

# Santi Ghetti

Italian sculptor and stone mason  
(1589-1656)

Son of Dominic, he was born in Massa in 1589. He became a stonemason following the trade of the Tuscan marble workers Francesco and Nicolò Ghetti, from whom he probably descended, who had moved to Carrara around 1517 in the wake of the Spanish sculptor Bartolomeo Ordóñez, or perhaps his predecessor and master Domenico Fancelli.

In his first will, written in Rome on November 15th. 1647, Ghetti defined himself as a Roman citizen. He had arrived in Rome at least from 1615 and the following year resulted in two documents of the Reverend Fabbrica di S. Pietro engaged as a stonemason in small works; in particular, he made some large windows near the Clementina chapel. Also in 1616 he was cited in a deed of the Monte Cavallo factory in the role of marble merchant for having delivered nine columns from Carrara. A few years later Ghetti was engaged in the construction of the beautiful ciborium of the main altar of the Basilica of S. Pietro in Perugia.

The work, commissioned in 1621 by Abbot Alessandro Pacognani, was performed by Ghetti in Rome for a fee of 124 scudi. In 1630 the ciborium and the altar, by the Perugian architect Valentino Martelli, were solemnly inaugurated. The chronological hypothesis of Montanari, based on ancient documents relating to the Abbey of St. Peter, appears to be the most reliable, and excludes the various other dates (1609, 1627-35) proposed by the critics.

In 1622 Ghetti hosted the sculptor G. Finelli in his Roman house, procuring a commission in S. Maria sopra Minerva: the two angels for the *Sepulcher of Ottaviano Ubaldini Della Gherardesca*. Finelli was trained in the workshop of Ghetti, and then moved to that of GL Bernini. In 1621 Ghetti collaborated to the execution of the berninian sepulcher of *Monsignor Pedro de Foix Montoya*, already in the church of S. Giacomo degli Spagnoli and now in the convent adjacent to the church of S. Maria di Monserrato. From 1626, and again in 1628 and 1638, Ghetti is at work for the church of St. Ignatius.

In the role of marble merchant we find him engaged in 1626 in the supply of a plate for the altar of the new choir of St. Peter and, in 1630, another plate destined to the niche of Veronica in the same Vatican basilica.

A few years after the *Sepolcro Montoya*, Ghetti collaborated with another Bernini company. Father Girolamo Ghetti, general of the Augustinian order, commissioned him the high altar and the ciborium of the Roman church of S. Agostino. The work was solemnly inaugurated in April 1628 and with an impressive procession there was placed the famous image of the Madonna attributed to S. Luke; the two angels above the cornice, allotted to Bernini, were built by Finelli on a design by the master. In 1636 Ghetti is again next to Bernini in the works for the chapel in the apse of the church of S. Maria in Via Lata, commissioned by Francesco D'Aste.

The contract establishes the materials to be used in the various areas and specifies that the stonemason must provide his own design for the floor, which was then modified in 1725 by Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili and restored in 1914; the sculptures of the putti and the angels must instead be realized - the document states - by "sculptors valent'huomini".

In 1636 Ghetti, together with Giovanni Piloti and Francuccio Francucci, stipulated a contract with Father Andrea Rossano of the Society of Jesus for the execution of the antependium for the altar of S. Ignazio in the church of the Jesus, attributed by Montagu to Alessandro Algardi ; the work, completed in 1637, was remodeled and again gilded in 1737. Also in 1636, Rossano commissioned Ghetti the tabernacle of the high altar for the cathedral of Savona; the stonemason turned to Piloti to perform "all metal works" (1637), while Algardi performed the statues and relief with the *Last Supper*.

In 1648 Ghetti took the contract for the execution of twenty-four marble columns (which later became forty-six) from the quarries of Cottanello in Sabina, and for their transport to Rome, to the Vatican basilica, where they had to be put in works in the minor aisles.

It is one of the most significant episodes of the career of the entrepreneur Ghetti; he proposed to the Congregation of the Reverenda Fabbrica the supply of the columns showing a sample of "perch-colored melee stone" which pleased his interlocutors. In 1650, in fact, these gave him permission to expand the existing road and to create a new one to make it possible to transport the columns from Sabina to Rome. In 1651 Ghetti provided materials for the fountains in piazza Navona.

In 1652 Ghetti stipulated a contract with Monsignor Virgilio Spada, Innocent X Pamphili's almsgiver, for the realization of the floor of S. Giovanni in Laterano, after having worked on the twelve tabernacles of the minor naves in the same basilica. Between the end of 1652 and May 1653, Ghetti provided Prince Camillo Pamphili with eight "cottanello" marble columns for the church of S. Agnese in Agone. The Lateran pavement was partly in place when the pontiff, in February 1653, visiting the basilica, showed "great disgust" for the design of the new floor and, although he had approved it himself, he ordered to remove what had already been done, giving F. Borromini an assignment to realize a new design. Thanks also to the intervention of Monsignor Spada, the work resumed but, only a few months later, in September, Innocenzo X, once again unsatisfied, this time due to the slowness with which he proceeded, had the elderly and infirm Ghetti. Two months later the work in S. Giovanni was entrusted to Luca Berrettini and Filippo Frugone, but was completed in 1655 under Alexander VII.

Ghetti was released from prison only in January 1656, thanks to the intervention in his favor by Monsignor Spada and a loan from Prince Pamphili. Of the long and complex affair, which threw Ghetti in desperate economic conditions, so as to force him to sell even his daughter-in-law's jewels, detailed memory remains in the Spada Archive.

Ghetti died of plague on 2 October. 1656 in Rome; it was not possible to draw up the inventory of the assets because the Office of Health affixed seals to his house.

On 27 November 1656, at the opening of the testament on November 15th 1647, the notary drew up an act of the state of the goods from which it is deduced that some marbles, already worked, destined for the floor of S. Giovanni in Laterano, were reused

in the churches of S. Urbano and S. Marco. The same document shows that Ghetti had provided some columns for the basilica of St. Peter and had worked on a chapel "de 'SS.ri Falconieri". From the will we know that Ghetti had married Agata Marescalchi, from whom he had Carlo, a priest, and, second marriage, Caterina Bartoloni, who gave him Giovan Francesco Ghetti, who lived in the Monti district and had his stonemason shop at the "Pantani", in the same area, declared he wanted to be buried in the chapel of the Mercede in the church of S. Adriano in Campo Vaccino (now destroyed) asking that a memorial plaque with his name, that of his wives and his successors, was placed. Lastly, he set up a chaplain in the cathedral of S. Andrea a Carrara, commissioning his great-grandson, Andrea Ghetti, to have you erect an altar. From the same act we get the news of some works performed in S. Andrea della Valle. In the second will, written Oct 2. 1656 of his hand and on his deathbed, Ghetti limited himself to correcting the numbers of bequests to his heirs.

by Maria Cristina Basili - Biographical Dictionary of Italians - Volume 53 (2000)

Translated from:

[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santi-Ghetti\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santi-Ghetti_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)