

# Giovanni LAZZONI

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The founder of a family of Carrara sculptors whose activity took place mainly in Tuscany, Rome and the Duchy of Modena from the second half of the seventeenth century, Lazzoni was born in Carrara in 1618 by Andrea (Campori).

His debut at the service of the Este can be traced back with certainty to 17 November. 1645 (*Ducal palazzo ...*), when he began to receive a commission for his participation in the decorative enterprise of the Ducal palace in Sassuolo.

The polyphonic choir of the workers and plastics gathered for the occasion was cleverly coordinated by Luca Colombi, who assigned to Lazzoni the execution of the four stucco statues placed in the niches of the ground floor atrium of the palace depicting the *Seasons*. In these same years we can also trace the two allegories of *Nobility* and *Glory* placed at the sides of the Este coat of arms placed above the illusionistic perspective frescoed by Angelo Michele Colonna and Agostino Mitelli on the entrance staircase of the same building (Riccomini).

The last payment to Lazzoni for this series of interventions is recorded on the date of 3 April. 1647 (*Ducal Palace ...*); and it is very probable that, in a short span of time, he had moved to Rome, almost certainly recalled by the enticing possibilities of work offered by the numerous papal factories promoted in view of the Jubilee year. Starting from the spring of 1647, in fact, the plastic decoration of the pillars of the nave of St. Peter's in the Vatican was started, a construction site commissioned by Pope Innocent X Pamphilj and entrusted to the design of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The immense vastness of wall to be covered imposed the recruitment of a real army of artists, composed of stonemasons, lustrators and thirty-nine sculptors. Among these, in addition to a group of usual Bernini collaborators such as Antonio Raggi, Ercole Ferrata and Lazzaro Morelli, also included Lazzoni as the author of three bas-reliefs, "ie one with the medal and 2 with the keys" (Iratz; of the Fabbrica di S. Pietro, arm 26, D, 276, c 158). The work, which began on 27 July of that year, was completed by 30 September. 1648, the day on which Lazzoni received the balance of 65 scudi at the completion of a total fee of 370 scudos (ibid.).

Many of the "young people" who had participated in that enterprise were later involved in the works in S. Giovanni in Laterano, a basilica of which the architect Francesco Borromini had overseen the restoration. On the basis of the project drawn up by the superintendent Virgilio Spada in collaboration with Alessandro Algardi, the twelve Borromini niches open on the nave had to be surmounted by as many stucco reliefs depicting stories from the *Old and New Testaments*. Lazzoni was entrusted with the *Resurrection of Christ*, a scene dominated by the mighty figure of the risen in which the sculptor was measured with a first and organic reworking of the Baroque language of the Algardian mold. All the reliefs of the cycle were completed by 1649 and awarded to each artist the figure of 110 scudi (Heimbürger Ravalli).

The Roman career of Lazzoni continued in the following decade with a new collective enterprise, promoted by the Cerri family. On April 29th 1640 Antonio Cerri had acquired the second chapel on the left in the church of the Gesù and had entrusted the modernization project to Pietro Berrettini da Cortona. On the death of the prelate (1642), the two sons Carlo and Francesco undertook to complete the decoration of the chapel, commissioned by the stonemasons Luca Berrettini and Domenico Marcone. On December 23rd 1657 the two masters presented a report of their rights in which they were also mentioned the four marble statues placed in the niches at the corners of the room (Montagu). For the realization of these allegorical figures were called some of the most talented sculptors of the new generation as Domenico Guidi (*Temperance*), Cosimo Fancelli (*Justice*) and his brother Iacopo Antonio (the *Force*), to which was added also Lazzoni, author of the classical statue of *Prudence* (Deseine).

Finally, in 1660 the portrait bust of the *Princess Olimpia Aldobrandini* dates back, a work dated and signed that is preserved at the Galleria Doria Pamphilj in Rome (Ferrari-Papaldo).

The marble effigy of the noblewoman is characterized by the iconic frontality of the setting; the most refined treatment of the hair contrasts with the geometric and almost stylized rendering of the tapered bodice. Even the sharply horizontal cut of the waist and arms helps to accentuate the rigidity of the whole, which is even more evident if compared to the vibrant pointed solution adopted by Algardi in the famous bust of *Olimpia Maidalchini*, mother-in-law of Princess Aldobrandini (1648 -50: Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilj).

