

# Sebastiano Cipriani

Italian architect  
(1660-1740)

Born in Siena around 1660, he established himself, not known in which year, in Rome, where he had as master GB Continiani and underwent the influences of Cipriani Fontana. His first work so far known is the catafalque for the funeral of Giorgio Bolognetti bishop of Rieti, erected in the Church of the Gesù in Rome on February 19th. 1686. A design for this monument, which was shaped like a circular temple and was crowned with a bust of the deceased, is preserved in the Cooper Hewitt Museum of Design in New York. Indicative of his professional level is the participation, in 1695, in the contest for the altare of St. Ignatius in the church of Jesus, in competition with A. Pozzo, GB Origone and GF Durazzo.

Although Cipriani had not yet "works in public" to his credit, as the Origone did not fail to point out his project, apparently, aroused, at least at the beginning, considerable consensus. But ultimately the Jesuit general Thyrso Gonzales, along with a commission of architects and artists, preferred the project of the Well. To this decision Cipriani reacted with the engraving of his own design with a very sensitive dedication to the patron of the prince Agostino Chigi (October 5, 1696) which emphasizes the initial approval. There is a certain resemblance of the architectural structure of the present altar with that designed by Cipriani. Worthy of note is the general conception of the system that is lavishly articulated through free columns; a concave space for the painting, instead of the statue we see today, is isolated scenographically from single columns jutting diagonally, repeated at the sides to frame statues. The central motif anticipates the later altars of the Cipriani in S. Maria in Campitelli and in the cathedral of Rieti. A few years later, he was in charge of the design for the decoration of the "quarantore" in the Gesù of Rome (21-23 february 1700), on the theme of the *Meeting of Abraham with Melchizedek*, which was architecturally dominated by a triumphal arch accessible via a bridge.

With the now seventy-five Cipriani Rainaldi collaborated in the design and construction of Palazzo Mancini-Salviati on the Corso (then seat of the Academy of France and now the Banco di Sicilia), built between 1687 and 1689; and perhaps some traces of its taste can be seen in the façade, ennobled by a scaffolding of four free columns supporting a balcony supported by balustrades in the parapets of the windows and in the side balconies on shelves.

The 4th October 1697 he was nominated "academic merit" of the Accademia di S. Luca, together with Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri and Carlo Buratti, students of Carlo Fontana. He served the Academy as an archaeological teacher, holding courses lasting one month in 1699, 1701, 1702 and 1703; strangely, however, we do not find it ever mentioned in the juries of the competitions, as instead often its two nomination partners. Later, March 19, 1714, appears in a document concerning the reform of the statutes, next to Bizzaccheri and others, all members of a commission appointed for this purpose by the Academy itself in 1711.

In 1696 he had provided the drawing of the catafalque, and decorated the church of St. Stanislaus. of the Poles, for the funeral services of Giovanni III Sobieski, king of Poland. In proportion to the dignity of the deceased, the apparatus appears unpretentious; for the upper part, pyramidal, it follows a type in vogue around the seventh decade of the century. XVII which has its most illustrious example in the Bernini monument for the funeral of the duke of Beaufort. More expensive, and perhaps one of the most important of its kind, was the funeral machine erected by Cipriani in S. Lorenzo in Lucina, with interior decoration and exterior of the church, commissioned by Cardinal Carlo Barberini, for the funeral (28 January 1702) of another monarch: the deposed James II Stuart.

From the famous Bernini's canopy to St. Peter derive the motif of the spiral columns, arranged by Cipriani on the diagonals, and the volute supports, used however to support a crown. The apparatus is known in all the details from the engravings of A. Mirrors published by Carlo de Aquino with a description of the funeral and the text of his prayer. The central structure with the sarcophagus can be compared to that which Mattia de Rossi designed in 1691 for the funeral of Alexander VIII, while in the vast drapery that discovers the view of the catafalque it connects to the monument erected to Gregory XV in S. Ignazio da Pierre Le Gros et al. (1697-1710).

The Cipriani collected, a success equally considerable in 1705, at the opening of the chapel of St. John the Baptist in S. Maria in Campitelli (first left), built for Angelo Altieri and his wife Laura Carpegna, premortagli in 1687. Again the architect strongly refers to Bernini in the pyramidal shape that serves as background to the busts of the defuriti. For the shape of the altar he served as a model for the one in the chapel "Noli me tangere" in SS. Dominic and Sisto, also of Bernini, to whom the Cipriani will appeal again when, in 1725-26, he will conceive, in a very congenial way, the altar for the Bernini statue of *S. Barbara* in the cathedral of Rieti.

The fate was not very good with two other chapels of Cipriani both changed in the nineteenth century: the chapel of the Immaculate Conception begun in 1718, second right in SS. Apostles in Rome, and that of the Crucifix, also in SS. Apostoli (to the right of the choir), designed in 1721, in which the architect punctuated the walls with eight spiral columns from the early Christian period (only the marble pulpit of 1736 survives intact). In 1725, for the nearby church of S. Marcello al Corso, he provided the design for the high altar (replaced in the 19th century). From 1703 to 1724 he was responsible for the construction of the library hall at S. Croce in Gerusalemme.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, when important commissions had been exhausted in Rome, the Cipriani had to accept more or less considerable commissions in the province. Around 1706 he carried out restoration and embellishment works in the cathedral of Palestrina; as successor of the Well, who left for Vienna in 1702, he prepared the design for the vault of the Jesus in Montepulciano (1710-12). In 1711, as an architect of the Apostolic Chamber, he gave Norcia an assessment of the state of the municipal tower which, against his opinion, was demolished and rebuilt by a local architect, GB Mastropaoli, in 1713. In the period 1703-17, the Pica-Alfieri palace in L'Aquila was built according to his design, which echoes the Mancini-Salviati palace in the particular of the colonnade near the center of the façade. In 1708 he prepared a very conventional project for the facade of the Cathedral of St. Maximus, also in L'Aquila, which recalls the

practice of the Accademia di S. Luca around the beginning of the century. The execution of his project for the church and rectory began in 1711. Other buildings of the same city, new, or reconstructed with the intervention of Cipriani after the earthquake of 1703, I am the Antonelli-de Torres-Dragonetti palace and the church and convent of S. Basilio.

