

Margaritone d'Arezzo

Also known as

Margaritone di Magnano

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Italian, active second and third quarter 13th century

BIOGRAPHY

The earliest painter from Arezzo to be known by name and whose works have survived was celebrated by Giorgio Vasari (Florentine, 1511 - 1574), who came from the same city and who dedicated a biography to him. He called the artist by the augmentative “Margaritone” and, underlining his fame among the other artists of his time, stated that he was not only a painter but also a sculptor and architect.[1] Evidence to substantiate Margaritone’s activity in these latter fields is, however, lacking. The only contemporary document known to us that mentions him was dated 1262 and called him “Margarito” and specified his profession as painter.[2] This profession is confirmed by several panel paintings bearing his signature. Only one of these, *Madonna and Child Enthroned and Four Stories of the Virgin* in the church of Santa Maria delle Vertighe at Monte San Savino, contains a date, now fragmentary and variously read as 1269, 1274, and 1283. Vasari himself asserted, in the first edition of his *Vite*, that the artist died in 1316 (an undoubtedly erroneous date). For these reasons, Margaritone has often been characterized as a provincial and *retardataire* painter.

As for the chronology of his works, many uncertainties still remain. His paintings are mostly dated to years close to 1262, even though some art historians, following the intuition of Roberto Longhi (1974),[3] are of the view that the stylistic features of various works included in Margaritone’s oeuvre suggest dates of execution preceding the mid-thirteenth century. According to an apparently trustworthy tradition, one of the paintings signed by the painter, the *Madonna* from the church of Santa Maria at Montelungo (Terranova Bracciolini, Arezzo), now in the Museo Statale at Arezzo, was painted in 1250.[4] Indeed, Margaritone’s paintings especially reveal stylistic affinities with the works of such painters as the Florentine Bigallo Master, the Lucchese Bonaventura Berlinghieri, or the Umbrian Petrus, all of them active just before or just after the mid-thirteenth century.[5] They were exponents of a figural style that defined the robust forms of the figures with a pronounced contour line and in general showed little interest in effects of

volumetric relief. Only in the concluding phase of his career did Margaritone respond to the more complex figurative language of the workshop of Simeone and Machilone of Spoleto, in the search for expressive liveliness and more pronounced dynamism of narrative. During this period, the artist would establish a partnership with the painter, miniaturist, and sculptor Ristoro, with whom he signed, probably in the early 1260s, the altarpiece of Monte San Savino, generally considered the latest of his surviving works.[6]

[1] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi, 6 vols. (Florence, 1966–1987), 2(1967):305. Apart from various pieces of information that have been shown to be erroneous, the Aretine historian maintained that the artist died at the age of seventy-seven. Therefore, if, as Vasari maintained, he died in 1316, his date of birth would have fallen in 1239.

[2] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence, 1878–1885), 1(1878):359 n. 1.

[3] See Anna Maria Maetzke, in *Arte nell'Aretino: Recupero e restauri dal 1968 al 1974*, ed. Lionello G. Boccia et al. (Florence, 1974), 15.

[4] Roberto Longhi, “Giudizio sul Duecento (1948),” in *Edizione delle opere complete di Roberto Longhi*, 14 vols. (Florence, 1961–1984), 7(1974):34, considered Margaritone the “evocatore di un'antichissima corrente copto-siriaca” (evocator of an ancient Coptic-Syriac current), a hypothesis that seems scarcely credible today. On the other hand, he rightly pointed out “suo evidente rapporto con una corrente di arte fiorentina cui appartengono taluni maestri della metà del secolo, in primis il Maestro del Bigallo” (his evident relationship with a current of Florentine art to which certain midcentury masters belonged, primarily the Maestro del Bigallo). On the chronology of the painter, see also Ada Labriola, “Ricerche su Margarito e Ristoro d'Arezzo,” *Arte cristiana* 75 (1987): 145–160.

[5] On the Bigallo Master, see Miklós Boskovits, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, sec. 1, vol. 1, *The Origins of Florentine Painting, 1100–1270* (Florence, 1993), 89–95. On Bonaventura Berlinghieri, see Boskovits, *Origins*, 73–74; Paolo Roberto Novello, “Berlinghieri, Bonaventura,” in *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon: Die bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, ed. Günter Meißner, 87 vols. (Munich, 1992–2015), 9(1994):467–468. On Petrus, see Filippo Todini, *La pittura umbra dal Duecento al primo Cinquecento*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1989),

1:282; Boskovits, *Origins*, 72.

[6] See Anna Maria Maetzke, "Nuove ricerche su Margarito d'Arezzo," *Bollettino d'arte* 58 (1973): 102–105. The miniatures of the manuscript entitled *La composizione del mondo colle sue cascioni*, ed. Alberto Morino, (Florence, 1976), probably should also be attributed to the same painter; cf. also Antonio Caleca, "Restoro d'Arezzo: Le idee di un artista, 1282," *Critica d'arte* 50, no. 5 (1985): 42–44.

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