At the end of this long and very intense chapter of the Capitoline, Lazzoni returned to his homeland, looking for new employment opportunities among the old patrons. Towards the end of 1662 he was called to participate in the imposing open building in S. Agostino, the Modenese church that after the funeral of the duke Francesco I (1658) was elected to celebrate the apotheosis of the Este family and raised to the rank of *Pantheon Atestinum*.

Under the direction of the Bolognese architect Gian Giacomo Monti, a large group of plasticists set to work to model the effigies of the saints, blessed and heroic ancestors of the family in the form of a bust or full figure; Lazzoni realized the statues of *S. Contardo d'Este*, of *S. Amedeo di Savoia* and of the *Beata Beatrice d'Este*, receiving "twenty-five double per regalo" on the 25th of January. 1663 (Riccomini). Complained by having been forced to work in stucco and not in marble "as his real profession" (Biagi Maino), he was promptly satisfied. In fact, also in 1663, the two marble statues of *S. Contardo d'Este* and *S. Amedeo di Savoia* were commissioned to flank the sumptuous tabernacle in a small temple designed by the ducal architect Bartolomeo Avanzini in the church of S. Vincenzo in Modena ( Martinelli Braglia).

Thanks to a good dose of resourcefulness and to the support given him by the ducal painter Francesco Stringa, Lazzoni could count on an almost uninterrupted series of commissions also in the following years.

In 1677, for example, two statues of *Pallas* and *Mercury* were commissioned to place themselves on the balustrade of the Ducal Palace of Modena, to complete the series of deities already initiated by the Bolognese Gabriele Brunelli. Once this first commitment was completed, Lazzoni made an application to obtain the assignment of four other statues; but *Mars*, *Virtue*, *Fortress* and *Time* were almost entirely carved by his sons Andrea and Tommaso, who from then on began to collaborate more frequently with the elderly father.

The measure of the esteem enjoyed by Lazzoni is also indicated by the positive conclusion of the affair of the nine statues for the façade of the church of S. Giorgio, a clerk who Lazzoni and the sons contended with the rivals Domenico Carloni and Andrea Baratta. The latter, despite having prepared some very popular models, in 1685 saw the prestigious opportunity to escape Lazzoni, who once again left his sons to carry out the works (Soli).

The next was a particularly intense decade for Lazzoni who began working more and more frequently also for the city of Lucca and its surroundings. In 1681 he signed the altar in inlaid marbles of the church of S. Michele in Sant'Angelo in Campo; it was one of the most significant examples of Baroque plastic in the area where the characteristic elements of Roman derivation are re-proposed with extremely original results. Also in Lazzoni must be ascribed the vibrant statue of the *Immaculate Madonna*, also known as the Stellario, placed on a high column with a Corinthian capital in the Piazza di S. Francesco in Lucca. Completed in 1687, the work was commissioned by the general vicar of the diocese, Flaminio Nobili, who donated it to the Compagnia della Concezione (or Stellario) officiating in the nearby church of S. Francesco (Ridolfi).

On the basis of a deeply rooted local historiographical tradition of the early twentieth century, it was customary to attribute to Lazzoni also the two allegorical figures of *Charity* and *Purity* on the sides of the main altar of the church of St. Catherine (ibid.); however, the events related to the rebuilding of the building, which took place between 1738 and 1741, led to the exclusion of his involvement by shifting the authorship of the two works to the youngest sculptor Giovanni Antonio Cybei. Stylistically, the two statues of *S. Paolino* and *S. Donato* on the top of the city's port bearing the same name (Belli Barsali), and the three

stucco reliefs on the façade of the Madonnina depicting the *Gloria of s. Pauline*, the *delivery of the keys to s. Peter* and the *Alms of s. Martino*.

Among his most assiduous patrons of Lucca we must finally remember the nobleman Fabrizio Mansi for whom Lazzoni probably realized the portrait bust and a statuette of *Diana*, reported by Campori in the villa that was Mansi in Verno near Lucca.

The profitable form of collaboration started with his sons Andrea and Tommaso, allowed Lazzoni to be present in several cities and to carry out numerous commissions at the same time. By virtue of the parental bonds and of the corroborated experience, the names of the three sculptors are often intertwined in some common enterprises as in the case of the churches in the Masses of St. Francis and the old cathedral of St. Peter, promoted by the powerful cardinal Alderano Cibo.

