

Paolo Maruscelli

Italian architect
1594-1649

He was born in 1594 from "Girolamo romano". The place of birth of Maruscelli remains doubtful: Baglione defines it as «Roman»; while it is called Florentine in several documents.

There is no information on his training; but it has been hypothesized that it took place in contact with GB Soria, to which the architectural and ornamental lexicon unites it. His activity is documented starting from 1622, when he turns out to be an expert for the Congregation of the Oratorians of Rome. The first design assignment entrusted to Maruscelli dates back to about 1626, the year of the commission and foundation of the New Church of the Oratorians of Perugia, which came to the construction of the façade in 1646 and ended, after the death of Maruscelli, in 1649.

The 27th August 1628 the Compagnia del Sacramento commissioned to Maruscelli the extension of the homonymous chapel in the dome of Rieti, finished in the spring of 1629.

The architecture of the small chapel is made up of a parallelepiped of a «classical» plant with rounded corners, richly decorated in stucco (around 1638 by Gregorio Grimani da Stroncone), and highlights the substantial commonality of language of the young Maruscelli with that of Soria and F. Ponzio. The marble coverings and furnishings were made between 1631 and 1635, while Maruscelli was in Rome.

The first documentation concerning Maruscelli reactor dates back to 1626. It was in fact identified with him the "Sr Paolo Marovelli Florentine Architect in Rome made to be established in this city".

In 1627 he began the collaboration of Maruscelli with the Oratorians of St. Philip Neri of Rome for the realization of their convent, whose plan developed around two axes of which the east-west one ended in the sacristy of S. Maria in Vallicella, first core of the building (1629-30).

Maruscelli worked for fifteen years for the house, in close consonance with Virgilio Spada, influential oratorian and amateur architect, with the contributions of "consultants" of external experts (G. De Vecchi, Soria, G. Rainaldi), carefully documented and integrated by Maruscelli in the final project. Even if the subsequent project by F. Borromini was superimposed on the previous one by incorporating it, the Marucellian events reconstructed by Connors have shed light on the genesis of the complex, among the major architectural and urban *exempla* of the seventeenth century. The actual Marucellian construction was built in the years 1629-34; Maruscelli was solely responsible for the projects until 1637, when he was associated with Borromini.

The sacristy (including the walnut credenzoni, dated 1634), with its service areas, the corridor and the complex of rooms surrounding the chapel of St. Philip Neri, translated

from his old house, and four or five between portals and exhibitions (of wood and marble) made between 1634 and 1635 approximately. This central, but functionally secondary, Marucellian nucleus was incorporated into the vast Borromini complex without substantial modifications. The latter, however, owes much to the functional and structural solutions of Maruscelli, since the Congregation, which always applied the system of "consulte" extended to various architects, had already examined and approved its project, despite the inspiring themes of Maruscelli (taken from A. Palladio, P. Tibaldi and Soria) have been superseded by Borromini's innovations.

The urban layout of the area facing the Vallicella (Strada Nuova) was built, between 1627 and 1630, on drawings by Maruscelli, approved by Pope Urban VIII Barberini, but remained unfinished.

In 1629 Maruscelli had the first task to design the house or convent of the Theatines of S. Andrea della Valle, in Rome, of which he was recognized as a façade and a court with a fountain. The building site continued for a long time (*post* 1698), substantially reflecting its project.

Starting from 1628, Maruscelli is documented as a Medicean architect in Rome, with tasks related, among other things, to the findings and measures for workshops of Palazzo Madama, of the Palazzo in Campo Marzio and in the garden of Trinità dei Monti.

The first known payments date back, however, to January 1636. On that date the Grand Duke Ferdinand II commissioned Maruscelli to design the enlargement of Palazzo Madama, as it was called the Medici palace (about 1478) in memory of Margherita d' Austria, which had lived there around the middle of the sixteenth century. Of that worksite, active between 1638 and 1645, already advanced between 1641 and 1643, but completed with further work on the side of Palazzo Carpegna by 1648, Maruscelli has left various drawings, starting from the beautiful relief of the state of departure (1638) and from the first project with a wooden model of the central window (1638). The final project deviated from the initial sobriety and came to a peculiar decorative complexity, whose paternity is still today the subject of studies and research. Maruscelli created a new façade, which incorporated the previous one, the courtyard and the apartment of the cardinals Carlo and Giovanni Carlo de' Medici.

