

Francesco Capriani

aka Francesco da Volterra

by Manfredo Tafuri - Biographical Dictionary of Italians - Volume 19 (1976)

Son of Giovanni Andrea, he was born in Volterra in the first decades of the XVI century. His fame is based on his architectural works in Rome; but his work as an architect outside the Pontifical State is still to be explored, in addition to his original work - according to the sources - of carver.

We do not know the year in which Capriani came to Rome; from the documents it does not result a direct participation in the works that, between 1560 and 1575, Bonifacio Caetani made in his possession of Cisterna; but the fact that at that time Capriani was an architect of Caetani led Wasserman (p.162) to attribute to Capriani a drawing preserved at the Accademia di S. Luca (n.196) with the caption "plan of the palace of the Cisterna". The palace was destroyed in the Second World War (Bibl. Apostaneo Vaticana, Riserva Stragrande 52: ... Photographic documentation and reliefs after the bombing).

Il Baglione and Martinelli attribute to Capriani the church of S. Chiara in Rome, whose façade, transformed in the nineteenth century, is known by an engraving of the Vasi: it is a simple in front of two orders punctuated by double pilasters, according to a model of sangallesca derivation that the same Capriani and G. Della Porta will develop in more complex projects. The attribution of the pious house attached to the church, founded in 1563, is uncertain; It is therefore difficult to evaluate the attribution of the convent to Maderno made by Baglione and Martinelli: Maderno, the continuator of many works by Capriani, may have completed the construction, which is extremely simple and the result of the re-adaptation of existing buildings.

All sources have started from 1565, with a salary of 181 scudi d'oro per year, the activity of Capriani a Guastalla, where Cesare Gonzaga moved the court in 1567, based on the document (State Archives of Mantua, b. 1392) cited by F. Amadei (17th-18th centuries), in *Universal Chronicle of the City of Mantua*, II, Mantua 1955, pp. 742 s. But the reference is far from exact, because in that document Capriani is not named at all.

The plant of Guastalla, which conserved the Roman thistle, had already been traced by D. Giunti, who died in 1560. Capriani "planted all the street garments, making sure that they went up the houses where they were missing" (I. Affò, *History of the city ... of Guastalla ...*, III, Guastalla 1787, p.25). The quality and quantity of the works carried out testifies to the high consideration already enjoyed by the C.: he opened, in fact, the Cesarea road (today Gonzaga street) with the elementary facades of the houses that will be painted by Raffaellino da Reggio, - which will follow Capriani in Rome - and completed the ducal palace, begun by Count A. Torelli; in it, despite the subsequent tampering and profound disfigurement, Capriani Mannerist motifs are still recognizable. In the State Archives of Parma (Maps and Drawings, Vol. XLVIII, 85-80) there are two reliefs of the palace, from the end of the century. XVIII, which are the only evidence of the original structure of the building. The community building and the cathedral church of S. Pietro, begun in 1569 on a project by Capriani, were also deeply transformed. The external treatment of the cylindrical drum of the dome, whose tense brick surface, denounces a research, is of particular interest. purist inspired by Emilian models. Attributed to Capriani is also the plan of the church of the servants (the decree of Cesare Gonzaga that allows the introduction of the Order is May 5, 1568: GB Benamati, *Memories of the Servite Convent*, Parma 1674, pp. 75 s.) , but already in the year 1600 was demolished and then rebuilt on a drawing by A. Filippi.

Probably in the same years Capriani worked in Mantua. In fact, before 1566, Vasari, who evidently did not know him, admired in the Mantua palace a "study made for medals, which he very well has of ebony, and of worked ivory a Francesco da Volterra that in similar works has equal "(*Le vite ...*, edited by G. Milanesi, VI, Florence 1881, page 489). There is no trace of this study, but it is the first

testimony of Capriani's carver activity, which the sources remember as the first work (and Vasari as unique), and to which the artist later dedicated himself.

