

# Gaspare Guerra

Italian Architect  
1540-1622

Born in Modena around 1560 to Baldassarre and Lucia Versi, Guerra was the youngest of three brothers documented in Rome during the last decades of the sixteenth century. His first artistic activity is connected with that of his elder brother Giovanni, who in the great Roman cycles of frescoes commissioned by Sixtus V had to use the young Guerra several times. His early architectural works are also linked to another brother, Giovanni Battista.

The Guerra was active in Vallicella since 1586, and had to carry out the function of support in the measurement and estimation works. Some accounts of Guerra drawn up for Martino Longhi the Elder, regarding the demolition of the old facade of the church and the construction of the loggias above the chapels, also allow us to hypothesize that the latter also had a role in the formation of Guerra.

In April 1587 he joined the Academy of Virtuosi at the Pantheon and since 1595 he appears to be the architect of the religious community of S. Cecilia in Trastevere. In fact, he is mentioned in the minutes of the meetings of the Congregation of the factory that was building some works sponsored by Cardinal Paolo Camillo Sfondrato, for which Guerra may have worked in the palace in via Giulia.

Guerra's first documented autonomous project concerns the construction of the Ripatransone cathedral, a task perhaps due to his frequentation of Vallicella, given that the Marche town housed an important Filipino oratory founded by Alessandro Fedeli, a close friend of Filippo Neri; but probably also to the common Modenese origin of Guerra and Gaspare Silingardi, bishop of Ripatransone since 1582.

The narrow space of the area chosen for the church and the difficulties of operating in a complex topographical condition determined the elaboration of a series of alternative proposals by the will of Silingardi himself, who in 1591 left the town without being able to see the start of the works. Only in June 1597, his successor Pompeo de Nobili, bishop until 1606, laid the first stone of the cathedral. A set of letters makes it possible to partially follow the design phases to be placed in the period immediately preceding 6 October.1598: the first drawings with relative cost estimates were sent on that date. The demolition works of the pre-existing buildings and those of the foundation followed immediately, and by May of the following year they were completed. In the design phase, Guerra made a further modification of the project necessary, carried out by local workers. The church was officiated only in 1625 when the Guerra was already dead, without the facade and the dome having been completed: only in the nineteenth century was it provided for the covering of the cross with lantern.

During the last decade of the century, Guerra appears to be particularly busy in Rome, as his reluctance to move to Ripatransone seems to confirm.

From a justification for his absence from the Marche town we know that he was involved in the construction site of S. Spirito; while in the same years it is also documented in works inside Roman palaces, such as Palazzo Cardelli and Palazzo Dezza then Borghese.

During these years his collaboration with the brothers had to continue. An operation conducted in partnership with Giovanni is documented in 1596; and in the early years of the seventeenth century, as shown by payments of 1603 and 1606, he was still active at the oratory for works that must be related to the presence of Giovanni Battista in Vallicella. Further payments of July 1608 for works at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli document how here too he was involved by his brother Giovanni. Minor works in the church of S. Maria del Sudario date back to the same years.

Guerra's most important commission dates back to the first decade of the seventeenth century for the construction of the church of S. Andrea delle Fratte, where he was active since the setting up of the project in 1605-06.

It is not possible to establish with certainty how Guerra had come into contact with the minims of S. Francesco di Paola, to whom in 1585 Sixtus V had entrusted the church, nor if he had already been employed in the construction of the convent, begun in 1592 according to Vedriani, which was based on information provided by Baglione. However, the main connection of the cloister with the side entrance of the church could suggest a coordinated project of the two parts of the complex. Guerra conceived and built the wide barrel vaulted nave with narrow chapels on the sides, reaching up to the two pillars of the dome towards the nave; under his direction the first level of masonry facade in finely polished brick was also built, partially modified during the nineteenth-century completion, when the niches placed in the spans on the sides of the main door were closed.

The works stopped around 1617; and only thirty years later Francesco Borromini would have built the cross and the lantern. In the effective simplicity with which the nave is articulated and in the technical expertise that marks the external brick envelope, the work of a now mature architect is recognizable, and such as to suggest that the current knowledge of the work of Guerra, overshadowed by names of greater prestige, is incomplete.

Contributing to this is the fact that some of his works were destroyed, such as the temporary chapel built in 1610 on commission by Agostino Palamolla for the Barnabites in S. Carlo ai Catinari, for which perhaps he also worked on some part of the convent. In the effective simplicity with which the nave is articulated and in the technical expertise that marks the external brick envelope, the work of a now mature architect is recognizable, and such as to suggest that the current knowledge of the work of Guerra, overshadowed by names of greater prestige, is incomplete.

Mola's assertion that Guerra would have carried out the cruise of S. Antonio dei Portoghesi still remains to be verified. Similarly it is to be defined whether he may have had a role in the construction of the church of S. Maria del Pianto. The external façade of the church, built however on a design by Niccolò Sebregondi, has considerable affinities with the external side of S. Andrea delle Fratte in the scan of the brick walls with paired

pilasters made of carefully worked masonry. It is a division of the wall surface which, despite being a common heritage of Roman construction of the early seventeenth century, appears particularly developed in the work of Martino Longhi the Elder: if the role of Guerra.

Although we can recognize an evident technical-constructive expertise in the work of Guerra, from his biography, not even in recent years does a completely independent professional profile appear. Still in 1617 he was still engaged in the Cusano chapel in Vallicella in the estimation of works by the stonemason Stefano Longhi.

Guerra died in 1622 in Rome, in his house near the Pantani in the parish of S. Lorenzo ai Monti.

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