

Francesco Caporale

Italian sculptor
(17th century)

He was probably born in Rome in the second half of the 16th century. The first news related to some decorative works in the Chapel of SS. Sacramento in S. Maria Maggiore, executed in 1606, in collaboration with Buonvicino, Silla Longhi, P. Bernini, S. Maderno, N. Cordier, G. Bertolotto. This information, although it does not allow us to identify the work, is valuable in defining the cultural orientation of the artist who in 1608 still sees Stefano Maderno in the execution of two travertine statues, St. Mattia apostle and Martyr of Epafra, to be placed in the niches of the exterior facade of the Pauline chapel, in S. Maria Maggiore. For these works, documents indicate that on August 14, September 18, October 30, 1608, the two artists were working on getting 50 soldi from time to time; On January 8, 1609, the two statues were already in operation and the sculptors received a total of 250 soldi. Probably already in January 1608, Pope Paul V commissioned Caporale the bust of Antonio Nigrita, the Congolese ambassador, who died on the 3rd of November 1608, just arrived in Rome after multiple trips. The pope wanted the funeral monument to be executed immediately and from a "notice" of 12 January 1608 it is known that on the 5th day after the ambassador's death, he had "taken the impression of his effigy from the natural to make the statue perpetual memory". This explains the characteristics of the singular portrait and, in a certain sense, the quality of the work, particularly remarkable in the physiognomic rendering and the typological interpretation; but once again does not give precise details of the exact skills of this artist, accustomed to more academic ways or, in any case, to a less realistic representation in harmony with manneristic taste. According to the sources the sculpture was believed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, but the documents then found by Muñoz have returned the paternity of the work to Caporale. The sculptor provided the black marble and received a fee of 95 soldi with three payments of March 27, April 30 and December 19, 1608 when the bust is finished. It was placed in situ, in the monument on the left wall of the chapel of the baptistery, in S. Maria Maggiore, only in 1629, date of execution of the monument itself.

From another document, there is also news of a marble work, no longer, now traceable: two putti riding dolphins, executed for a fountain placed at steps to the stairs in the new apartment of the pontifical palace at the Quirinale. On 11th of September, 1611, on the esteem of Architect Flaminio Ponzio, a mandate was issued to Caporale for this work, worth 25 soldi. The sculptor refused to accept it, considering the fee to be inadequate; so that a new mandate of 30 soldi followed on 24 September, 1611. The

artist undoubtedly had a wider activity and, if he still escapes us today, it is partly due to the character of his production, often called ornamental works and therefore easily confusing in anonymity.

The date of his death is unknown, almost certainly in Rome in the first half of the seventeenth century.

He is very likely to have relations with Caporale a Pietro de Caporali, mentioned in documents of 1638 and 1639 as a carpenter and stonecutter of capitals of the steep bell tower of St. Peter in the Vatican.

by Antonella Pampalone - Biographical Dictionary of the Italians - Volume 18 (1975)

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