From 1570 Capriani is in Rome at the service of Cardinal d'Este for carving and decoration works in both Tivoli and Quirinale: payments are documented in 1570, 1572, 1573, 1577 (DR Coffin, *The Villa d'Este at Tivoli*, Princeton 1960, ad Indicem).

Certainly during the stay in Mantua and Guastalla Capriani knew Diana Scultori, daughter of Giovan Battista and sister of Adam, that he married is not known in which year. Valente in the art of engraving, she was a collaborator, as well as her family and Giulio Romano, of her husband, whose drawings will be engraved. On 2 September 1578 their son John the Baptist was baptized in the parish of St. Augustine in Rome. He was the godfather During Alberti from Borgo San Sepolcro and is unique.

The ties with the Gonzagas, however, had not faded, since in 1578 Capriani was elected procurator of the Municipality of Guastalla at the papal court (G Campori, *The artists ... in the Estensi states*, Modena 1855, pp. 1195), and that in 1583 Monsignor Zibramonte, writing to Ferrante II Gonzaga (A. Bertolotti, *Artists in Relation with the Gonzagas ...*, in *Acts and Memories of Deputies of Country History for the Modenese and Parma Provinces*, 33, III [1885], p.17), 0 said that Capriani would gladly go to serve the duke despite the air being "very harmful" to him. Clearly Capriani thought that the Mantuan court could still take that leading role played in the smallest court of Guastalla, but the negotiations did not go to port and the artist was forced to remain immersed in the conformist climate of the Counter-Reformation Rome, of which he became one of the most significant performers.

Dating back to 1576-1577 are the works of Capriani for the second order of the façade of S. Maria dell'Orto, and to 1575-1579 some works for the Confraternita dei Bergamaschi.

Capriani is paid, from 1577 to 1579, for the drawings relating to the chapel and the hospital of the Confraternita dei Bergamaschi (Rome, Archives of the Collegio Cerasoli, Register of mandates, 1577-1587). F. Fasolo (Unpublished drawings of a Roman architect of the '700, in *Palladio*, ns, I [1951], 4, pp. 186-89) reports these payments to the church of S. Macuto. The latter and the second order of the façade of S. Maria dell'Orto exploit a common theme, that of the obelisks that slant the flat surfaces towards the sky, with a taste - especially a. S. Maria dell'Orto - completely surreal; moreover, in both buildings appear minor themes of northern Mannerism (see the serliana that opens on the upper floor of S. Macuto). The Gargano, on the contrary, refers to the intervention of Capriani the structure of the church of the Bergamaschi and its facade on Piazza Colonna, single-sided and semicircular window on the portal: the sixteenth-century front still transpires under the baroque decoration superimposed by Carlo De Dominicis in 1731 c. (MG Gargano, Carlo De Dominicis, in *History of Art*, IV [1973], 17, pp. 88-93).

That Capriani continues to work for the Caetani is confirmed by his handwritten note in the margin of a portal design of the castle of Roccabica in the Parmesan, which the same Capriani sent on 7-3 July 1578 to Count Giulio Rangoni (Milan, Castello Sforzesco, Martinelli Collection, IV, c.79). In fact, in the note Capriani writes that he had to leave Rome for "20 whole days" for works for the card. of Sermoneta in Cisterna and for card. of Como, Gallo. For the card. Nicola oversaw the work in the garden of Ninfa: from 1578 to 1580 he realized the entrance portal in travertine and a plant on two orthogonal avenues concluded by naturalistic nymphaeums; later, in 1588, he added a tank at the intersection of the avenues. For the same cardinal Capriani designed the funeral monument, with sculptures by GB Della Porta and A. Calcagni, in the basilica of Loreto, replacing the project by G. Bocalini who had not satisfied the client (Rome, Archivio Caetani, Racc General 89377, letters dated 2 June 1578 from Capriani al Peranda, A. Ricci, *Historical Memories ... of the March of Ancona*, Ancona 1834, II, pp. 56, 77, No. 38).

