

Baronzio, Giovanni

Also known as

Baronzio, Giovanni di

Italian, active c. 1320 - 1350

BIOGRAPHY

The name Johannes Barontius appears in the signature of an altarpiece dated 1345. Representing the Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints (Galleria Nazionale, Urbino), it comes from the church of San Francesco at Macerata Feltria. Usually, Barontius (the latinized form of Baronzio) is considered a surname, but a document of 1362 recording the painter's tomb in the church of San Giuliano at Rimini (where he was buried, together with his brother and a son) makes it clear that it was a patronymic. The only other piece of documentary evidence found thus far is a deed dated 1343 that cites "Iohanne Baroncio pictore" as a witness.[1]

Various other paintings were added to the signed Madonna in Urbino over the last century, including the signed crucifix in San Francesco at Mercatello, which we now know to be by another painter named Giovanni.[2] The result was a very extended and heterogeneous catalog that comprised, according to Bernard Berenson (1932), some forty works. Various scholars have since tried to clarify the resulting confusion and better define the artist's character.[3] In particular, Carlo Volpe, in his fundamental study on the history of painting in Rimini (1965), drastically reduced the number of paintings assigned to the painter, grouping stylistically related works and dividing them among anonymous artists named, respectively, Master of the Parry Adoration, Master of Santa Colomba, Master of the Life of Saint John the Baptist, and Pseudo-Baronzio. Art historical analysis of more recent decades has tended to restore most of the paintings assigned to these conventional masters to Giovanni Baronzio himself.[4]

To judge from the characteristics of this enlarged oeuvre, the painter, who may be said to have been a disciple of Giotto (Florentine, c. 1265 - 1337) but at second hand, must have begun his career around 1320 or a little later under the more immediate influence of Giovanni and Pietro da Rimini. His probable first works include the stories of Christ now divided between the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica di Palazzo Barberini in Rome and the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Rimini formerly assigned to the Pseudo-Baronzio. Fragments of an altarpiece

depicting the Madonna and Child and stories of the life of the Baptist, including the panels now in the National Gallery of Art, and panels formerly gathered under the name Master of the Parry Adoration belong to a subsequent phase in Baronzio's development. The final phase of his career is represented by the Madonna and Child in Urbino and the other version of the Madonna, generally given to Baronzio, that is still preserved in the church of San Francesco at Mercatello.

Long misunderstood and undervalued by art historians, Giovanni Baronzio was the leading light of the second generation of painters influenced in a decisive way by the activity of Giotto at Rimini. Though he adopted many of the compositional devices and motifs introduced by Giotto, Baronzio assimilated them into his own distinctive narrative style, enlivened and enriched with a wealth of decorative elements and genre details taken from everyday life. His narrative scenes, crowded with incident, err on the side of excessive loquacity, even naiveté. But this was a painter able not only to produce brilliant color combinations and striking decorative effects but also to achieve moments of great emotional intensity.

[1] Oreste Delucca, *I pittori riminesi del Trecento nelle carte d'archivio* (Rimini, 1992), 112–114.

[2] Carlo Volpe, *La pittura riminese del Trecento* (Milan, 1965), 62–63, 71; Mauro Minardi, "Giovanni da Rimini," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 83 vols. (Rome, 1960–2015), 56(2001):188–193.

[3] Cesare Brandi, ed., *Mostra della pittura riminese del Trecento* (Rimini, 1935), xii, xiii, xviii, xxii, xxvii, xxxii, 88–99, 160; Mario Salmi, "La scuola di Rimini, 3," *Rivista del R. Istituto d'archeologia e storia dell'arte* 5 (1935): 98–127; Luigi Coletti, *I Primitivi*, vol. 3, *I padani* (Novara, 1947), xii–xiv, xvii–xix; Alberto Martini, "Ricostruzione parziale di un dossale riminese," *Paragone* 9 (1958): 40–44; Federico Zeri, "Una *Deposizione* di scuola riminese," *Paragone* 9 (1958): 46–54.

[4] Cf. Miklós Boskovits, ed., *Frühe italienische Malerei: Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Katalog der Gemälde*, trans. Erich Schleier (Berlin, 1988), 15–18; Miklós Boskovits, "Per la storia della pittura tra la Romagna e le Marche ai primi del '300," *Arte cristiana* 81 (1993): 163–182; Daniele Benati, "Disegno del Trecento riminese," in *Il Trecento riminese: Maestri e botteghe tra Romagna e Marche*, ed. Daniele Benati (Milan, 1995), 45–54; and Daniele Benati, in *Il Trecento riminese: Maestri e botteghe tra Romagna e Marche*, ed. Daniele Benati (Milan, 1995), 246–273.

Miklós Boskovits (1935–2011)

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