

## Römisches Jb. der Bibliotheca Hertziana, 39.2009/2010

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Lothar Sickel:

Gli esordi di Caravaggio a Roma: una ricostruzione del suo ambiente sociale nel primo periodo romano

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### Abstract

Caravaggio's beginnings in Rome. A reconstruction of the painter's milieu during his early Roman years

There is still no precise answer to the question of when and under what circumstances the young Michelangelo Merisi moved from his Lombard home to Rome, where he is recorded for the first time only in 1597. While it is commonly assumed that he came to Rome in the Fall of 1592, the present article examines the possibility of a first, even earlier arrival in late 1591 or early 1592. The main aim of the study is, however, to outline the social settings that the young painter frequented in striving for artistic success. The reconstruction of this milieu is based on new documentary evidence. The first part regards the Roman journey of Michelangelo's uncle, Ludovico Merisi, who lived in the Eternal city for about seven months from October 1591 to May 1592. It was very likely due to Ludovico's connections in Rome that his nephew Michelangelo found his first lodging in the house of Pandolfo Pucci, the famous Monsignor Insalata. Pucci's rather negative reputation, as rendered by Mancini, can now be rectified; Pucci indeed had specific interests in art. Furthermore it is possible to identify Pucci's house situated in the Borgo in front of Saint Peter's. In this house Caravaggio must have stayed during his first Roman journey. The second part of the article focuses on the individuals who assisted the still-unknown Caravaggio when he returned to Rome at an unknown later date, after 1592. Several documents shed new light on the personality of the Sicilian painter Lorenzo Carli, with whom Caravaggio cooperated quite intensely before entering the service of his first major patron, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte. Carli's workshop was situated near Sant'Agostino, in a quarter where Caravaggio made several other acquaintances, for instance that of Antiveduto Grammatica, with whom he also worked. Caravaggio's stay with Carli is closely related to his recovery in the hospital of Santa Maria della Consolazione. According to Mancini, Caravaggio gave some of his early paintings to the priore of the hospital whose previously uncertain identity can now be established: this was Luciano Bianchi from Messina, who was the head of the hospital from 1594 until 1608. In conclusion the article addresses the crucial question of why Caravaggio, contrary to established thought, at the beginning of his Roman career could not rely on an efficient system of patronage. His situation is considered in contrast to that of the young Giovanni Battista Secco, a contemporary painter also originat-

ing from Caravaggio, who, however, was a pupil of Federico Zuccari and benefitted considerably from his teacher's help and reputation. Without such support, it was much harder for Caravaggio to find his way to success.

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Reference:

TOC: Römisches Jb. der Bibliotheca Hertziana, 39.2009/2010. In: ArtHist.net, Dec 14, 2010 (accessed Jun 24, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/641>>.