

Giacomo Antonio Lavaggi

Italian sculptor
died. 1718

The origins of this sculptor are still obscure, probably born in Rome between 1666 and 1668. In 1683 Lavaggi won the third prize for the first sculpture class at the Accademia di S. Luca. In 1689 he became a member of the Congregation of Virtuosi al Pantheon, participating later in the meetings of 1700 and 1705. Although he acquired a good technique also in marble sculpture, he specialized in the processing of stucco, taking part in some decorative cycles in the most important churches in Rome. His friendship with the sculptor C. Rusconi would suggest a period of training in the busy workshop of E. Ferrata, of which Rusconi was also a pupil

In 1686 Lavaggi appears for the first time on the Roman art scene committed to stucco the statue of *Hope* for the chapel on the left of the main altar of the church of St. Ignatius.

The work was part of a larger decorative complex conceived by A. Raggi and including the cardinal and theological virtues. The eight figures were entrusted to C. Rusconi, but the Jesuit fathers later decided to divide the order more fairly: the four cardinal Virtues, in the niches of the Ludovisi chapel, on the right side of the altar, were executed by Rusconi who obtained a total 60 scudi; those of the opposite chapel were subdivided between F. Nuvolone (*Charity*), S. Giorgini (*Faith*), F. Rainaldi (*Religion*) and Lavaggi, to whom 15 scudi each corresponded. Dissatisfied with the fee, after receiving the balance, Giorgini and Lavaggi filed a lawsuit against the Jesuits. The dispute lasted for over ten years and ended only on December 11th. 1699 with a favorable verdict to the fathers. The terracotta preparatory model of Lavaggi, from the Farsetti collection, is kept at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg.

At the end of the eighties the growing affirmation of the artist is evidenced by the important commissions that saw him as protagonist. Just in 1689 Lavaggi took part in the decoration of the altar dedicated to the Blessed Amadeus of Savoy in the church of the Ss. Sudarium of Rome, while between September 1689 and August of the following year he joined M. Maille in the execution of the monument to the *Connestabile Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna* in the collegiate church of S. Andrea in Paliano. The relationship of trust with the Colonna family was re-established ten years later when Lavaggi was called as a restorer to carry out some interventions of consolidation of the ancient statues depicting *Clelia*, *Aesculapius*, and a *Consul*.

The last decade of the seventeenth century was full of commissions for Lavaggi starting from 1690 when, in collaboration with G. Calandrucci, L. Ottoni, P. Papaleo and G. Napolini, participated in the creation of ephemeral apparatuses for the canonization of the blessed Giovanni da Capestrano. In 1695 he was entrusted with the execution of the marble statue of *S. Elia* for the presbytery balustrade of S. Maria in Transpontina.

The decorative apparatus of the main altar of the church, designed by C. Fontana in 1674, was entirely made of stucco by L. Retti; the four statues of saints for the balustrade, already foreseen in the original project, were replaced in 1695 with the

current figures sculpted by M. Maille (*St. Albert*), A. Rondone (*S. Angelo*), V. Felici (*S. Eliseo*) and from Lavaggi. The attributions are confirmed by a church memorial which specifies the figures given to the artists (165 scudi each) and some important biographical data. In the case of Lavaggi, we read that that of the "Holy Father Elias was sculpted, and worked by Giacomo Antonio Lavaggi, who lived behind the forum of Santa Maria in Via" attestation, the latter, which finds confirmation in the *states of the parish souls*, where the sculptor lived with his wife Barbara Squarci and his sons from 1693 to 1699.

Once the commitment to Transpontina was finished, Lavaggi was involved in the work of the altar of St. Ignatius at the Church of the Gesù, one of the most significant sculptural enterprises of the late Roman Baroque. Lavaggi intervened in two separate sections of the imposing altar machine designed by Father Andrea Pozzo. First he was engaged in the bronze balustrade for which he made the models of two of the sixteen putti that decorate the eight chandeliers. The couple performed by Lavaggi, identified on a stylistic basis, in that of the first left banister, was welded for 30 scudi on July 20, 1697. On November 3 of the same year, Lavaggi on the contrary, it was paid "Sc. Quaranta for the model of an Angel over the Frontispiece on the side of the Evangelio".

