

# Federico Mannucci

Italian Architect, Engineer, Photographer, Mathematician  
(1848-1935)

Of an ancient Florentine family, he was born in Rome on 16 September. 1848, third of the five children of Giuseppe and Barbara of the Zamboni counts. On 18 June 1870 he obtained a bachelor's degree in mathematics and philosophy and, in 1873, a degree in engineering from the Roman "Sapienza". He attended the observatory of the Roman College, gaining the friendship and trust of Fr. A. Secchi, who assisted in various scientific works. He specialized in architecture at the Accademia di S. Luca and, as a member of the Workers' Artistic Society, founded immediately after 1870, taught drawing in a Catholic evening school. He had just begun to carry out duties as an engineer collaborating with road and railway construction companies when, thanks to his frequenting of the Society of Italian Catholic Youth and the friendship of some ecclesiastics, in January 1882 Leo XIII called him to carry out the function of sub-foremaster major of the Sacred Apostolic Palaces, which he held - in the service of three other pontiffs - for 47 years under the direct command of the major harbinger, a title traditionally held by the Marquises Sacchetti.

The duties of the major sub-foremen were described by Mannucci himself in the preface to his volume "My forty-seven years of major sub-foremen in the service of the Sacred Apostolic Palaces" (Rome 1935): "His obligations are the custody, ordinary maintenance and conservation of all the buildings belonging to the Sacred Palaces, has an active part in the new works decreed by the Supreme Pontiff, both in the projects, in the direction of their execution and in the final tests. He represents the Major Foriere in case of impediment or absence".

Alongside his institutional function, Mannucci made an important contribution to the Vatican observatory: in addition to having had, together with Fr. F. Denza, who played a decisive role in the re-foundation of the observatory (1888-91), initiated its activity and development, carrying out the role of photography assistant there until 1900. As soon as the observatory on the Tower of the Winds was reopened, Mannucci produced, at the invitation of the Royal Meteorological Society of London, a photographic atlas of the clouds which earned him a gold medal and great praise at the photography exhibition held in that city in March 1890. In 1891 he installed the large "Carte du Ciel" photographic telescope on the Leonina tower on the Vatican hill (today the San Giovanni tower). He followed a stay in Paris in 1892 to learn the use of the new instrument.

These activities resulted in printed contributions: Photography of the clouds, in Publications of the Vatican Specola, I (1891), 1, pp. 95-97; and Description of the observatory for celestial photography and of the work carried out therein, *ibid.*, 2, pp. 85-109 (together with G. Lais).

Alongside the main photographic work, shared with Fr. G. Lais, for the execution of the photographic program of the catalog and the map of the Sky assigned to the Vatican

observatory, Mannucci also photographed the Sun, the Moon, the planets and stellar objects many times. For these photographs of his, the Vatican observatory was awarded a diploma of honor at the 1894 Esposizioni reunited in Milan. Under Pius J. Hagen as new director of the observatory (1906), Mannucci directed the works for the adaptation of the new headquarters of the directorate, the design and installation of the dome for the large new visual telescope and the iron bridge for the connection of the two domes. When Hagen created an apparatus for a new demonstration of the rotation of the Earth, the isotomeograph, it was again Mannucci who, in addition to assisting him in the technical part, suggested him to use Atwood's machine to measure the deviation towards the East of falling bodies .

Mannucci was a stable member of the commissions responsible for the conservation of the historical and artistic monuments of the Holy See, the School of Tapestries and the sanctuary of Loreto. It was he who promoted the transitions imposed by technological progress, installing the first power plant in the Vatican and thus replacing gas lighting with electric lighting and hydraulic ones with electric elevators. He also saw to the construction of a summer residence for Leo XIII at the top of the Vatican hill and, at his request, had a small vineyard planted nearby. He also worked to bring drinking water to Carpineto Romano, the pontiff's birthplace, renovated the thermal power plant, created a new hydraulic network for the distribution of drinking water in the Vatican apartments, strengthened the fire brigade and firefighting equipment and replaced horse carriages with automobiles.

Among the countless restoration and consolidation works on the most important buildings of the Holy See inside and outside the Vatican, we remember the construction of a lazaretto for a cholera epidemic (1884); the Vatican Exhibition for the priestly jubilee of Leo XIII (1888); the intervention on a dangerous fire in a room adjacent to the Library (1903); the hospitalization in the Vatican of refugees from the Messina (1908) and Avezzano (1915) earthquakes; the transfer of the Art Gallery to another location (1909); the construction of the Belvedere palace for homes and offices (1903-14); the protection and darkening of the Vatican against air raids and the setting up of a hospital entrusted to the Order of Malta for the wounded during the Great War; the foundation of the Pontifical Oriental Institute (1917); the intervention on the fire of the Holy House of Loreto and its restoration (1921; a writing on The miraculous translation of the Holy House of Nazareth to Loreto is dedicated to this intervention; the contribution to the staging of the World Missionary Exhibition (1925); the new intervention on another fire in the dome of the Loreto sanctuary (1926); the foundation of the missionary-ethnological museum in the Lateran (1926); the construction of public housing and a new house and school for the Pious Filippini teachers in Castelgandolfo (1926).

Knight of the Order of Malta and Commander of the Order of St. Gregory the Great, in 1929, after becoming a Vatican citizen, at the request of his superiors he asked for and obtained his resignation from office and retirement, to which "it was however necessary to resign ". The Holy See allowed him to maintain his new citizenship, residence in the Vatican and the title of honorary major sub-foremen, and to continue to be a member of the commissions for historical and artistic heritage and for the sanctuary of Loreto. In recent years he collected his memories of himself.

Mannucci died in his home on 22 May 1935 and was buried in the church of S. Anna in

the Vatican.

by Sabino Maffeo - Biographical Dictionary of Italians

Translated from:

Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani - Volume 69 (2007)