

Flaminio Boulanger

Carpenter of the circle of Michelangelo

It is legitimate to assume that the young man destined to become one of the best "faber lignarius" in the Rome of the second half of the sixteenth century comes from Troyes, city of Champagne where a family of artisans is remembered with this name and where Enryet Boulanger was, in 1548, a famous goldsmith and medalist in the service of Henry II and Caterina de Medici.

Flaminio's first known news dates back to 1551 when he was in Rome and was paid by Ippolito II d'Este for having carved the carved ceiling of the dining room of his palace in Monte Giordano. The following year is a payment related to a tabernacle that Pope Julius III gives to the church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli on a project by Girolamo da Carpi (1501-1556), artist also in the orbit of Cardinal Ippolito II. The hypothesis that it was precisely the cultured cardinal, in close relationship with the French court, to favor the arrival in Italy of Boulanger, is likely but so far unverifiable. In 1560 it is a document that recalls the execution by our carpenter of another tabernacle for the church of Santa Maria dell'Anima.

The first great order of his career is certainly the ceiling of San Giovanni in Laterano for whose execution a competition is announced that Boulanger wins by presenting a detailed project.

He will work on this work for five years, from 1562 to 1567, with a well-tested workshop which also includes the Florentine Vico di Raffaele di Lazzaro - who will die along with eight workers in the collapse of a scaffolding. The decorations of the lacunari are made of papier-mâché by Daniele da Volterra (1509-1566), a close collaborator of Michelangelo.

In 1565, a document informs us, he has a workshop at the church of Santa Maria dell'Anima. On 26 August 1572 he commits, within a year and a half, to realize the "sufficta de Aracoeli". He will sculpt in the frieze carvings of rostrums, dolphins and dragons that allude to the alarm of the Boncompagni family to which Pope Gregory XIII belongs; everything will be gilded starting from 1574 by "Maestro Francesco Spagnolo".

In 1573 it was the ceiling of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in San Marcello, at the behest of Tommaso de Cavalieri (1509-1587), a close friend of Michelangelo, and thanks to the financial support of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.

In 1575, again thanks to Alessandro Farnese, he was called to make the altarpiece and the tabernacle for the lost church of Santa Chiara al Quirinale. The proximity, the confidence, of Boulanger to the Cardinal's entourage is also evidenced by a letter dated May 1576 from Fulvio Orsini to Farnese in which "maestro Flaminio" is remembered for having made the packing case and personally taken care of the shipment of a precious ancient marble sculpture for the Duke of Savoy.

Between 1578 and 1579 he worked at the large stucco, a Roman palace with a powerful architecture with overlapping orders and a façade centered by a large arch crowned with Farnese weapons, designed to house the cardinal's collections of antiquities, bronzes and medals (today at Ecouen National Musée de la Renaissance).

A design trace of this work remains in two drawings. The first is a sheet by Giovanni Colonna da Tivoli preserved in a code of Roman architectural drawings at the Biblioteca Espacio de Espania in Madrid (shown here at the opening). Together with sketches of altars, frames and decorations, studies of the front of a study similar to that of Ecouen appear accompanied by the words "flaminjo franzese". The second sheet, which probably represents a first idea of Farnese furniture, is preserved, together with the inventory of the Farnese collection drawn up in 1588 by Fulvio Orsini, at the State Archives of Naples.

In 1581 it was the turn of another great enterprise: the ceiling of the Hall of the Orazi and the Curiazi in Campidoglio; lost, the description attached to the contract is preserved, specifying that in the center there

must have been an octagon with the "arm of the Roman people" and that the whole work was performed "according to the design given to Flaminio himself". These ceilings should not have been very different from what we see in a drawing by Carlo Maderno at the Biblioteca Nacional de Espania in Madrid. In the same year there is news of the carving of an organ for the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere; the following year it was the turn of another organ destined to the Gregorian chapel of the basilica of San Pietro.

These are the last Roman works of the master who, now an old man, was called in 1584 by the Order of the Celestini of L'Aquila, a fief of Ottavio Farnese Margherita of Austria's wife, to take care of the altar of the Basilica of Santa Maria in Collemaggio. Here suddenly died that same year. The work, now lost, is terminated by one of its collaborators, also French named Guilielmus Poeyret, in 1585. According to the meticulous description of the local scholar Giovan Giuseppe Alfieri in 1590 in a manuscript today at the Library Apostolic Vatican, the altar was a large machine of architectural structure supported by four columns with capitals of Corinthian order and triumphal arch, enriched by bas-reliefs "where we see all the Mysteries of the Redeemer of the World" and "half relief" a Annunciation and numerous figures of Saints. Particularly valuable was the base "adorned with a beautiful red stone that does not give way to oriental jasper beauty".

Bibliography:

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