

GIACINTO BRANDI

(Rome 1621-1691)

The son of an embroiderer from Poli, Brandi was the pupil of the Bolognese G.G. Sementi, and reputedly also of Lanfranco, who was certainly the formative influence on his style. Brandi probably fell under his sway when he spent seven to eight months in Naples in 1638. A very successful artist, he was also prolific - which Pascoli ascribed to his continual need for money because of his extravagant way of life. His major output was of altarpieces for the churches of Rome, notably the high altarpiece of S. Rocco (before 1674) and the paintings of the Chapel of the Passion in S. Andrea al Quirinale (1675-82) but he also painted frescoes in the Palazzo Pamphilj (1646-53), S. Carlo al Corso (1671-9), S. Silvestro in Capite (1680-3), and the Gesù e Maria (1686-7). His daughter made a runaway marriage with Philipp Roos (Rosa da Tivoli). He was Principe of the Academy of St. Luke in 1669-70. In 1685 he was described by the Piedmontese Resident Provana as (along with Ferri and Maratta) one of the "tre pittori di prima riga" in Rome.

The Nativity

Oil on canvas

233 x 198 cm

This painting is reputed to have come from the now demolished church of the Monache Barberine near the Baths of Diocletian, attached to their convent of the SSma. Incarnazione del Verbo Divino. This Discalced Carmelite community was founded by Urban VIII in 1639, with a nucleus formed by the widow of his brother Paolo and her daughters. The church was rebuilt by Picchetti at the expense of Cardinal Francesco Barberini in 1670. This was the occasion for having a new high altar and side-altars, for which Brandi was asked to produce paintings. Neither Pascoli nor the guide-books specifically mention the Nativity, but in view of the dedication of church and convent, it is most probable that this was either one of the paintings arranged in some unspecified way round the high-altarpiece in its own right - either in the church or in the inaccessible clausura of the nuns.

Antonella Pampalone regards this work as a masterpiece of Brandi's maturity, and has dated it to around 1680, when Brandi was working nearby in S. Andrea al Quirinale.

Hist: Convent of the Monache Barberine, Rome

Bibl: Antonella Pampalone, "Inediti di Giacinto Brandi", Commentari XXI/4 (1970) pp. 313 & 315 n. 21, and fig. 10 (unaware of the provenance).

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