



ANTONIO ALLEGRI, KNOWN AS *CORREGGIO* (1489-1534)

BIOGRAPHY

1489

The son of Pellegrino Allegri and Bernardina Ormani, Antonio Allegri was born in Correggio (Reggio Emilia) before 30 August, since in order to sign the contract for the *Madonna of St. Francis*, dated August 30th 1514, without his father's consent, the painter must have been twenty-five years old according to the law of the time.

1511-1512

He stayed in Mantua and was in contact with Francesco Mantegna, Andrea's son.

1514-1515

Painted the altarpiece for the high altar of the Church of San Francesco in Correggio for the sum of 100 ducats. Signed "Antonius de Alegris f." on the wheel of the martyrdom of St. Catherine of Alexandria, the *Madonna of St. Francis* is the master's first significant work, testifying to his adherence to the manner of Mantegna, Leonardo, Raphael, Andrea del Sarto and some older and more established Emilian colleagues such as Francesco Francia and Lorenzo Costa.

1518

Probable stay in Rome, where he could admire the works of Raphael and Michelangelo.

1520

He received the first 30 gold ducats for the fresco decoration of the choir dome of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Parma. Devoid of architectural scores and based exclusively on the power of colour and daring illusionistic foreshortenings, the fresco depicts a whirling *Vision of St. John* and anticipates the theatrical Baroque pictorial decorations by a century.

1521

He married 18-year-old Gerolama Merlini, the daughter of a military man, who brought him a dowry of both real estate and 257 ducats.

1522

A poetic composition by Lorenzo Cornigli in praise of Abbess Giovanna Piacenza mentions for the first time the paintings in the so-called *Camera della Badessa* (Abbess's Room) in the Monastery of San Paolo in Parma, a refined fresco cycle centred on mythological themes aimed at extolling the virtues of the patron, equated with the goddess of hunting and virginity Diana. Datable to 1520 and inspired by Raphael's Loggia of Psiche, Correggio's decoration would become a model for Parmigianino's painting.

The "fabbricieri" of Parma Cathedral commissioned the painter to fresco the dome, cross vault,

apsidal basin and choir, guaranteeing him a fee of 1,000 ducats. The decoration, but above all the vibrant *Assumption of the Virgin* in the dome, a source of inspiration for great masters of the 17th century such as Giovanni Lanfranco and Pietro da Cortona, was also praised by Giorgio Vasari, who was struck by the “very large multitude of figures [...] seen below upwards with stupendous marvel”.

1524

After receiving the last 27 gold ducats, the artist declared that he had been paid in full for the frescoes in the Church of San Giovanni Evangelista.

1526

The “fabbricieri” of Parma Cathedral pay the painter the first instalment of the 275 ducats for a quarter of the decoration of the dome.

1530-1533

He painted two canvases with the *Allegory of Virtue* and the *Allegory of Vice* for Isabella d’Este’s studiolo in Mantua, located in the Ducal Palace, both of which are housed in the Louvre, and for the Duke of Mantua Federico II Gonzaga a mythological cycle with the so-called *Loves of Jupiter*, four canvases housed in various collections: *Danae* at the Galleria Borghese in Rome; *Leda and the Swan* at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin; *Rape of Ganymede* and *Jupiter and Io* at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. The paintings, which, according to Vasari, were made “to send to the Emperor [Charles V]”, were most likely destined for the Sala di Ovidio in Palazzo Te, where Giulio Romano saw them.

1534

On March 5th, following a fulminating illness, the painter died in Correggio and was buried in the family tomb in the cloister of the Church of San Francesco, leaving a second series of *Loves of Jupiter* unfinished for the Duke of Mantua who, in three letters of September 12th and 17th and October 17th, urged the governor of Parma to hand over to him the “cartoni di pictura” remaining in the master’s workshop.