The works were ordered by Ferdinand II, respectively brother and father of the two cardinals, to give the Medici an adequate representation, equipped with houses for the sequel and outbuildings for horses and carriages. The initial project included a tripartite façade with giant pilasters, which was regularized according to the Florentine tradition with a score of windows and bricks to «face».

The general *facies* of the building reflects the need of the Grand Duke and cardinals to affirm a Tuscan identity, adapting it to the Roman environment and to the plasticism of the Baroque period. Despite the very high overall costs (more than 90,000 scudi), only the total expenditure of 750 scudi is currently documented for Maruscelli. According to the recent archival researches, Maruscelli alternated the role of designer to the functions of director responsible for the construction site, coordinating artists and artisans active under his guidance also in other important Roman coeval yards, such as the sculptor Cosimo Fancelli, the stonemasons Francesco Ortolani, Simone Castelli, Andrea Appiani, Domenico Prestinari, Giovanni Maria Bongiardini. For the interiors (1638-39) he had as

a collaborator M. Monanni, painter and influential chamber teacher of Cardinal Giovanni Carlo.

After the purchase by Bernardino Spada in 1632 of the Capodiferro palace, Maruscelli was first commissioned to restructure (1633-34) the large vestibule, and then when in July 1636, as a road sub-master, he signed the concession to Cardinal Spada of an area of the alley of the Arch, he worked on the enlargement of the sixteenth-century building.

In particular, he took care of the restoration of the secret garden and of the construction of the gallery and of the cardinal's study on the main floor (current III and IV hall of the Galleria Spada). Between 1641 and 1642 he was also commissioned to renovate the three rooms on the ground floor, towards the secret garden, and to open the two arches of the courtyard, on the south-west side, where the Borrominian perspective was subsequently realized.

In those same years Maruscelli, commissioned by Virgilio Spada, collaborated in the arrangement of the Spada chapels of S. Andrea della Valle (1631-32) and S. Girolamo della Carità (1634), and subsequently, starting from 1641, it was in charge of the renovation of the Spada-Veralli building at the Corso (no longer existing).

In 1634 the work of Maruscelli was requested in the sacristy of S. Maria dell'Anima by the superintendents L. Holstein and J. Savenier, while the architect of the church was O. Torrioni. Between 1636 and 1644, and beyond, an octagon with rounded corners was created with ornamentation and scores comparable to some of the oratory and of the Madama palace. The project for the sumptuous and refined Filonardi chapel in S. Carlo ai Catinari is dated to 1635.

Between 1638 and 1642 waits for the functional project of the convent of S. Maria sopra Minerva (eastern wing), with shops on the ground floor (now walled), rooms with mezzanine on the main floor and wide corridor, now reading room of the Casanatense Library, north of the next main covered hall (1700-29) which on the short side continues Maruscelli façade.

In the sacristy of S. Maria sopra Minerva he was given the whimsical and ingenious *Chamber of S. Caterina*, previously given to Borromini and A. Sacchi, due to the lack of stylistic recognition. The attributional proposal is based on a manuscript by Fioravante Martinelli (about 1660), a friend of Borromini.

For various other works, including those for the Germanic College of S. Apollinare (1624 and 1632-37) and for S. Maria dell'Umiltà, at the Quirinale (1641-46), there is no exhaustive documentation. The chapel in S. Giovanni in Laterano, with gilded stucco scores much appreciated by Mola, is probably to be identified with the chapel adjacent to the sacristy of the canons, with an altar dedicated to St. Anne.

During these years of intense activity, Maruscelli became a member of the Academy of S. Luca (from 1630) and of the Congregation of the Virtuosi (1640) and put together a conspicuous personal library, including the major classical texts of architecture, from Vitruvius to Serlio, to the hydraulic and military engineering treaties, which the Swords were also interested in. In it there were texts of perspective, geometry, optics, iconography, language and literature, or volumes relating to religious orders and their founders. The approximately 30 architectural drawings of Maruscelli still preserved

have also made it clear that his drawing technique (pink and yellow ink and watercolor on pencil trace) was close to that of Rainaldi and his circle.

Starting from 1642, the year in which the project dates back, he was mainly active as a hydraulic engineer for the reclamation of the Pontine marshes, commissioned by Pope Innocent X.

Maruscelli died in Rome on 23 October. 1649. On 5 December 1649 an inventory of goods was drawn up in the house in the alley of the Corallo, from which his wife Antonia Spicher and his sons Girolamo, Maria Felice, Gian Filippo, Carlo and Ludovico are his heirs.

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