In Rome its most significant phase was probably around 1717, the year of the competition announced by Clement XI for the Spanish Steps, which included, among others, A. Specchi, F. Iuvarra, A. Valeri and F. de Sanctis, and for which Cipriani presented four drawings.

The development of his ideas began with the only signed project (1717); this is based on two elements: the wide, straight lower staircase and the convex body surrounded by narrower stairs. This rather simple scheme is later interpolated by a small square, half-height on the slope, embraced by, flights of stairs on a polygonal plan. In the final drawing, the same convex body is moved further down and the square is freed which is located halfway between two straight steps of a staircase. With this project Cipriani almost anticipates that of the winner F. de Sanctis, which brings the convex part back to its original place, in front of the church of Trinità dei Monti.

Defeated by a narrow margin, he created one of his main works during this period: the villa for cardinal Giovanni Battista Patrizi (1716-17), demolished around 1911, in which the trend of the arched shoe of the lower terrace and the staircase that crosses the upper one show a notable affinity with the aforementioned plans for the Spanish Steps. The casino, however, especially in the central section that rises above the roof and in the "serliana" of the open loggia, reveals the influence of the back side of the villa Aldobrandini in Frascati by G. Della Porta. Villa Patrizi, near Porta Pia, assumes particular importance in the work of Cipriani also because, although of smaller scale, it appears connected with a project that he elaborated at the same time: the imperial villa in Strjelna, near St. Petersburg, near the sea, with the high casino on a large terrace and surrounded by canals and islands.

Dating from the year 1717, this project is similar to some themes of the Clementine competitions, and especially that of 1707: a palace for a prince "in the middle of the sea". It was not executed because again it was preferred that of another architect, Nicola Michetti. Instead, built between 1717 and 1730 is the monumental although somewhat unadorned and unfinished, pal. Collicola in Spoleto, but distinguished by a rear façade with three floors of arches, the upper two of which take the viewpoint towards the mountainous landscape. From the same period (1719-29) it is the choir of the cathedral of Foligno, of classical articulation, the projects of which are still preserved in the archive of the cathedral. Two other drawings, which bear the date 1751 and show a different arrangement of the choir (remained on paper), were ascribed to Cipriani, but they can not be reported.

The Cipriani maintained close contacts with the Academy of St. Luke: a list of 1725, for example, mentions it as "First Censor and Estimator of Architecture". The apogee of his career, and of the recognition, he was reached on November 16th. 1732 when he was appointed prince for the following year. During his tenure, he insisted that the rule be observed that the new academics would leave the Academy "proof" of their ability; and

is perhaps due to this initiative if we currently have designs such as those of Nicola Salvi, Vanvitelli and B. Vittone elected under his principality.

As for the active profession, it seems, however, that it was now a bit 'in decline. As far as we know, he did not take part in the great competitions organized by Clement XII for the façade of S. Giovanni in Laterano and for the Trevi Fountain. He continued to work as an architect of the Monte di Pietà (1729-40) and, with Salvi and Filippo Crenoli, he built that stretch of enlargement of the original building that overlooks the S. Trinità dei Pellegrini (1735-40). Also, in 1731, as a local architect, he expanded the Via di Pietra when the Compagnia dei Bergamaschi was preparing for new projects for his church. In 1732 there is a drawing of the "p.n.te state" of the chapel of S. Leone II in S. Maria di Costantinopoli dei Siciliani, executed perhaps in view of a reconstruction, and the enlargement of the convent of La Maddalena.

Towards the middle of the fourth decade of the eighteenth century his activity began to decline: he was not re-elected Prince of the Academy, in 1734 Vanvitelli replaced him as "Commissioner of the Fiumicino Passonate"; in 1740 Salvi succeeded him as architect of Monte di Pietà. He must have died at that time, probably in Rome.

Briefly reviewing the path, it seems that Cipriani, as an architect of a period of transition, had a happy talent for assimilation towards inspirations coming especially from Bernini and his students, a particular ability to produce effects of great solemnity, as in catafalque of James II and in the Altieri chapel. He was also able to design urbanistic and grandiose style, as the tsar project suggests, not available, but failed to establish itself in this field against other competitors, and in his career never achieved an extraordinary success. Rather than an ascending line one notices in his production differences, but partially conditioned by the modesty of the works required.

From his known works (many are still to be discovered, probably) Cipriani appears as a characteristic personality of the late Roman Baroque; conservative rather than innovator, he produced decent and respectable works. Supporter of the Berninian current, on the occasion of his report of February 13th. 1715, concerning the auction house in S. Maria in Trastevere, however, expressed great respect for some of the works of Borromini. Finally, the recent hypothesis proposing it as Vanvitelli's teacher should be considered with interest.

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