

Francesco Nappi

Italian Mannerist painter
1529-1566

He was born in Milan by Giovan Paolo around 1565, if the indication provided by the contemporary Giovanni Baglione, who says he died sixty-five years old, is correct; the later indication that he died "about 1638". The name of the mother is unknown.

Nothing is known of any formation at home; Father Sebastiano Resta said so "in Milan, a schoolboy of Morazzone", but this is unlikely, since he was born in 1573. From the same Baglione, his first biographer, we know that Nappi arrived in Rome, we think about half of 'last decade of the sixteenth century, after a stay in Veneto: «A painter came from Milan, called Francesco Nappi, who had previously lived in Vinegia, who was making fun of all the Painters of Rome». Yet a certain integration in the Roman context is attested, since the early years of the new century, in addition to the numerous works carried out, from its participation, at least from 1603 to 1627, to the congregations of the Academy of St. Luca. Listing the works in an apparently chronological order, Baglione starts from a frieze "with some Sea Monsters, and Nymphs, of a very good manner", today lost, frescoed by Nappi in the courtyard of a house owned by Giovan Battista Crivelli, in Via dei Cappellari, followed «On the old façade of the Palazzo di Madama, around the alarm of the Grand Duke of Tuscany» from «two great Putti to fresh, very good», also disappeared. Father Resta recalls, around 1710, other Nappi paintings "almost all of them demolished or bleached for the adjustment of the small porch between the two courtyards of the Tocci house"; it is not clear if it referred to those of the Crivelli house. If the sequence proposed by Baglione is correct, the paintings of Nappi in the chapel of the "garzoni degli osti" in S. Maria della Consolazione estimated in 1597 by Cherubino Alberti and Cesare Nebbia: the lower half was stolen from the Assumption on the altar in 2011 and the frescoes on the walls (Stories of the Virgin) appear in poor condition. The work, in which the artist's substratum comes out more than elsewhere, was welded in 1601. In 1597 there is the fresco, still existing, depicting St. Joseph, painted by the artist in the University of Carpenters at the Palazzo dei Conservatori. In the same year, the «Pier Francesco Milanese» involved in a fight with Giacomo Galli could be Nappi or, more likely, Morazzone.

In 1600 he waited for the decoration of the apse of S. Giacomo degli Incurabili (*Angels in the apsidal basin, Ss. Matteo and Marco and the Collection of the manna* on the left wall), performed on commission of Cardinal Antonio Maria Salviati, on the occasion of the Jubilee; his participation in that enterprise can be seen from the testimonies of the contemporary Gaspare Celio (1638) who refers to the paintings of the "Tribona", on the invention of the Novarese Giovan Battista Ricci, and of Baglione. "Manna in the desert with many figures: and above there are two Saints; all painted in fresco: & again in the vault are Angels, and puttini del Nappi». In this decoration - as well as in the subsequent paintings of the vaults of the cloister of S. Maria sopra Minerva - a link was found with the Alberti family painting, original artists of Borgo San Sepolcro, or a possible collaboration with the viterbese Tarquinio Ligustri. The news that Nappi has painted, in collaboration with Giovanni Alberti, a façade of the Quirinale palace has not yet been confirmed. Still in the 1600s Nappi was paid for some paintings in S. Nicola in Carcere, where the painters Marco worked Tullio, Orazio Gentileschi and Giovanni

Baglione; this is probably the work carried out under the direction of Cavalier d'Arpino, commissioned by Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, in the chapel of the Ss. Sacramento. From 31 August 1601 - albeit referred to as "Jac or Nappi" - and until 10 May 1602, he was paid for his participation in the construction of the mosaics of the Clementine Chapel in St. Peter, realized and probably concluded in 1601 under the guidance of Cristofano Roncalli, the Pomarancio. Among the other aid of Pomarancio in that yard was Prospero Orsi, with whom Nappi also collaborated later; from Roncalli he learned the way to color and a fullness of the forms we find in his later works as also affirmed by Father Resta, who writes that Nappi "in Rome had taken a mirar in Cav. Roncalli so much that the figurines in medals seemed his ". In November 1603 he worked for Cardinal Cesare Baronio, painting "those dark colored canvases, which for the octave of the Dead are seen on the walls inside the Church of s. Gregorio in Monte Celio " still existing in the early eighteenth century but later lost. Particularly skilled, according to Baglione, in the "bizarre and dark bizarre decorations with different whims, very good and tasty", Nappi demonstrated this talent in the frescoes of the cloister of S. Maria sopra Minerva, perhaps his masterpiece, realizing paintings that "seem miniatures, so much has it retouched, and hunted so, that they do not seem to be worked in fresco, but dry". As recently clarified, the commission of these frescoes, begun in 1603 and completed in 1607, is due to Bishop Andrea Fernández de Córdoba.

