

Giovanni Battista Grossi

Italian sculptor

18th century

We do not know the place and date of birth of this sculptor, documented in Rome in the second half of the eighteenth century, of which we ignore the formation, certainly occurred in the late-baroque tradition, prevailing in the city during the first decades of the century. This is borne out by the analysis of the first decorative cycle attributed to him by the sources and dating back to 1749. They are four bas-reliefs, placed inside the church of S. Nicola dei Lorenesi, then renovated by the architect Pietro Mariotti.

The stucco squares, worked "with great study and diligence for the copiosity of the Figures" according to the chronicles of the time, represent the prodigious facts of the life of S. Nicola di Bari. Designed according to an ideal point of view, located in the center of the church, and according to a purely baroque theatrical taste, they are arranged in pairs on the opposite walls of the vaulted rectangular hall: the two episodes concerning the Childhood of the saint are at the center, those of maturity at the entrance, thus suggesting a sense of spatial and temporal continuity (Violette, p.499). A series of compositional and formal correspondences also ideally connects scenes illustrating similar periods in the life of the saint on either side of the building. In the bas-relief with *S. Nicola, a child who refuses mother's milk on Wednesdays and Fridays*, on the second door on the right, and on the second with *S. Nicola, a child praying while bathing*, on the second on the left, a female character overflowing from the frame of the frame, as it happens with a male figure in the other two. In these, depicting *St. Nicholas elected bishop of Mira* and *St. Nicholas who distributes his goods to the poor*, the sculptor placed at the top the same decorative motif (the heads of the cherubim and the divine ray directed towards the saint) that alternates to the variant of the drape open suddenly to let the light of God appear in the other two panels. From a stylistic point of view, the pasty and enveloping workmanship of the drapery, and the arrangement of the figures along diagonal axes show the late-baroque persistences that melt into the classical faces of the characters, especially women, where we can see the influence of the sculptor Filippo Della Valle, without however achieving the same results of elegant formal refinement. The composition of the panels, especially those with s. Nicholas child, rich in characters presented with a precise spatial scan of the groups and with the scenic expedient of the raised cloth, shows the assimilation of the lesson of Pierre Legros, with particular reference to the *Tobia and Gabael* of the Chapel of the pawnshop (1702- 05).

In 1750 the decoration of the facade of the Oratory of the Arciconfraternita del Carmine at Tre Cannelle dates back to the newly renovated. Grossi made in stucco the bas-relief of the *Virgin with the Child*, placed in the tympanum of the facade designed by Michelangelo Specchi and destroyed with the rest of the church in the fire of 1772.

The two bas-reliefs depicting the *Nativity* and the *Annunciation* for the chapel of the Madonna dell'Archetto, probably lost in the reconstruction made by the architect Virginio Vespignani between 1850 and 1851 at the behest of the Marquis Alessandro Muti Papazzurri.

The following year the sculptor received from the prince Fabrizio Colonna the task of

carrying out the funeral monument of his uncle, Cardinal Carlo, who died in 1739 and was buried in S. Giovanni in Laterano, for the patronage chapel of the family dedicated to St. Francis in the church of the Ss. Apostoli.

The work, completed and "discovered" to the public on 6 April. 1754, is composed of all the traditional elements of the Baroque tomb: the pyramid, the tomb, the Fama with the trumpet, the putto with the face of classical derivation, the family crest and the Latin inscription, the various precious marbles, such as the ancient brecciato yellow of the blanket, the base of bardiglio with a black and white hoof of France on it, the urn of ancient red. The composition is asymmetrical: on the bottom left sits a putto on which the drapery of the blanket gently falls, raised from the urn by a *Fama* in the foreground on the opposite side. In modeling these two sculptures, the artist referred to some of Della Valle's works, above all to the *Temperance* of the Corsini chapel in S. Giovanni and to the puttini of the monument to Maria Clementina Sobieski in the church of the Ss. Apostoli.

The Colonna would have used the services of Grossi again. According to an account paid in 1759, he had the task of contributing to the increase in the gallery's sculptures and intervening for their own preservation, in particular on eighteen statues of the hall and eight among those in the room known today as the War Column.

In 1759 he began working on the reliefs of the Trevi Fountain with Pietro Bracci, Filippo Della Valle and Andrea Bergondi.

The subject of the high relief made by Grossi, who was to commemorate the origins of the Virgin water, defined as it was a girl, named Trivia, to indicate the source to the thirsty Roman militia, and the relative location in the upper left, had already been defined in the large wooden model, made in 1735 by the carpenter Carlo Camporese on a design by Giovan Battista Maini and Nicola Salvi, and today preserved in the Museum of Rome at Palazzo Braschi. The composition of the work, of which there is a plaster model (1.85 x 1.20 m), walled on the third floor of the Palazzo Rondinini staircase, with few variations compared to the final version, echoes that already indicated in the large wooden model of the fountain. The descriptive system remains more linear than the stories of the life of s. Nicola in the church of Lorraine, with more classical references in the setting of the characters, and with that measured control of the forms, typical of Della Valle's art, which make it a balanced illustration, outside the Baroque rhetoric that instead characterizes the other high relief, made by Bergondi.

In the same period Grossi worked "in rehabilitating the cliff, and vessel" of the fountain for which he received 341.65 scudi, together with the 750 of the "bas-relief", according to a "Restricted expenditure" of July 14, 1761. The whole decoration of the fountain was completed on May 22, 1762, when the pontiff went to visit it on the occasion of its opening to the public.

Like other artists of the time, Grossi is a fine performer of sculptures for the funeral of important figures, such as the apparatus set up on 28 July 1774 in the church of S. Luigi dei Francesi for Louis XV and the one prepared on 18 May 1787 for Peter III of Portugal in S. Antonio dei Portoghesi.

In the eighties he continued the activity of restorer of ancient sculptures, demonstrating to participate in the research and valorization of antiquities, according to a common

attitude that feverishly characterized those Roman years.

At the end of 1780, Grossi had added his arms and feet to a "sleeping sleeper", made of white marble, now lost, found in the Tor Tre Teste quarry, owned by the cardinal Antonio Casali who was carrying out several excavations. The piece had been restored "with such art and mastery that we do not know the modern from the old", according to the integrative taste of the period.

It is possible that the sculptor also took part directly in the excavation campaigns, as Francesco Piranesi, general agent of the king of Sweden, would suppose when the 20 ag. 1785, in the contract of sale of the colossal statue of Greek marble depicting a "Sleeping Endimione", he affirmed that the sculpture was "compiled and found by Mr. Gio. Grossi" in the excavation of Villa Adriana in Tivoli, commissioned by Monsignor Giovanni Francesco Compagnoni Marefoschi. The sculpture, sold to the king of Sweden, was exhibited in Stockholm, where it is still preserved today.

On July 14, 1792 a sculptor named Grossi, probably to be identified with Grossi, worked on the restoration of the statues and busts found by the painter Gavin Hamilton in the Pantano excavations carried out at the behest of Prince Marcantonio Borghese, then destined for the Gabii museum in Villa Borghese and sold in 1793 to the Dutch Enrico Hope.

The date of his death is unknown.

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