The triumphal arch structure, completed by a tympanum and connected to lateral obelisks, does not reveal any particular linguistic research, despite the Michelangelesque motifs of the

catafalque. Capriani still proves to be faithful to the current models of the second half of the sixteenth century, limiting itself to interpretations of mannerist correctness.

Again for the Caetani, Capriani designed the great multi-storey catafalque for the funeral of the Duke Onorato all'Aracoeli, in 1592 (Rome, Arch. Caetani, Racc. Generale, November 1592).

Enrico Caetani commissioned Capriani projects, never carried out, for the Orso's palace in Rome, to which the Uffizi drawings (A. 6722, 6733) dated 1581 refer to (Hibbard, 1971, p.127). In an undated and unsigned letter from the Caetani Archives (attributed to the inventory of Cardinal Nicola Caetani and dated 3 May 1582), the fact that Capriani continually leaves Rome without bothering to follow the work in progress complains. This is probably the period in which Capriani returned to Volterra to perform the ceiling of the cathedral.

Already in 1574 the bishop of Volterra had commissioned the ceiling of the cruise to Capriani; between 1580 and 1582 public offerings had been collected to make a similar one on the central nave and again in 1583 for the side aisles. Probably after the first part of the work Capriani addressed (June 22, 1579) to the magistrates an application to be recognized as a citizen of Volterra (his wife, in 1582 will dedicate an incision to the city of Volterra). On October 16 Capriani was certainly in Volterra and also inspected the water of the castle pools leaving instructions for the construction of an aqueduct. From the entry and exit book for the work of the attic of the cathedral (Volterra Archives of Volterra, pp. 61, 81, 85, 89), Capriani appears in Volterra between 22 May and 13 September. 1584. At Capriani were asked for other works as well as drawings of the beautiful ceiling still in place except those of the side aisles demolished in the last century; on the tenth column on the right the coat of arms of Capriani (for all the documentation see Cinci, pp. 1-9).

It is in the Roman works designed and built from 1582 onwards that Capriani emerges with its own personality, after the uncertain tests offered in the previous twenty years, often the result of divergent lines of research. From 1582 Capriani appears engaged, in fact, in the construction of the facade of the church of S. Maria di Monserrato, of which he saw finished only the first order, completed on 6 September. 1593 (J. Fernández Alonso, S. Maria of Monserrato, Roma sd, ad Indicem). The heavy criticism of the façade by the Militia is not entirely unjustified: the "severe style" adopted by Capriani appears in fact still immature.

A drawing by Capriani (Coll. Cronstedt Fullerö, Stockholm: see Langenskiöld, Fig. 43) is what remains of the Rustici chapel (later Cenci) he made on the left of the main altar of the church of S. Maria sopra Minerva.

In the vertical plant, with a dome turned on a drum with resented frames, and in the triumphal arch altar finished with a triangular tympanum, the search for essentiality of the Church of S. Pietro a Guastalla and the façade of S. Maria di Monserrato seems to echo. .

In 1588 Capriani was paid for a design project for the hospice of French pilgrims in Rome: the hospice of St. Louis of the French which was built by Maderno in 1600 and destroyed in 1798 (Hibbard, 1971, p.130). In smaller works Capriani is still engaged by Cardinal Tolomeo Gallo: Lotz has identified the design of the Gab. drawings and prints of the Uffizi A. 6724 as a project for the portal of the villa then Torlonia to Frascati, and the Hibbard (The Art Bulletin, XL [1958], p.335) has therefore supposedly intervened in the primitive building of the villa. Capriani is also committed, between the years 1591 and 1593, in the complex history of S. Andrea della Valle, as supervisor of the construction of the nave and the first four chapels: in the phase, that is, led by Cardinal Alfonso Gesualdo, which approved the plans of the theatine Francesco Grimaldi, reviewed by Della Porta (Hibbard, 1971). He thus participates in one of the most choral and typical works, in this sense, of the new counter-reformist building policy, without being able to distinguish his contribution in it. Still difficult to identify are his works, confirmed by the documents, for the new monastery of the Cistercian nuns of S. Susanna: the construction, commissioned by Camilla Peretti, began in October 1587 and continued in 1595-96, after death of Capriani. The relative documents reveal, however, that Capriani, as well as an architect of the Compagnia di S. Bernardo,

was a member of the congregation: and in about 1590 he appeared to be assisted by Flaminio Ponzio.

