, then inhabited by Cardinal Alessandro Peretti. The date 1600 appears in the corners of the frieze of the room which presents on the short sides two choirs in perspective on the sides of groups of cherubs with coats of arms, figurations that recur identical in the Paravicini palace, where Ligustri would have worked six years later. For relations with Peretti it is interesting to note how a Bernabeo Ligustri residing between Rome and Bagnaia, a man capable of drawing complex geographical maps, was superintendent and general factor of Prince Michele Peretti, was often used by the cardinal for his business.

Between 1602 and 1603, Ligustri painted the imposing vault of a gallery recently added to the family palace for Massimo Massimi, for which he was paid a higher sum than that collected for similar works in Palazzo Mattei, perhaps due to the greater complexity of the company, but perhaps also as a sign of a growing appreciation of its capabilities. At the signing of the contract for the Massimo, Roncalli was present, with whom it is probable that Ligustri had had further contacts also in the following years.

As further evidence of such a consideration in the Roman artistic scenario, even in the institutional sphere, in 1604 the appointment of Ligustri as secretary of the Academy of S. Luca, to which he must therefore have already been enrolled.

The most representative work of Ligustri's landscape production is undoubtedly the frieze painted in 1606 for the new gallery of the palace of Cardinal Ottavio Paravicini alle Stimmate, today Besso, a frieze depicting, in addition to choirs formulated in the same way as the aforementioned works to the Chancellery, eight Virtues and above all countries with hermits.

For the realization of these scenes he drew partial ideas, for single figures, from prints by Tempesta and the Sadeler brothers. The exaltation of the hermit life, here understood as a serene relationship between a man of faith and a hospitable nature, is linked to Filipino religiosity, to which the landlord had been particularly close. The certain attribution of these landscapes to Ligustri allows for some clarity in the complex panorama of landscape painting in Rome at the beginning of the seventeenth century, often generically similar to the Bril school.

The last documented work of Ligustri is the decoration of the vault of the Alli Maccarani chapel in S. Marcello al Corso, ordered by Prospero Alli in 1607, whose payments however lasted until 1613. Here the painter applied those perspective virtuositities of which he had given an extensive essay in Palazzo Mattei, completing the decoration with small monochrome scenes of a religious theme.

Still unknown is the production of the painter's movable works that still existed, as evidenced by two payments by Giovan Angelo Altemps dated 1616 for a drawing of a perspective on paper, which it is not known whether it is preliminary to a pictorial transposition.

The safe works, listed up to now, are flanked by others, more uncertain or no longer confirmed attribution. The landscapes, also attributed to Ligustri, with stories of Tusculum in the Farnese loggia of the Grottaferrata abbey are by Cornelis Loots. Röttgen believed that he had worked in the frieze of the Consistory room in the Vatican palace, the work of Cherubino Alberti and Bril. Faldi assigned to Ligustri some landscapes of the helical staircase of Caprarola, whose usual dating to 1580-83 does not, however, reconcile with the age of the painter, making the more usual reference to Tempesta more likely. It is possible to hypothesize the participation of Ligustri in vast construction sites of the early seventeenth century, including the decoration of the Vatican apartment of Paul V, where some scenes show similarities with the Paravicini frieze; while the assignment to Ligustri of the landscapes of the hall of Villa Sora in Frascati is not acceptable, due to the evident differences in the way of creating the figures and landscape elements compared to previous and certain paintings.

The date of death of Ligustri, perhaps mentioned at the date of 1615 in the parish register of S. Lorenzo in Lucina, is however placed by Baglione towards the end of the pontificate of Paul V, that is, by 1621.

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