

Giovanni Battista Giovenale

Italian architect/restorer
1849-1934

He was born in Rome on Nov. 11. 1849 by Benedetto, lawyer, and by Maria Valenziani.

Architect, engineer, restorer and architectural historian, has for over half a century been a prominent figure in the Roman cultural landscape. Formed in Rome, where he graduated as an engineer architect in 1876, Giovenale started his work during the so-called "building fever": after the competition for the exhibition building (1876), which he took part in a project, elaborated in collaboration with Enrico Guj, in which "the attempt to reconstruct thermal spaces leads to results of some interest", Giovenale, together with the almost peers Francesco Azzurri, Luca Carimini, Camillo Pistrucci, Giulio Podesti, and the older Virginio Vespignani, Antonio Sarti and Andrea Busiri Vici, active during the papal government, were among the artists of the renewal and transformation of the capital city.

Giovenale's first accomplishments include interventions on the urban fabric of the historic center, such as the restoration of the Wedekind Palace (1879), the Vicarant of the Vicariate of Rome and then the Pontifical Poste (then the newspaper *Il Tempo*), during which the prospect on Colonna Square was modified by placing one clock on top of the building instead of the two originals. More often it had to do with extensions of buildings, sometimes of considerable size, carried out with ill-conceived speculative intent by wealthy buyers: this is a brilliant building that the Marquis Philip Theodoli had built on Giovenale's design in the garden of his own residence in Via del Corso, joining it. Such interventions were implemented by means of building permits issued for "lifting" works (with the appropriate modification of the roofing and the height increase of the underlying environments) and "reduction" (of useful heights, but implemented through as the Palatine Malatesta, today Pecci-Blunt, and Costaguti.

It is clear in these first works that the search for design solutions is as good as possible without further prejudice to the homogeneity of the urban fabric: the will expressed by Giovenale in a great stylistic simplicity, which is equally evident also in the architectures faced *ex novo*, such as the Mencacci-Pericoli mansions, today Tritone, Spithöwer and Tombari, where the designer relies on austere models of the 16th or early Baroque architecture.

It is quite different from Giovenale's design attitude with particular residential typologies such as a single-family house or a luxury building: in the whole, the house and the cottage Folchi and the cottage G. Boncompagni, one of the most valuable achievements in the area of Villa Ludovisi, Giovenale attended with a particularly happy hand to the formal repertoire of late baroque, an astonishing homage to a taste that as archeologist and restorer the same architect denied polemically.

After the financial scandals that had been sanctioned by the crisis in the construction industry, Giovenale, giving voice to the need urgent to safeguard the quality of the

architectural heritage, founded in 1890 the Artistic Association among the architects who, similarly to the institutions in France and Great Britain, was born with the objective of revitalizing the fate and prestige of architecture through a series of initiatives aimed at studying monuments, especially those of the so-called "middle age", but also in promoting of competitions for the realization of public buildings or of representation. The conservative, constant and ambiguous action was exercised through a sort of vigilance carried out by a committee of districts, consisting of fourteen members, by which a Monument Inventory was drawn up, starting from 1895 during the chairmanship of Gaetano Koch, and who had the undoubted merit of re-evaluating the artistic merits of a minor building.

The restoration of the church of S. Maria in Cosmedin (1896-99), commissioned by the Association by the Ministry of Education, saw Giovenale personally engaged since the preliminary studies, conducted with great philological rigor. The design phase, equally entrusted to Giovenale and a subject of unanimous applause by contemporaries (the project was rewarded at the Turin Architecture Exhibition of 1893), constituted the poster of the so-called "scientific restoration", according to which the indication methodological intervention had to be deduced univocally from the analysis of the formation of the monument, and implemented by making the reconstructions and any additions to be individually identifiable at all times.

From these premisses, entirely offended by the refined Roman tradition of Giuseppe Valadier and Raffaele Stern, the choice to break down the eighteenth century façade of the church, performed by Giuseppe Sardi for Cardinal Annibale Albani, in favor of restoring the facies of XII century: a decision considered drastic today especially if viewed in connection with the theories of Camillo Boito, of which Giovenale was, in other respects, a faithful continuator.

The intervention, certainly the most important in this field by Giovenale, gave him a lot of notoriety, but he also had an unpleasant lapse: appointed in 1896 director of the Regional Office of Rome for the preservation of monuments, was discharged from office in 1898 by decision of the disciplinary board of the Ministry of Education, with the accusations that he had recently withdrawn, that he had used funds for the restoration of other monuments in Rome for the work in S. Maria in Cosmedin, and that he had unpublished employment for the same purpose marbles from the Roman Forum, the Colosseum and other monumental sites.