Capriani also worked in the convent and the church of S. Maria in Via, from 1585 onwards (Archive of the Convent of S. Maria in Via, Filze of receipts 1578-1596, filza VI. 9.a). In 1590 the "pillars of the claustro" were built, and in April 1593 they were calibrated by Giovanni Antonio Pomis, Francesco da Volterra's help, measurements and estimates relating to the foundations of the pillars of the nave, substantially coinciding with the current ones. However, Capriani was able to set up only the organism of the church: at his death, the works will be continued by Carlo Lombardi (L. Mortari, Considerations and clarifications on the Aldobrandini chapel in S. Maria in Via, in *Quaderni di Emblema*, No. 2, Bergamo 1971, pp. 77 s., 80).

A very different opportunity for intervention was that offered to Capriani by Enrico Caetani, created cardinal by Sixtus V, who decided to restore (from 1587) the ancient basilica of S. Pudenziana of which he had become titular.

The work of Capriani as auditor is documented (Rome, Archivio Caetani, 2 July 1588). G. Celio (*Memory made ... of the names of the artisans*, Naples 1638, p.81) recalls how "several times the architect Volterra" complained with him of the "tristitia delli masatori", who, working on piecework and fearing not being paid for extra work, they had preferred to destroy the statue of the Laocoon, found in the foundations, of which the artist had given him some fragments. In S. Pudenziana, Capriani finds himself working on precious medieval remains, in front of which he behaves with extreme ease and ambiguity. P. Ugonio (*Historia delle Stationi of Rome*, Rome 1588, 163) describes in detail his works and notes how, "having removed some columns that cluttered the middle ship, it made its space more relevant". On the one hand, that is, Capriani destroyed precious historical evidence, such as the innocent schola cantorum, replaced by a new high altar, and the two extreme figures of the apostles in the apse mosaic; and on the other he brought to light the original scan of the columns. Counter-reformist anti-historicalism joins here with experimental reasons; and not by chance, in S. Pudenziana, Capriani inserts a motif on which he will then insist constantly: that of the elliptical dome raised on the cruise. The theme will be used again by Capriani in S. Sylvester in Capite and on it he will reflect for a long time in the elaborate design of the church of St. James in Augsburg. The oval shape that Peruzzi had introduced into the linguistic baggage of the Mannerism architecture, and to which Serlio's drawings and Vignola's realizations had given new impetus, is taken up again by Mascherino and Capriani in late sixteenth-century Rome, in projects and realizations cautiously experimental. The synthesis between the central organism and the longitudinal organism, which the oval implant reaches in a sort of spatial anamorphosis, is thus introduced by Capriani, in S. Pudenziana, to accentuate the longitudinality of the nave and to avoid the artificial arrest of the ideal motion of the observer below a circular space, as in the canonical examples of Roman classicism. This is all the more significant if one remembers that it is in the studies of Peruzzi, both in S. Andrea in Via Flaminia and in S. Anna dei Palafranieri del Vignola, the oval shape coincides with isolated organisms, which are themselves completed. In S. Pudenziana and S. Silvestro in Capite, on the contrary, Capriani obliges it to fit into traditional systems, in which it introduces a known problem.

Also at S. Sylvester in Capite Capriani works on a medieval work: in 1591 (October 26 and November 1) it provides two drawings of plan and section, preserved in the State Archives of Rome; from 1588 to '91 he had worked at the convent and at the main cloister, today completely reworked or destroyed.

The organism drawn by Capriani shows some affinities with one of the projects he himself has developed almost simultaneously for St. James (Stockholm, National Museum, No. 2073). In both projects, the oval dome no longer accentuates, as in S. Pudenziana, the longitudinal axis of the organism, but extends towards the arms of the transept, marking a marked change in the direction of the visual axes. In S. Silvestro, moreover, Capriani gives a more accentuated importance to the dome, preceded by only two pairs of chapels, and followed by the rectangular compartment of the main altar.

