

Tommaso Della Porta, the Younger

Italian sculptor
(1550-1606)

Originating from Porlezza (Como), like the other famous sculptors Della Porta, son of Alessio and a Battistina, he was probably born around 1550, given that his older brother Giovanni Battista was born in 1542 and that the first document left about his sculptor activity dates back to 1571. He also had two other brothers, Giovanni Paolo, indicated as Cortigiano, Giovanni Pietro and two sisters. Della Porta does not seem to have had a wife or children, and in his testament of 1583 he proclaimed his "nephew in art" the son of his sister and Iacopo Braschi, providing for his professional maintenance for three years. Like many other artists at the end of the 16th century in Rome, Della Porta was a merchant and restorer of ancient paintings and a sculpture. In both fields his brother Giovanni Battista followed, whom he accompanied to Loreto to work on the covering of the Holly House.

Della Porta was in Rome in 1574, where he appears in a list of members of the Pontifical Academy of Virtuosi al Pantheon, but he probably returned to Loreto in the end of 1576, when his brother was organizing the shipment of blocks of marble of Carrara in Loreto for the last group of the *Prophets*, begun by the Lombardi brothers between the fifth and sixth decades of the 16th century, which were to be inserted in the ten niches of the lower part of the covering. In July and August 1578 Della Porta received payments "on good account" for a prophet, and on 10 December 1578 he received a total of 690 florins "for the remainder of the Prophet made and put by him in the facade of S. Cappella". Back in Rome in September 1578, Della Porta sold seventeen fragments of ancient sculptures to Cardinal Pietro Donato Cesi for a total of 1,500 scudi. At the same time in December 1579, together with his brother Giovanni Paolo, Della Porta sold another group of six ancient sculptures to the heirs of the Venetian nobleman Michele Surian for a price yet to be determined. The sale also had to include an unfinished portrait of Surian, presumably the work of Della Porta himself. In this period Della Porta was busy in jobs for the pope, sculpting two "little cherubs" for the altar of the Gregorian chapel in S. Pietro for which he was paid in June and October 1580. In April 1583, being his body "aliquantum infirmus", Della Porta made a will.

From the document it is deduced that, although still young, Della Porta was wealthy, since he could leave his mother a sum of 200 scudi and minor sums to many relatives and still 200 scudi beyond his furniture to the painter Durante Alberti. To his brother Giovanni Paolo he left his ancient sculptures and to Giovanni Battista "5 petia statuarum modernarum", as well as "pieces to be restored". The most significant legacy in this testament is however that of the church of S. Ambrogio dei Lombardi, in which he wanted to be buried; he left two unfinished modern statues of *Sibyls* which were to be placed in the niches on the side of the altar. The two female figures on the sides of the altar of the chapel of S. Ambrogio, now part of the church of S. Carlo al Corso, are considered works of Della Porta, as well as the marble *Deposition*, mentioned in the biography of Baglione, which is located between the *Sibyls* above the altar.

In 1585, together with Leonardo Sormani (who had worked with Giovanni Battista on many other projects of Sixtus V) Della Porta received an important pontifical commission: the model for the colossal bronze statue of *St. Peter* for Trajan's column.

In 1590 Della Porta and his brother Giovanni Paolo were designated universal heirs of the older brother Giovanni Battista. In January 1594 Della Porta and Giovanni Battista were present at a meeting of the Academy of drawing. Giovanni Battista received his last assignment, for the chapel of S. Pudenziana, in June 1596, but died in 1597 leaving the work unfinished, which was completed by Della Porta and by Giovanni Paolo who together received in December 1598 a payment of 180 scudi for completing the work.

At the death of Giovanni Battista, Della Porta found himself heir to the collection of ancient and modern statues of his brother, which he valued over 60,000 scudi; therefore, he in turn made a new will on the basis of which he left large sums for pious works and for the foundation of seminaries. A dispute arose between the widow of Giovanni Battista and the two brothers over the inheritance resolved in 1601.

Della Porta is documented for the last time as a sculptor in 1601, when he sculpted an angel in bas-relief for S. Giovanni in Laterano; in that same year, together with Durante Alberti, he was guarantor for Teodoro and Paolo (probably his brother Giovanni Paolo) Della Porta. In April 1600 Della Porta was registered among the members of the Accademia dei Virtuosi al Pantheon and in 1604 among those of the Accademia di S. Luca. In November 1603 Della Porta testified to the well-known trial brought by Giovanni Baglione to Onorio Longhi, declaring himself a friend of both. At that time Della Porta lived in via del Corso, at the corner of via dei Pontefici, in the house of Giovanni Battista. He died in 1606 and was buried in S. Ambrogio on 24 November. Three years later, on Dec. 23. 1609, his brother Giovanni Paolo was buried in S. Lorenzo in Lucina.

Baglione asserts that Della Porta "did a few jobs, and gave himself to the same traffic as his brother, in order to find great quantities of good old things" and this is true. In a career of 48 years Della Porta produced few original works and those known and documented no is certain: the *Angels* in the Gregorian and Lateran Chapel have not been identified, the *S. Pietro* of Colonna Traiana is a work in common with Sormani and his fundamental works, *the Prophet* or the *Sibyls* that result from the payments of the Holy House, have not been identified exactly. The ten great *Sibyls*, sculpted quickly, in the two years between 1570 and 1572, which demonstrate a pedestrian resumption of the style of Iacopo Sansovino through the mediation of the Lombardi brothers, must be the result of the collaboration of the two brothers and other aids.

He must be remembered above all in the 16th century Roman environment as a successful eccentric restorer and merchant.

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