

Jacob Cornelisz Cobaert

Flemish sculptor / goldsmith
(1535-1615)

Also known as Cope Fammingo, Giacomo Coppe, Coppa, Coppeio, Cop, Cobar, Cobbet, Cobet. Originally from an unknown locality of Flanders, his date of birth, unknown, is set at around 1535.

On the date of his arrival in Rome was between 1552 and 1555. In 1569 Cobaert is already appointed as a helper of Guglielmo Della Porta in a letter from Della Porta to Bartolomeo Ammannati.

It is still Cobaert who affirms his activity with Guglielmo Della Porta, but the identification of his work, his function and of his artistic physiognomy is an issue that is unsolved and full of problems.

The Baglione, stating that "in making small was excellent", he attributes the Stories from the Metamorphoses of Ovid "informs ovate and some octangoles, composed to throw in gold, or in silver, and served to adorn a rich table"; without specifying the paternity of the design, he refers to Cobaert the model: "he fabricated some very gracious and beautiful models", from which he witnesses the derivation of various creations in wax. The same qualification as a relatively independent performer in the Della Porta house, the Baglione confers on it for a Pietà and other sacred works of which the models "formed".

Both the series of Ovid's Metamorphoses and one of the Passion, among which at the time the Cross Discourse is particularly famous, are among the material stolen after William's death in his home in via Giulia, where Cobaert continued to live with his minor children of the teacher. So we learn from the lawsuit of Teodoro Della Porta that the Discourse of the cross is "about three great palms of low and high relief, with many figures inside, carved excellently by the hand of my Father, in what History has also worked the cup of the flames". To better define his intervention is Cobaert himself in his interrogation, where he claims the paternity of the execution only of the stolen objects, which are the original terracotta models of the Stories from the Metamorphoses, of the Deposition and a round with the Gods and Jupiter at center, of which he affirms: "I had made it conform to the will of Mr. William before clay then plaster and then wax". It thus proclaims itself implicitly foreign to the invention of the design, which can only belong to the master, or to possible works in bronze, or other subjects, in which he may have provided his assistant work.

For these works modern criticism oscillates between the propensity to the paternity of Cobaert, its minimization in the role of specialized craftsman or limitation of his intervention to some "copies" in terracotta of Guglielmo's bronze originals. Actually the activity of Cobaert is so internal and implicit to the execution of the work, to be practically indistinguishable, like that of other technicians assigned to the execution of other moments of the realization of the work; from the inextricable complexity of the

work emerges, but obviously it is in no way insulative, only the function of William as "technical" to which the graphic invention of the composition competes.

The complete series of bronze bas-reliefs of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (from the Estensi Collections) is kept at the Kunsthistor. Museum of Vienna. It refers entirely to Cobaert dal Berliner and brought back to G. Della Porta from Gramberg together with the other achievements found at the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Hamburg and at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Completely due to the hand of Cobaert and "copies" of the respective bronze works of Guglielmo, are two oval reliefs in terracotta with Meleager chasing the boar of Calidonia and the Dance of the nymphs of Victoria and Albert Museum of London; in the same museum another terracotta relief depicting the Rape of the Sabines is hypothetically referred to Guglielmo Della Porta or Cobaert by J. Pope-Hennessy. An isolated replica of the Fall of the Giants, again from the scenes of the *Metamorphoses*, is found in the Vatican Library with an attribution to Cobaert based on a drawing by Guglielmo Della Porta.

Among the numerous objects made of various materials, which are traced back to a design or a model of Cobaert, is included a medallion in gilded bronze by Paulus Van Vianen in a private collection, dated about 1600, depicting a Bacchanal and derived from a relief attributed to Cobaert on original drawing by William. In the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna the engraved gems derived from the scenes of the *Metamorphoses* and due to the Italian architect of the second half of the century are also traced back to the invention of Cobaert.

The full measure of the personality of Cobaert can be grasped only when, after William's death in 1577, he continued his activity independently of Della Porta's workshop, in whose house he continues to live until he moved to the Contarelli area. near St. Peter. The protection accorded him by Cardinal Matteo Contarelli is worth the commission of the sculpture of S. Matthew and the angel to be placed on the altar of the chapel of St. Louis of the French. On 23 November 1578 Virgilio Crescenzi, heir to the cardinal, who died two years earlier, stipulates a contract in which Cobaert undertakes to finish the two "already sketched" statues within four years.

Baglione tells, in his own way, the following of the story: how the technically incapable Cobaert dragged his work for life, forbidding anyone to see the work, until "he was led at the age of 80 in about, and puffed up he could not finish it "and how" them Contarelli, when they saw it, thinking it was a divine work, or miraculous, and finding a seccaggine, no'l wanted in their chapel of St. Louis "and commissioned consequence to Caravaggio the canvas, of analogous subject.

For the study of the problem of the dating of the works of art of the chapel, the vicissitudes of the sculpture of Cobaert are of decisive importance, which has caused the increase in the interventions on the subject. H. Röttgen, in three successive interventions determined by the appearance of always new documents reaches the most reliable reconstruction, for which not only Cobaert does not respect the terms of the contract of 1578, but in 1596 another contract is stipulated by Giacomo Crescenzi, in which the previous one is substantially confirmed and from which it emerges that the original commission was a personal act of Virgilio Crescenzi made for "liberality his age and to do something grateful to M. Jacomo Cobaert". The insistence on this last aspect

had perhaps become necessary to appease the protests of the clergy of St. Louis of the French to the pope because of the failure to complete the chapel and at the same time to safeguard the commission to Cobaert; and thus compensate for the precariousness of its economic situation.

Contrary to what was stated by Baglione, it results from further documents that at the end of 1601 the sculpture was finished, but without the angel and was placed on the back side specially built since 1590 in the Contarelli chapel in S. Luigi dei Francesi. But already 30 Jan. 1602, perhaps because of the decisive will of the nephew of Cardinal Contarelli, Francesco, the sculpture is rejected and Cobaert is dissolved from the obligation of the execution of the angel, made later by Pompeo Ferrucci when the whole group will be transferred to the Trinity dei Pellegrini, its current location.

The documents testify to other small works commissioned by the Crescenzi during the long period in which Cobaert is bound by the commitment of the S. Matteo . 22 Jan. 1595 promises to make a silver goblet engraved with figures from his model and another silver goblet "without historia" which is paid for him on the 15th of January. 1596. On 25 January 1596 undertakes to provide a Visitation and an Ivory Deposition.

After 1602, the date of the refusal of the S. Matthew, there are no other achievements, it seems likely that Cobaert moved away from Rome having been documented as an academic professor of St. Luke.

The conclusion of the biography of Baglione bears witness to a character involution, an increasingly grumpy isolation and increasingly serious melancholy fury: "this man did not do it with anybody, and lived like a beast, nor did he want, that in his house he man or woman entered". He died, eighty years old, on the last days of May 1615; June 1 "was raised from the parish of St. Peter and buried in our church at the altar of the Madonna" (St. Mary in Campo Santo dei Tedeschi).

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