Nappi can refer to the Ascension, the Assumption and Pentecost, along the northern arm, the Coronation of the Virgin, along the western arm, as well as some of the paintings in the vaults of the bays, with the help of the workshop. In them and in general in his first Roman production, he was identified as "a complex game of equilibrium between late Veronese painting, the Venetian manner of Palma il Giovane, the intellectual exercises of A. Figino and Pederzano", which would have constituted the basis for his painting "completely anti-academic", according to a judgment that is not totally shareable. Already Lanzi noted that the artist "is varied; and where he has painted in his Lombard style, as in an Assumption at the cloister of Minerva and in other things at Humility, he is a naturalist who is more satisfied than the Mannerists of his time. " In these frescoes there are important tangencies with the Pomarancio and the Cavalier d'Arpino, but also with the early Roman works of Morazzone, in S. Silvestro in Capite. At the same time Nappi remained a stranger to the classicist carraccesche instances and to the novelties of Caravaggio. The groups of ocher chiaroscuro figures depicted on the frescoed pilasters between the scenes, on the walls, with entrenched satiresque figures, were also referred to the Modenese Giovan Battista Magni or to the Bolognese Giovan Luigi Valesio; for the one between the Assumption and the Ascension a possible preparatory drawing has been traced, conserved in Paris.

Early paintings of the seventeenth century should also be the paintings, made together with the Roman Girolamo Nanni, in the Gregorian chapel in S. Croce in Gerusalemme; the frescoes, in a very poor state of preservation, depict the Blessed Trinity with the Virgin, ss. monks, angels, the souls of purgatory, St. Gregory and St. Bernard.

In 1607 he took part, together with Celio, Nanni, Orsi and Cristoforo Greppi, to work in the Vatican apartment of Paolo V; the paintings were estimated by Ricci the following year. In 1608 he painted in the house of the Signori Crescentij friezes of room, they say with very beautiful whims", part of which was identified in the frieze with Putti present in the palace that was the property of Giovan Battista Crescenzi , in piazza della

Rotonda; in this decoration the Pomarancio's ways are awkwardly stiffened. Two drawings traditionally attributed to Roncalli and kept at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, preparatory for these friezes, were consequently linked to Nappi, but the perplexities expressed towards this proposal are understandable.

He could also have worked for Vincenzo Giustiniani, if he can refer to a (undated) payment of 243 scudi intended for "painting in Napo". Around 1607-08 he had to form a partnership with Celio alongside whom he worked in Palazzo Mattei and where he painted, in 1608, a panel with the Sacrifice of Isaac frescoed in the «dark room», copy from Tintoretto. On 16 August 1612, the "societas" was extended to Orazio Borgianni, for "all those works that will come from the R. fabrica di S. Pietro"; a different and specific agreement between the three artists was stipulated on January 5, 1613, for the decoration of the Chapel of the Treasure of St. Gennaro in the cathedral of Naples, and January 26, 1613, for works to be carried out in the small church of St. Thomas 'Aquino in Naples, commissioned by Tommaso d'Avalos. None of the agreements signed by the three artists could probably be put into practice.

In 1609 he lived, opposite S. Marcello al Corso, together with the Urbino painter Giovanni Maria Gherardi; the following year he still shared the dwelling with Gherardi and, from 1608, Orazio Zecca da Montefortino had as his apprentice. On September 5, 1613 he was paid "for days 29, shield 1 for each day, made by him and days 9 by his young Gismondo to make different paintings in the garden" of Villa d'Este in Tivoli, commissioned by Cardinal Alessandro d'Este; his collaborator was such "Gismondo Straccia". Nothing remains of the paintings executed, around 1613, commissioned by Francesca Baglioni Orsini, in S. Maria dell'Umiltà. The paintings were lost with the seventeenth-century restructuring of the church, although later Titi stated that "the picture in the main altar is believed by the Nappi". Lost is also "a figure of s. Sebastiano stood in fresco "to the Ss Apostles, with whom Nappi intended" to clarify the Painters of Rome, but he remained the clarified ".

In 1616 the Disputations by Mario Altieri were published, with a frontispiece of which Nappi was the "inventor" and "Christophorus Blancus Lotharingius" the engraver. In 1618 he worked for the Alveri family. On 5 April 1621 he was commissioned with Matteo Pagani to paint the triumphal arch prepared for the election of Pope Gregory XV. Among the latest works are the paintings of the Annunziata chapel in S. Maria in Monserrato, which denounce the heavy qualitative involution already noted by Baglione; the frescoes with Stories of the Virgin and the altarpiece - depicting the Annunciation - date back to 1624-26. Titi also incorrectly reports the paintings in the chapel of the Crucifix to the artist.

The corpus graphic is limited, in addition to the drawing preserved in the Louvre, a few other sheets, two of which are kept in the Cabinet drawings and prints of the Uffizi of Florence and referred to Nappi from ancient writings: a Madonna with Child and s. Giovannino and a Prophet (or Apostle) with scroll.

He died on 13 May 1630 in Rome, in the district of S. Andrea delle Fratte.

To Nappi were also attributed an Annunciation on canvas in S. Maria in Aquiro, then returned to the Capuchin Paolo Piazza, and the frescoes (Prophets and angels in dome and Stories of the Baptist) and the altarpiece depicting the Baptist in the desert of the Naro chapel in S. Maria sopra Minerva; also of these last paintings the assignment has

changed: the frescoes are the work of the Florentine Jacopo Berni (1601-03) and the canvas was painted in 1606 by the Maceratese Giuseppe Bastiani. The link between the paintings of this chapel and the frescoes of the Marliani chapel, of uncertain author, in S. Maria delle Grazie in Milan is not very persuasive. The decorations of two apses in S. Caterina della Rota are mentioned - it is not clear on what bases - as late but certain works by Nappi, "a sort of expressionistic epilogue of his parable".

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