At first the critics felt that the work, together with the *pendant* modeled by St. Giorgini, was to be identified with a pair of stucco angels located immediately above the niche of the saint, then replaced with the current two angels that hold the plaque with the monogram made of PE Monnot marble by 1698. However, Bacchi noted, also because of the chronological incongruity, that the figures of Lavaggi and Giorgini were not temporary models to be replaced with sculptures of Monnot, but that in reality it was two independent works now lost, placed above the "frontispiece" of the altar and reported *in situ* at least until 1705.

Thanks to the experienced expertise acquired in the stucco technique, Lavaggi was called to participate in the plastic decoration of the nave of S. Maria in Vallicella. Following the models made by C. Rusconi, Lavaggi executed the putti of the first bay framing the paintings of the Genoese Domenico Parodi (*The ark of the covenant*, on the right, *The expulsion of the merchants from the temple*, on the left). The stuccoes were completed by September 1698 as Lavaggi received a first payment on September 2 and the balance on the following 23.

At the turn of the century, Lavaggi was active in the church of S. Maria in Campitelli where, together with a large group of sculptors, it contributed substantially to the decoration of the Altieri chapel.

Designed by architect S. Cipriani, the chapel was commissioned by Prince Angelo Altieri to house his funeral monument and his wife Vittoria Parabiacchi. On the basis of the accurate description that can be read in the *Pregi dell'architettura* (1706), Vaccondio attributes to Lavaggi a half-length portrait of the princess and the two "Genii piangenti con faci" lying above the urn of the same; however, the analysis of the *Register of mandates* kept in the Altieri Archive and made known by Anselmi, revealed a different division of the works. The bust and one of the two genes were initially entrusted to M. Maille, who received payments up to 30 ag. 1701; after this date the sequence of advances is almost certainly interrupted due to the occurred death of the artist. Lavaggi,

who had been commissioned only one of the genes for the urn at the price of 60 scudi, was then called to make the *pendant* of the small figure and above all to complete the bust of *Vittoria Parabiacchi*, left unfinished by Maille. His intervention is found mainly in the face and in the neck rather lengthened, which recalls that of *Hope* in St. Ignatius. Moreover, Vaccondio attributes to Lavaggi and A. Rondone the two putti that support the coat of arms of the Altieri house, placed above the entrance arch of the same chapel. The author does not specify who is responsible for each of the two figures and for this reason proposes to attribute to Lavaggi the putto on the right of the emblem. The soft modeling of the body, the chubby face and the vaguely dazed expression refer directly to the contemporary genius placed on the left of the tomb of Vittoria Parabiacchi and to the two putti of the altar of S. Ignazio. Again from the *Registry of the Altieri Archive* it emerged that Lavaggi should have performed, for 60 scudi, a glory of stucco "with two putti in act to support the crown of stars", destined to overcome the altar of the chapel. Due to a change in the original design, the group was removed - or even never realized - to make room for the frescoes by G. Passeri in the apsidal basin. According to Schiavo, Lavaggi worked, also in S. Maria in Campitelli, also in the second chapel on the left, dedicated to S. Giovanni, patron saint of Cardinal Paluzzo Altieri. Here, in collaboration with L. Ottoni, he modeled in stucco one of the two angels claw-holder placed above the tympanum of the altar.

After 1703, Lavaggi seems no longer to take an active part in the artistic life while maintaining contact with some of the sculptors with whom he had previously collaborated; in 1714, in fact, he found himself busy drafting the inventory of the study of the late L. Retti. Lavaggi died in Rome on 11 December. 1718, leaving his property to his sons Giuseppe, Giovanni Battista, Nicola and Andrea.

by Cristiano Giometti - Biographical Dictionary of Italians - Volume 64 (2005)

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