Among the restorations made by Giovenale in the field of church architecture is worth mentioning the intervention in St. Cecilia in Trastevere (1892-1901), commissioned by the patron of the title, Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro, who was accompanied by Monsignor Pietro Crostarosa. The works, preceded as usual by a series of excavations, first "to flourish the ground to search for traces of the quadriportal before the basilica" and subsequently in the subsoil of the church, concerned the eclectic echo of the crypt, which may not benefit the profusion of granite columns, mosaic pavement of the upper church, calidarium and marble marble coating.

Restoration of a certain extent by Giovenale also carried out in S. Maria del Popolo (1897-98), following the investigations that had highlighted the need to repair the wall structures attacked by the rising moisture, and in S. Maria dei Monti (1904), already

under construction by Enrico Salvati, in which Giovenale carried out a façade cleaning "according to particularly well-maintained maintenance criteria".

The architectural achievements between 1903 and 1917 do not differ materially from the previous ones by type and stylistic choices: in addition to the aforementioned Boncompagni villa, the "reduction and expansion" intervention of the Kemp followed by the Max-Planck Institut headquarters.

His activity in the field of architecture, which he never overcame, since Giovenale had happily joined other activities, not least those of the historian and of the publicist, also includes some valuable funeral monuments made in the cemetery of Verano: the chapel Donati-Sacconi to the new Pincetto, essential in form, which resembles that of the funerary stele, as in the decorations, in which the only chiaroscuro movement is given by the very small part of the architrave of the entrance door; the Borrelli and Caetani chapels, the Neo-Baroque in the shape of a small temple with a cupola, the other Neo-Romanesque with double-faced, arches and motifs with blinded loggetis on the main front, and the Apolloni-Caracciolo (Cianferoni) tomb.

In addition to what has already been mentioned, Giovenale has been of some importance in other areas of the public administration: a municipal councilor on the lists of the Roman Union, several times as a councilor to Edilty and Technological Services, can also be reasonably defined a pioneer in the municipalization of the decision to fight the monopolies, working to ensure that the City of Rome was granted the waters of the rivers Velino and Pescara (Water Forces and Drinking Water, Rome, 1920). Giovenale's prestigious roles also occupied the most important capital culture institutes: in addition to the aforementioned Association of Artistic Artists, he was a member of the Roman Academy of Archeology (since 1892) and the Virtues of the Pantheon. The Academy of St. Luke nominated him in 1897 as a scholar of merit and in the years 1911-12 president; He was the head of the Society of Italian Engineers and Architects, and was a member of the Council of Antiquities and Fine Arts (Giovannoni) from 1923 to 1925.

The latest phases of Giovenale's activity relate almost exclusively to archaeological investigations and restorations, except for the construction of the Museum of St. Peter's (Petriano Museum), via S. Uffizio, dismantled during the construction of the Nervi Hall.

Among the principal works in the so-called Martino V house in Genazzano for Cardinal V. Vannutelli (1921-22), around which Giovenale had performed some years ago an interesting stylistic analysis to detect the presence of Aragonese influences in the architecture of Lazio, participation in the excavation campaigns of the Augusto forum (1926-30), directed by Corrado Ricci, and the Asinaria port with Gustavo Giovannoni (1930). At the beginning of the 1920s he completed plans for the unpatched Patras Church, and for the metropolitan cathedral of the Mother of God of Porto Alegre in Brazil (1921-86), conceived in Neo-Baroque shapes with a concrete dome armed, to which substantial changes were made during the long run, such as the inclusion of stylistic quotes inspired by maya art.

In the same period, he devoted himself to the dissemination of his historical research, which he had always looked forward to with great care: between 1930 and 1931 he

published the results of the studies performed on the different types of veil covering Roman amphitheatres, and on the aurelian walls, his last effort, in which he refuted the attribution to Onorio.

Giovenale died in Rome on 23 September. 1934.

Of the five children born of the marriage with Teresa Apolloni, Benedetto (1889-1944), Luigi (1890-1969) and Paolo (1891-1975), who graduated in engineering in the early 1920s, pursued a fortunate professional activity, currently perpetuated by their grandchildren.

by Raffaella Catini - Biografico degli Italiani - Volume 56 (2001)

Translated from:

[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-battista-giovenale_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-battista-giovenale_(Dizionario-Biografico))