

# Salvatore Monosilio

Italian painter  
(1715-1776)

He was born in Messina on May 30, 1715 to Caterina Monosilio and Andrea Scimone; he took his mother's surname in homage, perhaps, to a canon uncle, Salvatore Monosilio. He probably received his first teachings from Letterio Paladino, Giuseppe's uncle, also a painter, with whom Monosilio would later also share his apprenticeship with Sebastiano Conca in Rome.

As he himself stated in the marital interrogation, Monosilio left Messina in 1734, but no documentary traces remain of the first ten years of his stay in Rome. In 1744 he was welcomed into the Congregation of the Virtuosi at the Pantheon and on November 22, 1745 he married Anna Teresa Madoni, who between 1747 and 1767 gave him seven children, four boys and three girls. In the mid-1740s he executed two altarpieces with the *Assumption* and the *Conversion of St. Paul* on the third altar on the right and on the third on the left of the destroyed Holy Trinity of the Congregation of the Mission in Montecitorio, entirely rebuilt between 1739 and 1743. Together with the other altarpieces of the church, the canvases are now preserved by the fathers of the mission at the Leoniano college in Prati. The altarpiece with St. Pasquale Baylon for the church of the *Holy Forty Martyrs*, rebuilt in those years and, at the end of the works, also dedicated to the Spanish saint, is dated around 1745-47.

Monosilio obtained the commission from the Fathers of the Mission as a student of Conca, who had been entrusted with the execution of the *Trinity* for the main altar of the same church: the Chronological Book of the convent in fact qualifies Monosilio as a student of Conca and specifies the sum received, just 220 scudi. The two canvases, like the one in S. Pasquale Baylon, already show the essential characteristics of Monosilio's production, clearly dependent on Conca's language, subjected to a simplification that decidedly distances Monosilio from any Baroque emphasis.

For the canonization of Caterina Ricci, in 1746, Monosilio executed some paintings commissioned by the Dominican Order. Following the example of his master, he then often worked on the occasion of beatifications and canonizations, also creating ephemeral works.

Monosilio painted three double-sided banners depicting "on one side, a *Crucifix* that detaches itself from the Cross to embrace the Blessed [...] on the other side the same Blessed carried to heaven by the Angels". One of these banners is today at the Dominican convent in Prato, the city where the saint had lived, and was sent from Rome in that same 1746. The conservation, for an object of this type, is exceptional. Also at the Lemme collection in Rome is the original model by the same Monosilio relating to the image of the saint assumed into heaven. This iconography was spread by an engraving made by M. Sorello which bears the inscription "Salvator Monosilio inv. et pinxit", probably taken from another painting by the same Monosilio still today in the Dominican convent of S. Sabina in Rome.

The 1750 Jubilee Year edition of Roisecco's Ancient and Modern Rome mentions, in addition to the altarpieces of the Holy Trinity of the Mission and the Holy Forty Martyrs, other public works by Monosilio, who evidently worked a lot in the second half of the 1740s.

In S. Paolino alla Regola he frescoed a *Glory of St. Anne* derived from the Glory of St. Camillo de Lellis of Conca alla Maddalena, from 1744; in the oratory of the new college of the fathers of the Pious Schools in Rome he executed a *Blessed Giuseppe Calasanzio*, which was destroyed in the early nineteenth century, probably commissioned on the occasion of the beatification of Calasanzio, in 1748. For the Jubilee anniversary, Benedict XIV entrusted Monosilio with the restoration of the portraits of the pontiffs along the naves of S. Paolo fuori le Mura.

After these years of intense activity, there is no certain information about Monosilio's Roman activity, although he was present in the city at the baptisms of his third (1751) and fourth (1758) sons. In 1762 he was finally admitted to the Academy of St. Luke, for which he had executed, as a test of acceptance, a Constantine Orders the Destruction of the Idols, signed and dated 1761 (still in the Academy's collections), which constitutes the only known easel work of profane subject by M.: the easel of the pictorial draftsmanship of this small canvas will not be found again in the artist's subsequent production. The 1765 edition of Ancient and Modern Rome does not record any new public work by M., and it has been hypothesized that in these years the painter worked outside Rome, but it is also possible that he sent canvases to Messina and Piceno without ever leaving the city.

The sources do not allow us to establish the date of execution of the works created by Monosilio for Messina and the Piceno area. For the church of S. Andrea Avellino in his hometown, to which Conca had sent a canvas with the same subject in 1749, Monosilio executed an altarpiece with the titular saint. In that of Gesù e Maria delle Trombe there were some of his paintings, including an Oration of Jesus in the Garden which, after the destruction of the church following the earthquake of 1908, is today in the Regional Museum, in a poor state of conservation. Conca's fame in the Piceno area procured Monosilio other commissions: in S. Barnaba, in San Ginesio, there was a S. Barnaba and the saints Antonio Abate, Telesforo papa and Tiburzio, and according to Ticozzi he «worked much more in various cities».

In 1767 Clement XIII celebrated the canonization of six new saints, including the Frenchwoman Giovanna di Chantal and the Pole Giovanni Canzio. Monosilio executed the lost processional banner with the image of the saint and, above all, the altarpiece depicting the saint destined for S. Stanislao dei Polacchi in Rome. The positive reception of this work presumably procured Monosilio other important commissions from the Polish nation: dated and signed 1767 is the Massacre of the Innocents in the cathedral of Krakow, where one of his Saint Andrews is also preserved. From these same years is the modest Madonna and Child with Saints Francis de Sales and Thomas of Villanova in S. Lucia del Gonfalone in Rome, rebuilt starting in 1764. Between December 1768 and May 1771 Monosilio received some payments for the Sermon of St. Bernardino in S. Caterina da Siena: the preparatory sketch is also preserved at the Arciconfraternita dei Senesi which is located next to the church.

This is one of the most important commissions of his career, called to participate in a collective enterprise alongside some of the protagonists of Roman painting at the turning point between late Baroque and incipient Neoclassicism, such as Tommaso Conca, Gaetano Lapis and Domenico Corvi. Monosilio's performance is however decidedly disappointing, anchored to classicizing stylistic elements of the early eighteenth century, with inflections that still recall Benedetto Luti.

Of the last ten years of Monosilio's activity in Rome, we can recall the creation, between 1772 and 1775, of the preparatory cartoons for the mosaics of the Gregorian Chapel in St. Peter's, to replace those of Giovanni Muziano which were now seriously deteriorated.

Monosilio died in Rome on 6 October 1776.

by Stefano Pierguidi

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