

Antonio Felice Casoni

Italian Architect and medalist
(1559-1634)

CASONI (Casone, Casini, Latone, Latoni), Antonio (Felice or Felice Antonio). - Very little is known about the first thirty years of the life of this medalist, sculptor and architect from the Marches, who was born in Ancona in 1559 and received his training in Bologna around the eighth decade of the century. A. Ricci (1834) states that Casoni "in Bologna was ... educated, and from Bologna to Rome he was rich in every virtue, since besides having learned about it, he drew perspective with so much science, that the youth contributed to learning it; he diligently sculpted small and minute things in colored wax and played the lute with sweetness".

There is no other information relating to his period in Bologna: however, it can be argued that Casoni carried out essentially medalist activities, as evidenced by the famous medals for two illustrious Bolognese characters, two for Ercole Bottrigari, humanist, man of letters, musician and musicologist, publisher, and four, dated 1592, for Dionisio della Ratta, a Bolognese nobleman who held important positions in the papal government.

In the Bolognese period, Casoni signed and dated in 1598 a medal to celebrate the entry into Ferrara (29 January 1598) of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, protagonist of the story of the devolution of the Este city to the Holy See.

Around the last years of the 16th century Casoni moved to Rome, perhaps at the invitation of Cardinal Aldobrandini himself.

First sign of the Roman activity of Casoni, still a medal: the one he coined in 1604 on the occasion of the foundation of the palace of museums on the Campidoglio. The medal for the Bolognese painter, active in Rome, Lavinia Fontana dates back to 1611.

The first enterprise of Casoni in the architectural field, in which he was engaged in Rome, was the construction of the convent of the servants at the church of St. Marcello on via del Corso, which began in 1616.

The construction of the convent, perhaps more representative of Popera than Casoni, although already in 1618 was quite advanced, went on longer than expected until a long-standing controversy over the alignment on the Corso was settled. In 1624, when the wing on the Corso was almost finished, the works were suspended. Twenty-five years after the death of Casoni were resumed: in August 1659 the construction of the convent wing adjacent to the apse of the church was started. The whole complex was completed only in 1672.

At the same time, as architect of the Duke of Bracciano Paolo Giordano II Orsini, Casoni created the highly successful Orse fountain in the courtyard of the noble palace of Montegiordano, later Gabrielli and today Taverna, in Rome (1618).

The fountain, the largest in the Ponte district and located at the main entrance of the building, can be considered one of the happiest examples of its kind in Rome, especially by virtue of the unprejudiced aggregation of its elements, which precludes the compositional freedom of the Baroque mature. Casoni also demonstrated the skills of a hydraulic technician in the water supply of Montegiordano with the derivation of the Acqua Paola from the Gianicolo through a pipeline under the Sisto bridge.

The collection of the thirty-nine drawings of fountains is preceded by a drawing of the noble coat of arms of the Aldobrandini surmounted by the cardinal's hat; this suggests that the collection of drawings was dedicated and carried out for Cardinal P. Aldobrandini. D'Onofrio also recognizes a remarkable resemblance between some drawings of the albin and individual resolutions of niche fountains housed in the nymphaeum of the Villa Belvedere in Frascati erected in those years by G. Della Porta for Aldobrandini.

The circumstances mentioned, namely the Aldobrandini coat of arms in the album and the stylistic affinities with the fountains of the nymphaeum by Frascati, executed by I. Buzzi (or Buti) and the French J. Sarrasin, suggest a recurring link between the Anconitano artist and Cardinal Nephew. It can be marginally observed that the long inscription celebrating the devolution of Ferrara to the Holy See, which runs along the frieze of the nymphaeum of the Tuscan villa, is headed to P. Aldobrandini: the same historical fact had also been celebrated with the coinage of the medal of 1598, in which Casoni had represented the entrance of the Cardinal tied in the Emilian city.

The models of fountains invented by Casoni are surprisingly imaginative: irony and paradox are almost constantly present. The "capricci" of Casoni landed in the Roman artistic environment of the transition between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with a significant innovative charge and prelude to the refined reversal of the taste that will be produced with the Baroque fountain; as they appear, they must have had considerable influence on the design of fountains in the Roman seventeenth century up to and including Pietro and Gianlorenzo Bernini.

In many of the fountain designs, the logically ordered architectural elements almost completely disappear: their presence is sacrificed in the face of the desire to create an artificial nature, in which the taste of the effect and the joke takes place.

Casoni also intervened in the Augustinian monastery of St. Lucia in Selci, after C. Maderno, perhaps simultaneously with Gaspare de Vecchi and obviously before the numerous Borrominian interventions. The construction of the monastery had been started in 1603 under the direction of this Bartolomeo Bassi: in 1624 Urban VIII favored its expansion.

Also in the first thirty years of the seventeenth century Casoni was active in other monasteries and churches in Rome. For the Franciscans, first Spanish and then Irish, he built the college and the adjoining church of St. Isidoro (S. Isidoro a Capo le Case) on the Pincio.

The construction was started in April 1622, but suspended in the following year. In the summer of 1625 the work was resumed and completed by Casoni in its general lines within the same year. Luke Wadding, who had taken over from the Spanish Franciscans, had a prominent role in the construction of the Irish Franciscan see; to these, at first, by pardon of Gregorio XV, they had been allowed to erect their home in Rome, with the funds made available by Ottaviano Vestri-Barbiani and after the purchase of the land by G. Antonio Orsini di Sangemini .

Casoni designed for the Spanish Franciscans a Latin cross church with dome, which when Wadding took care of it was presented as a pure envelope; in fact it was the latter who added the six side chapels to the church. In the meantime, Casoni had built the college-convent next to the south side of the church, with a small cloister.

In May of 1623 Casoni was active in the convent of St. Augustine. Casoni built the central wing of the convent in the stretch on the Via della Scrofa; already in 1634, however, the work was "cracked in several places and overhanging, of fate that threatened a precipitous ruin", so much so that its demolition was decided.

Less defined is the story of Casoni's participation in the construction of the church of the Immaculate Conception of the Capuchins at Piazza Barberini, at the beginning of Via Vittorio Veneto, whose foundation stone was laid by Urban VIII on 4 October. 1626.

The project seems to have to be assigned to the Capuchin father Michele da Bergamo, "maker" of the Order since 1608 and "pontifical architect" from 1624 .. who was "president" of the new Roman convent from 1626 to 1631. Casoni most likely carried out a role of help and advice alongside the religious, being well known in Rome for the numerous conventual architectures performed for various religious Orders. Even the Capuchin church falls within the ranks of those purified and deliberately uncultured architecture, adopted in those years by the counter-reformed religious Orders, whose directives and aspirations Casoni was a faithful and effective interpreter.

Member of the Roman Academy of S. Luca, Casoni held the position of "censor", as shown by the general congregation of 24 April. 1633. Shortly thereafter, in January of the following year, Casoni died in Rome at the age of seventy-five.

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