The documents kept in the State Archives of Rome make it possible to ascertain that at the death of Capriani very little of his project was realized. From 1595 onwards, Maderno will alter the original plans and complete the church, consecrated in 1601: it comes to lose much of the avant-garde character originally attributed to it by Capriani, who, in this late phase of his activity, he showed himself to experiment with unusual syntactic reasons, with connections to the mannerisms of the first generation, which make it possible to bring his research closer to that, almost contemporary, of the Mascherino (see, also for the archival references, FS Gaynor-I. Toesca, S. Silvestro in *Capite, Roma sd, ad Indicem*). The work of Capriani a S. Giacomo is the result of the new commissioning relationship established by him with AM Salviati, created cardinal in 1583 by Gregory XI-II and dedicated to charitable works : in 1591 Capriani had already started the construction of the church of S. Maria in Aquiro or "degli Orfanelli", which was later completed by Maderno, with the assistance of Filippo Breccioli (M. D'Onofrio-CM Strinati, S. Maria in Aquiro, Rome 1972, ad Indicem); 11 December 1592 began the construction of the palace at the Collegio Romano (destroyed as early as the seventeenth century: see Hibbard, 1971, pp. 117 s.). Perhaps Capriani designed the chapel Salviati in S. Gregorio Magno, attributed to him by Baglione, but that documents prove built after his death (Hibbard, 1971) p. 121, does not exclude, however, that Maderno, certainly present in the yard, has benefited from Capriani's drawings). Maderno appears as heir to all the work begun by Capriani for Cardinal Salviati, including S. Giacomo in Augusta.

At the San Giacomo hospital complex, Cardinal Salviati is particularly interested in the framework of his welfare policy and the renewal of social structures on an urban scale.

Despite the testimony of the Baglione, which attributes the work of the hospital to Capriani, the architect cited in the documents is however Bartolomeo Gritti. Capriani, rather, is called to insert in the complex, restructured on two parallel corridors, from the Corso to via Ripetta, the great church of S. Giacomo, with front on the Corso and protruding inside the courtyard. The design process followed by Capriani is documented by three drawings at the Stockholm National Museum (Coll. Fullerö, nos. 341, 342 and 343) and a drawing of the Albertina in Vienna (AZ Rom. 349; see also, for further bibliographical indications, Hibbard, 1971, pp. 118-121).

As has been mentioned, the first two projects of Capriani, which a note in the margin of the third drawing indicates elaborated in 1590, show affinity with the organism elaborated for S. Sylvester in Capita. In them the church, inserted between the two infirmaries and tangent the ancient church of S. Iacopo, is structured as a basilica organism, faithful to the models of Jesus and of the Madonna ai Monti, with oval dome placed to emphasize the area of the transept and ended by a semicircular apse. But, with all evidence, Cardinal Salviati pushed the architect on the path of a more eloquent oratory.

The third project, similar to the one realized (beginning of construction May 20, 1592) with the assistance of Breccioli (Baglione, p.338), sees the theme of the oval space dominating the whole organism. Capriani seems here to resume not so much the small plants of Peruzzi or Vignola, but the project drawn up in 1584 by the Mascherino for the church of the Neapolitans: the oval plant, is dilated, for the first time in a building made, in gigantic size , projecting into rectangular chapels with an articulated outline, on the transverse axis, and in domed-covered chapels on the diagonal axes. The longitudinal direction is accentuated by the profound development of the chapel of the main altar, flanked by two bell towers. La Zocca has formulated the hypothesis that Capriani knew the church of the Annunciation in Parma, but it is certain that the oratory deployed by Capriani in S. Giacomo has all Roman sources, as transposition, on an elliptical axis, of the triumphal units of Jesuit models. It is not by chance that among the vignolian projects for Jesus are included oval-shaped solutions, which Capriani may have kept in mind (Ackerman-Lotz). That there are also symbolic reasons for the adoption of the oval system is proved by the funeral oration pronounced on 22 Jan. 1603 dall'Ugonio at the funeral of Cardinal Salviati, (*In funere amplissimi cardinalis ... oratio ...*, Romae 1603, p.22) that speaks of the church as an amphitheater inspired by the Colosseum, both from the description of the funerals themselves made by P. Arnolfini (*Narratione della morte, et ... essequie ...*, Rome 1603, page 8). An amphitheater for worship, therefore, a stage machine inspired by the ancient as a single room that embraces and involves the

