

Salvatore Monosilio

Italian painter
(1715-1776)

He was born in Messina on 30 May 1715 to Caterina Monosilio and Andrea Scimone; he took his maternal surname in homage, perhaps, to a canonical 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 studentship with Sebastiano Conca in Rome.

As he himself stated in the marital interrogation, Monosilio left Messina in 1734, but no documentary trace remains 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 22 Nov. 1745 he married Anna Teresa Madoni, who between 1747 and 1767 bore him seven children, four sons and three daughters. In the mid-1740s he executed two altarpieces with the *Assumption* and the *Conversion of St. Paul* already on the third altar on the right and on the third on the left of the destroyed Ss. Trinità of the Congregation of the Mission in Montecitorio, entirely rebuilt between 1739 and 1743. Together with the other altarpieces of the church, the paintings are preserved today by the fathers of mission to the Leoniano college in Prati. The altarpiece with *S. Pasquale Baylon* for the church of the Ss. Quaranta Martiri, rebuilt in those years and, at the end of the works, also named after the Spanish saint, is dated to 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 decisively 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 two-sided banners representing "on one, a Crucifix detaching from the Cross to embrace the Blessed [...] on the other the Blessed herself 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; in the Lemme collection in Rome there is also the original model by Monosilio himself relating to the image of the saint assumed into heaven. This iconography was disseminated 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 jubilee year 1750 edition of Roisecco's ancient and modern Rome highlights, 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. Anna* derived from the *Glory of St. Camillo de Lellis* of Conca alla Maddalena, 1744; in the oratory of the new college of the fathers of the Pious Schools in Rome he painted a *Blessed Giuseppe Calasanz* which was destroyed in the early 19th century, probably commissioned on the occasion of the beatification of Calasanz in 1748. For the jubilee anniversary Benedict XIV entrusted the restoration to Monosilio 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 regarding Monosilio's Roman activity, although he was present in the city at the baptisms of his third-born (1751) and fourth-born (1758). In 1762 he was finally admitted to the Accademia di S. Luca, for which he had performed, as a welcome test, a *Constantine orders the destruction of the idols*, signed and dated 1761 (still in the Academy's collections), which constitutes Monosilio's only known easel work with a profane subject: the ease of the pictorial drafting of this small canvas will no longer be found in the artist's subsequent production. The 1765 edition of *Ancient and Modern Rome* does not record any new public works by Monosilio, 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 the Piceno area without ever leave 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 Jesus and Mary of the Trumpets there were some paintings by him, including a *Prayer 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. The fame of Conca in the Piceno area brought Monosilio other commissions: in S. Barnaba, in *San Ginesio*, there was a *S. Barnaba and SS. Antonio Abate, Pope Telesforo and Tiburzio*, and according to Ticozzi he "worked much more in various cities".

In 1767 Pope Clement XIII celebrated the canonization of six new saints, including the French Joanna of Chantal and the Polish Giovanni Canzio. Monosilio executed the lost processional banner with the image of the saint and, above all, the altarpiece depicting the saint intended for S. Stanislao dei Polacchi in Rome. The positive reception of this work presumably earned Monosilio other important commissions from the Polish nation: dated and signed 1767 is the *Massacre of the Innocents* in the Krakow Cathedral, where one of his *St. Andrews* is also preserved. From these same years is the modest *Madonna with Child and SS. Francesco de Sales and Tommaso di Villanova* in S. Lucia del Gonfalone in Rome, rebuilt starting from 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 in the Archconfraternity of the Senesi which is located next to the church.

This is one of the most important commissions of Monosilio's career, called to participate in a collective undertaking alongside some of the protagonists of Roman painting at the turning point between late Baroque and neoclassicism, such as Tommaso Conca, Gaetano Lapis and Domenico Corvi. Monosilio's work, however, is decidedly disappointing, anchored to classical stylistic features of the early 18th century, with inflections still reminiscent of Benedetto Luti.

Of the last ten years of Monosilio's Roman activity we can remember the creation, between 1772 and 1775, of the preparatory cartoons for the mosaics of the Gregorian chapel in S. Pietro, replacing those of Giovanni Muziano which were now greatly deteriorated.

Monosilio died in Rome on 6 October. 1776.

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