The construction site in S. Francesco started in 1663 with the construction of the monumental high altar, designed by architect Giovanni Francesco Bergamini. Once the working of the marbles, completed almost entirely by the workshop of Andrea Baratta, was completed, the two statues to be placed at the sides of the table were made; the terracotta models of *S. Francesco* and *S. Bernardino* were prepared in Rome by Guidi and fortunately arrived in Massa at the end of January 1673 to be translated into marble by Andrea Lazzoni and Francesco Tacca respectively (GB Bergamini, *Historical Memories of Massa, Carrara and Avenza di Lunigiana*, in Federici). Between 1682 and 1684 the works in S. Francesco resumed with the decoration of the altars of the transept, for which the cardinal had commissioned two paintings to the Pistoia artist Luigi Garzi. Also in this circumstance, the models of *Putti* surmounting the niches were executed by Guidi, but they were sculpted in Massa by Lazzoni and Andrea Baratta (ibid.).

In 1687, the rebuilding of the St. Peter's Cathedral was also vigorously resumed, largely collapsing on the night of 8 December. 1671. The members of the Cibo family actively engaged in bringing the ancient building back to life; among other initiatives, in the context of internal decoration, the Duke Alberico II Cibo Malaspina took care of the erection of the altar of the Crucifix, while his brother Alderano financed the one dedicated to the Rosary, both designed by the architect Domenico Martinelli. Following a widespread fashion in Rome, the cardinal decided to place in the shrine of his altar a marble relief depicting the *Virgin giving the rosary to s. Domenico*; it is therefore quite probable that he had once again appealed to the creative abilities of Guidi, a specialist in this field for having carved the altar reliefs in the chapel of Monte di Pietà and in the church of S. Agnese. The difficult task of translating into a monumental icon the model of Guidi was assigned to Lazzoni, who again made use of the assistance of his sons Tommaso and Andrea. The large marble table ready to be carved was placed in a room specially rented at the Carrara hospital; and Lazzoni began working on the work as early as March 1688, when on the 14th the two agents of the cardinal, Giovanni Pizzuti and Bernardino Moretti, made the first payment. The rather regular sequence of the payments was interrupted on August 22nd. 1691, almost certainly in correspondence with the completion of the works.

The work is no longer placed *in situ*. Following the destruction of the old cathedral commissioned by Elisa Bonaparte Baciocchi in 1807, the "high relief notabilissimo" (Campori) was placed in storage in the warehouses of the church of S. Sebastiano; and only in 1856 did he proceed to his transfer to the right altar of the transept of the new cathedral of Saints Peter and Francis (Ceccopieri Maruffi).

We do not know the place and date of death of Lazzoni, which, due to the disappearance of his name from the accounting documents, however, had to happen towards the end of 1690 or early 1691 (Federici).

Parallel to the activity carried out in the study of his father, the two brothers Tommaso and Andrea also pursued their own independent career. Di Tommaso is reminiscent of the six terracotta statues made in 1680 for the facade of the cathedral of Carpi depicting *S. Bernardino of Siena*, *St. Francis*, *St. Valerian*, *St. Sebastian*, *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* (Campori), and a marble bust for the Negri house in Pontremoli, of which Bologna was mentioned.

Di Andrea , in addition to the aforementioned statue of *St. Francis* for the homonymous church of Massa, there are two small marble groups with *Aeneas and Anchises* and *Time* , dated 1706 and kept at the Castello Sforzesco in Milan.

The last representative of the family to follow in the footsteps of his predecessors was Giovanni , son of Andrea and nephew of Giovanni. The catalog of his production, still rather small, was rebuilt by Campori, who counted among his most successful works the marble relief depicting *St. Anthony of Padua holding the Child* , placed in the altar dedicated to the saint in the church of S. Francesco in Carrara. Campori also remembered "the beautiful altarpiece placed in 1739 at the altar of the Crucifix in the church of S. Pietro a Massa, where he represented the Madonna supported by two Angels, S. Giovanni and la Maddalena"; while Soli assigned him a *Crucifix* in white marble placed in the fifth chapel of the right aisle in the Carmelite church of Modena. Executed by 1700, the work in 1768 had already been replaced by another stucco *Crucifix* attributed to the Modenese sculptor Gregorio Rossi.

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