faithful in a triumphal affirmation of the unity of the Roman Church. This, even if not completely resolved, appear the connections between the lower order and the great dome, which at the death of Capriani was about to be turned. Quite rightly, Hibbard rules out that Maderno, executor of the church after 1595, has made substantial changes to Capriani project which had faced significant static and lighting problems, resolved with the independence of the roof covering from the dome structure, with lunette windows that lighten the vault and with a system of volute spurs. In the façade on the Corso, Capriani follows models of the Portiani, deformed however in order to accentuate the verticalism of the central sector, in homage to the grazing view, to which the spectator is obliged, due to the narrowness of the road. To such emphasis of the vertical dimension Capriani is willing to sacrifice the coherence between the central body - jutting out, to underline its autonomy - and the short lateral wings.

However, S. Giacomo represents the synthesis of the research conducted by Capriani, with openings of notable consequences both in the Madernian manner, and in many themes of the Baroque classicism of the following century.

On the other hand, Capriani's contribution to the setting of S. Maria della Scala is uncertain, to which the Uffizi A. 6375 drawing, dated February 25, refers. 1593 (Wasserman, pp. 56 s.) And of the Lancellotti chapel in S. Giovanni in Laterano, later transformed by GA De Rossi (Hibbard, 1971, p 124).

Capriani appears to be less personal in civil construction. In 1591 he began the construction of the palace for Cardinal Scipio Lancellotti in Via dei Coronari (Hibbard, 1971, 123) and in 1592 the works for the palace of Alessandro Cardelli (G. Scano, Palazzo Cardelli, in *Capitolium*, XXXVI [1961], pp. 21-25). Both buildings, in the parts attributable to Capriani, adopt sangallesque typological patterns reduced to a meager and depersonalized essentiality. Among the minor works of Capriani should be mentioned the renovation of the house in Via del Pantheon, n. 57 (whose base area is attributable to the Uffizi A. 1537 design, by fra 'Giocondo), and a fountain in Piazza Montecitorio built for the cardinal Santoro, engraved by the Falda. In the Distinguished Report of Rome (perhaps 1595: Arch. Of State of Florence, Carte strozziane, series 1, code 233) is preserved the design of the "Villa made by Volterra hoggi dell'illmo Card. Aldobrandini" which presents the first building of the Belvedere villa in Frascati (whose first owners were from Volterra: the Contugi). According to archive research by H. Röttgen, reported by Lotz (1974, page 384 No. 40), Capriani is cited, finally, in documents relating to the S. Atanasio dei Greci factory in Rome.

Already in 1577 Capriani had been annexed among the Virtuosi to the Pantheon (Rome, Bibl Hertziana, Nachlass Noack). He then collaborated with Federico Zuccari in the institution of the S. Luca Academy, to which he was registered in 1594. On 1 March 1594 he was called to deal with the rules relating to architectural orders, a task which, like other Roman architects, he subtracted, witnessing the disinterestedness of the late seventeenth-century Roman professionalism for theoretical issues. Il Baglione (p.48) writes that Capriani also had "some principle of Astronomy" and that it printed "a whimsical lunar, which has the characters of Heaven and the Mutation of the time all figured and under Sixtus V at the meridian of Rome it is calculated ", but it has not been found to date.

He died in Rome on February 15th. 1594 (Rome, Bibl. Hertziana, Nachlass Noack).

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