

Jacopo di Cione

Also known as

Robiccia

Florentine, c. 1340 - c. 1400?

BIOGRAPHY

Brother of Andrea (nicknamed Orcagna) and of Nardo di Cione (Florentine, active from c. 1340; died 1365/1366), both of them painters and by midcentury considered among the best masters active in Florence.[1] Jacopo is cited in documents for the first time in 1365 as one of the heirs of Nardo, who had died in that year.[2] Only after 1368 is he mentioned as a painter. It may be presumed, however, that by that date he had been working in that role for a decade; the first dated work (1362) that can plausibly be attributed to him (private collection, New York) shows him as a fully formed artist.[3] Jacopo's birth therefore should be placed in years close to 1340.

Upon the death of Andrea di Cione in 1368, Jacopo became the heir to his brother's prestigious shop, and, according to the unanimous opinion of art historians, he was responsible for the execution of such important commissions as the polyptych for the high altar of the church of San Pier Maggiore (1370–1371) and the *Pala della Zecca* (the Mint) in Florence (1372–1374).[4] In the years thereafter the artist is frequently documented until 1398, but no securely authenticated work by his hand has come down to us. It seems that he did not personally participate in the execution of the frescoes in the Palazzo dei Priori at Volterra, for which he was paid in 1383 together with Niccolò Gerini.[5] The attempted reconstruction of Jacopo's oeuvre has thus been based on the two large polyptychs mentioned above, both dating to the early 1370s. Since no registered payment appears alongside his name in the list of Florentine *prestanze* (state loans) dating to 1400, the inference can be drawn that he was dead by that date.[6]

Jacopo must have been trained in the shop of his brother Andrea, for he was strongly influenced by the severe compositional balance of scenes and the sculptural modeling of figures that distinguish Andrea's paintings. Especially in his works dating to the sixth and seventh decade of the fourteenth century, Jacopo adopted Andrea's tendency to reduce the *mise-en-scène* to the minimum and concentrate his attention on the human figures, modeled with dense *chiaroscuro*

and enveloped in precious stuffs that imitate gold-embroidered brocades. Apart from the Madonna dated 1362 formerly in the Stoclet collection, Brussels, we can probably place in his early phase the altarpieces depicting the Annunciation respectively in the churches of Santissima Annunziata di Rosano (Florence) and San Niccolò at Calenzano (Prato), and the Madonna and Child with angels in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, as well as several portable panels intended for private devotion. Among the latter, two small triptychs deserve particular mention because of their extremely accomplished workmanship: one in the Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence (no. 8465), and the other formerly in the Galleria Moretti in Florence,[7] in which a delicate poetic vein alleviates and adds grace to the severe monumentality and the brooding gravity normative in Orcagna's workshop.

Subsequently, the compositional formulae inherited from Andrea di Cione are reformulated with ever greater rigidity in such works as the polyptych formerly in the Fischel collection in Vienna, dated 1379. In addition, Jacopo's style in the 1380s was enriched, his compositions enlivened, and his repertoire of motifs diversified as a result of his collaborations, both with Niccolò Gerini, who partnered with him in the polyptych in the church of Santi Apostoli in Florence dated 1383, and with Giovanni del Biondo, with whom he painted the panel *Saint Zenobius Enthroned* in Florence Cathedral. In the last decade of the century his creative vein, which had contributed greatly to shaping the characteristics of Florentine painting in the second half of the fourteenth century, showed signs of exhaustion. As demonstrated by the triptych dated 1391 in the Academy of Arts in Honolulu, Jacopo gradually dissociated himself from, or failed to achieve, the ideals of elegance and vivacity typical of the Gothic renewal pursued by painters of the younger generation.

[1] Andrea and Nardo di Cione are listed among the leading masters of Florence in an undated Pistoian document that was probably written shortly after the Black Death in 1348, which had decimated the population of Tuscany. The document was published by Andrew Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi: Critical Reappraisal and Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia, MO, 1982), 257.

[2] For the documents relating to Jacopo, see Richard Offner and Klara Steinweg, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 4, vol. 3, *Jacopo di Cione* (New York, 1965), 7–13.

[3] Formerly in the Stoclet collection in Brussels, the painting represents the Madonna and Child surmounted by a bust of the Blessing God the Father. It formed

the centerpiece of a polyptych bearing the coat of arms of the Parte Guelfa, so it was undoubtedly a commission of some prestige and would hardly have been entrusted to a novice painter. Cf. Miklós Boskovits, *Pittura fiorentina alla vigilia del Rinascimento, 1370–1400* (Florence, 1975), pl. 48; Gert Kreytenberg, *Orcagna, Andrea di Cione: Ein universeller Künstler der Gotik in Florenz* (Mainz, 2000), 162–163 and pl. 46 (where Kreytenberg reproduced the painting in a deceptively overpainted state and with an erroneous attribution to Andrea di Cione).

[4] Most of the panels of the first of these works are now in the National Gallery in London, while the second altarpiece is now in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence. Cf. Richard Offner and Klara Steinweg, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 4, vol. 3, *Jacopo di Cione* (New York, 1965), 31–74, 85–93; Miklós Boskovits and Angelo Tartuferi, eds., *Dipinti*, vol. 1, *Dal Duecento a Giovanni da Milano*, Cataloghi della Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze (Florence, 2003), 127–135. The documents relating to the *Pala della Zecca* cite the name of the painter Jacobus Cini, generally identified with the younger brother of Andrea di Cione. The San Pier Maggiore polyptych is assigned to the artist only on the basis of style.

[5] Richard Offner and Klara Steinweg, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 4, vol. 3, *Jacopo di Cione* (New York, 1965), 115–119. Recently, Laurence Kanter questioned the traditional reconstruction of Jacopo's oeuvre; see Laurence B. Kanter and John Marciari, *Italian Paintings from the Richard L. Feigen Collection* (New Haven, 2010), 12–18.

[6] Richard Offner and Klara Steinweg, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 4, vol. 3, *Jacopo di Cione* (New York, 1965), 13 n. 17, drew this plausible conclusion. The “Jachopo di Cione dipintore” recorded in a Florentine document of 1410 is probably a different person, perhaps a grandson of the Trecento painter with the same name; cf. Werner Jacobsen, *Die Maler von Florenz zu Beginn der Renaissance* (Munich, 2001), 583.

[7] For these paintings cf. Miklós Boskovits and Angelo Tartuferi, eds., *Dipinti*, vol. 1, *Dal Duecento a Giovanni da Milano*, Cataloghi della Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze (Florence, 2003), 116–121; and Daniele Benati, in *Da Bernardo Daddi a Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Maria Pia Mannini (Florence, 1999), 50–55.

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