

# Cesare Rossetti

Italian painter and mosaicist  
(d. 1627)

Painter and mosaicist, he was the son of a Giacomo, also a painter, whose name appears in relation to that of his son in a document of baptism. Unknown is his date of birth, presumably located in the seventh decade of the sixteenth century. Giovanni Baglione, in his early Roman origins, alludes to the succinct biographical medallion dedicated to him within the *lives of painters, sculptors and architects* (1642). The artistic biography of Rossetti is inextricably linked to that of his teacher, Giuseppe Cesari, called the Cavalier d'Arpino, with whom he collaborated throughout the course of his career emulating his style. The meeting between the two artists is not documented but had to take place around the end of the 1570's, when both worked on the construction sites started in Rome at the behest of Pope Sisto V.

Rossetti's hand has not been identified in any of the many paintings of the Sistine cycles, in which it is likely to have a secondary role. It is always Baglione who mentioned him among the workers of the suburban villa of Farnese, in Caprarola, where he had to work in the service of a certain Bartolomeo, "painter of the cardinal" Alessandro. A character who could identify with the little known Florentine Bartolomeo Sogliani.

With the latter he also collaborated on the lost decoration of the great hall and the theology school of the Roman College. In a note dated 21 April 1584 of the *Book of Expenses of the College Factory*, in fact, the painters Cesare e Bartolomeo.

From the end of the 1580's he was among the permanent collaborators of the workshop of Giuseppe Cesari, in which he was charged with the execution (and in some cases of the design) of entire portions of the numerous pictorial enterprises commissioned to the master. In the Olgiati chapel in S. Prassede his hand was recognized in monochromes with the *Stories of the Passion of Christ*; in the hall of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in the Campidoglio in the ovals with scenes from the history of Rome adorning the base of the walls; in S. Giovanni in Laterano in the ornamental apparatuses that frame the great frescoes of the transept. He was also commissioned by Cesari to complete entire decorative cycles commissioned to him. This is the case of the frescoes that decorate the chapel of S. Barbara in S. Maria in Traspontina, where the painter is remembered as the author of the wall paintings.

He was the author of the frescoes of the Sannesì Chapel in S. Silvestro al Quirinale ( *St. Stephen in front of the Sanhedrin, Stonation of St. Stephen*, 1604-05), just as it was of those of the under-arch in the Benigni chapel in S. Maria della Pace ( *St. John the Evangelist in Patmos, St. John the Evangelist led to the tomb, St. John the Evangelist drinks the poison in the presence of the tyrant*, 1611-19). In collaboration with other artists, he participated in large-scale decorative companies. The sources remind him at the beginning of the 17th century among the painters engaged in the fresco decoration of one of the cloisters, now destroyed, of the convent annexed to the church of S. Maria in Aracoeli, where he would paint eleven lunettes historiated, of which, however, the subjects are not known. On the other hand, the frescoes made in the papal apartment on the second floor of the Vatican building of Sisto V (the so-called new apartment) date back to 1607, next to the Clementina rooms and the Conclistorio. The friezes that decorate

the rooms were entrusted together with Rossetti and Ranuccio Semprevivo, Pasquale Cati and Gaspare Celio, who created the paintings under the direction of Giovan Battista Crescenzi, holder of the advances paid for the works of the Apostolic Chamber between January 1607 and the October of the same year. Two of the allegorical figures accompanying the papal coat of arms in the Sala degli Scultori, one of the angels accompanying the arms of Paolo V Borghese in the library, one of the doctors of the Church in the Evangelists' room and, in the same room, four episodes of the frieze with the *Stories of s. Paul* (the *Call of Paul*, *Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia*, *Paul in Malta*, the *Decollation of Paul* ).

Although Rossetti's Vatican frescoes are stylistically close to the contemporary production of the Arpino, they are characterized by a marked taste for the description of the natural datum rarely present in Cesari's work, to the point where it can be hypothesized that the landscape views were made not by Rossetti but by a collaborator.

Together with the same team of painters who collaborated in the Vatican, he was involved in the decoration of a wing of the papal palace at the Quirinale, just built under the direction of Flaminio Ponzio. The payments made in favor of Rossetti and his colleagues for the fresco decoration of two rooms with friezes, now lost, putti representatives, allegorical figures, papal coats of arms and squares with *stories of Abraham* and illustrations of the building works promoted during the pontificate of Paul V. Still in the Quirinale palace, in 1616 he was responsible for the decoration of the room of the Virtues, in which his hand is identifiable in allegorical figures and putti that flank the false cartouches within which are ten landscapes, the latter perhaps referring to one of his collaborators.

Familiarity with Cavalier d'Arpino and with Crescenzi's environment allowed him to obtain other important job assignments. In 1608 Cesari and Crescenzi signed the contract signed with a group of mosaicists - including the names of Rossetti and Semprevivo - for the work of the dome of St. Peter's Basilica. As mosaicist and fresco painter he also worked at the church of S. Cesareo on the Appia, restored and redecorated on the occasion of the jubilee of 1600. Here, together with Baldassare Croce and Andrea Lilio, he realized part of the pictorial decoration of the walls: his brushes, in fact, some of the figures of the saints that intersperse the squares with the lives of the ss are to be reported. Cesareo and Ippolito, the fresco with *S. Cesareo conducted in front of the prefect*, the inner shell of the ciborium with angels and on the sides the four doctors of the Church, and the two pairs of angels with crowns and garlands in the triangles of the apse. In 1609, on a cartoon by Cesari, Rossetti, together with Semprevivo, executed the mosaic at the Vatican which overlooks the Swiss gate.

In addition to major public works, Rossetti was the author of several paintings of private use, mostly devotional works, which demonstrate his discreet skills as a painter but also the limited inventive talent that forced him to work on the track of the most typical compositions of the Knight, openly cited as a model in the arrangement of figures in the space and in the characters' attitudes. Among the medium and small format room pictures we remember the *St. George* of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, the *Martyrdom of s. Stephen* of the Musée des beaux-arts of Nantes, a *Madonna with Child and angels, a pope, S. Clare and two Franciscans* of the Staatsgemäldesammlungen of Monaco, a *sermon of S. Giovanni* at the Palais Fesch - Musée des beaux-arts of Ajaccio, a *S. Lorenzo among the poor and the sick*, a *Madonna with Child and s. Girolamo*, as well as a *Madonna and Child among Sts. Agostino and Lorenzo and three angels* of private collection.

If Rossetti's date of birth is unknown, some considerations can be made regarding that of his death. Rossetti, in fact, died in Rome on a date that will surely be placed between June 16, 1626, when he participated in one of the congregations of the Academy of St. Luke, and December 10, 1627, when the *post-mortem* inventory of the his assets.

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