

# Francesco Capriani

(aka *Francesco da Volterra*)

Italian Architect  
(1535-1594)

Son of Giovanni Andrea, he was born in Volterra in the first decades of the 16th 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 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.

Il Baglione and Martinelli attribute to Capriani the church of S. Chiara in Rome, whose façade, transformed in the 19th century, is known by an engraving of the Vasi.

All sources have started from 1565, with a salary of 181 scudi d'oro per year, the activity of Capriani at Guastalla, where Cesare Gonzaga moved the court in 1567.

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 by Francesco da Volterra that in similar works has equal". There is no trace of this study, but it is the first testimony of Capriani's woodcarver 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.

Certainly during the stay in Mantua and Guastalla Capriani knew Diana Scultori, daughter of Giovanni Battista and sister of Adam, that he married is not known in which year. On 2 September 1578 their son Giovanni Battista was baptized in the parish of St. Augustine in Rome.

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. F. Fasolo 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.

That Capriani continues to work for the Caetani. 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.

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. Enrico Caetani commissioned Capriani projects, never carried out, for the Orso's palace in Rome, to which the Uffizi drawings dated 1581 refer to, 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 nave 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, 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.

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. A drawing by Capriani 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 1588 Capriani was paid for a design project for the hospice of French pilgrims in Rome: the hospice of San Luigi dei Francesi which was built by Maderno in 1600 and destroyed in 1798. In smaller works Capriani is still engaged by Cardinal Tolomeo Gallo 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. 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. In 1590 the "pillars of the claustrum" 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.

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.

In S. Pudenziana, Capriani finds himself working on precious medieval remains, in front of which he behaves with extreme ease and ambiguity. P. Ugonio describes in detail his works and notes how, "having removed some columns that cluttered the middle nave, 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. In S. Pudenziana, Capriani inserts a motif on which he will then insist constantly: that of the elliptical dome raised on the nave.

In S. Silvestro 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.

The work of Capriani at S. Giacomo is the result of the new commissioning relationship established by him with AM Salviati, created cardinal in 1583 by Gregory XIII 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.

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. Capriani was 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.

In 1591 he began the construction of the palace for Cardinal Scipio Lancellotti in Via dei Coronari and in 1592 the works for the palace of Alessandro Cardelli.

Among the minor works of Capriani should be mentioned the renovation of the house in Via del Pantheon, n. 57, and a fountain in Piazza Montecitorio built for the cardinal Santoro, engraved by the Falda.

He died in Rome on February 15th. 1594.

Translated from:

[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/capriani-francesco-detto-francesco-da-volterra\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/capriani-francesco-detto-francesco-da-volterra_(Dizionario-Biografico))

## Works:

**San Giacomo in Augusta** (082/8)  
lower order of façade

**Santa Susanna alle Terme di Diocleziano** (005/11)

**Santa Maria in Via** (034/40)

**Santa Maria dell'Orto** (083/21)  
Completed façade begun by Vignola

**San Silvestro in Capite** (054/36)  
Built church and cupola. (1591-1601)

**Santa Pudenziana** (018/14)  
Restored church (1588)  
Designed Caetani chapel. (1601)

**Santa Maria in Aquiro** (378/37)  
Rebuilt church. (1588-1591)