

Tommaso Mattei

1652-1726)
Italian architect

Son of Carlo and Anna Felice Zanghe, was born in Rome on 24 December. 1652 in his father's house-shop located in Tor Millina Street, behind the church of S. Agnese in Agone.

Known as the "pope's sparrow", his father was a goldsmith craftsman of remarkable skill to whose magisterium G.L. Bernini recourse to St. Peter to clean, gilt and polish the chair, the ciborium of Sacred Sacrament, and the statue of Death in the tomb of Alexander VII. It was in his workshop that Mattei received a first artistic education, as suggested by the nickname of "spadarino" attributed to him by Valesio, and his work, characterized by formal elegance and refined research in the care of stylistic details, which refer to paternal art.

Mattei is mentioned in the margins of Carlo Fontana's biography, written by Pascoli, as one of the many "pupils" of the Ticinese architect. Recent studies, however, place the constitution of the professional studio of Fontana between 1675 and 1677, when Mattei, by now twenty-seven, had exceeded the time of the training journey. The close ties of collaboration and, perhaps, of friendship between Carlo Mattei and Bernini suggest that young Mattei, like many aspiring aspirant artists, had to be introduced at the atelier of the latter.

It is assumed that Mattei had come into contact with Fontana (entertaining with him an initial apprenticeship relationship and subsequently a professional collaboration) at the Bernini's atelier, where Fontana waited for the architect's master's assignments.

Since 1674 C. Fontana is documented as Architect of Duke Filippo Cesarini for which he oversaw some construction and infrastructure projects in the feudals of Genzano and Civita Lavinia, today's Lanuvio. It is possible that Mattei was the coadjutor of Fontana in this assignment, where he took over from 1679 to 1680, completing construction works under his design and management coordination. Moreover, MATTEI's first note of work is the bell tower of the collegiate medieval church of S. Maria Maggiore in Lanuvio, restored between 1674 and 1677 by C. Fontana. The bell tower preserves a drawing donated by Mattei to the Academy of St. Luke, at the time of being admitted as a merit academic at the age of fifty-four years on 31st December. 1706.

On the verse of the drawing is the autograph notation "Drawing of my first work by Tomasso Mattei in Civita Lavinia in 1680". The sober formal elegance of the bell tower architecture, the taste for the delicate plasticism bent on the design of moldings, the graphic and pictorial effects of the surface denote Mattei as an author who is already mature and conscious of his expressive means and orientates his he works towards accents of calm and elegant decorativism, placing it on the horizon of the eighteenth century now. Circumstance, which, together with the unconventional technical commitment required by the bell tower, prompted to believe that Lanuvio's cementation

was preceded by an intensive training (characterized by the study and the active absorption of architectural culture of the great masters of the seventeenth century) and professional.

On Mattei of Lanuvio we can also see the cultural incidence of Carlo Rainaldi, who must be considered his true master and who introduced him definitively to the profession's environment.

Elegant rainal descent accents in the work of Mattei a Lanuvio are in the crowning spire of the bell tower, inspired by the work of Rainaldi in the bells of S. Agnese in Agone. But, as Fasolo points out, Rainaldi's latest work was geared towards inventive new ideas that can be explained by the contribution of the young collaborator, designated by Rainaldi himself as his successor in the most prestigious commissions. That the last creative stage of the master could be influenced, in part, by Mattei is a circumstance suggested by a precious ornamental fountain, now glaringly trimmed, drawn by the same Mattei for the Community of Lanuvio. The execution of the latter coincides, inspired by some stylistic phrases, with the work of collaboration that Mattei lent to Rainaldi in the renovation of the third secret garden of villa Pinciana (1680-88), where the architectural and stylistic articulation of the casino said of the Meridiana and the perspective towards the Daini Park is the result of a shared sharing of ideas and design thoughts.

At the death of Duke Filippo, which took place in 1685, Livia's grandson Cesarini took over the birth of his home, and on account of which, from 1687 and at least until 1696, Mattei supervised the new urban expansion outside the medieval walls of the Genzano feud, at the completion of the new factory-flanked road, started under the responsibility of Carlo Fontana in 1675.

Mattei continued the work begun by Fontana consolidating the plan of building alignments and designing every single building. Of great scenic invention are the two building blocks that open down the prospect of the large urban canal, to erect up the facade of the cathedral of S. Maria della Cima and the valley of S. Sebastiano, whose construction began in 1647 on probably designed by Giovanni Antonio De Rossi and finished in the facade by the same Fontana with the possible collaboration of Mattei. The buildings designed by Mattei for the new road are denoted by a sober and standardized design, albeit without formal and stylistic solutions of the highest rank; as is the case in the holiday casino designed and built around 1690 for Carlo Maratti, to whom Mattei was linked by close ties of friendship, as evidenced by G.P. Bellori in his biography dedicated to the artist Marche. A friendship that, as in the case of Genzano's residence, and in other circumstances that will be discussed later, also translated into artistic collaboration opportunities.

Between 1682 and 1684, after having joined him for a few years as a coadjutor, he replaced Giuseppe Brusati Arcucci (another gravitational architect in the orbit of Carlo Rainaldi and nephew of Camillo Arcucci and who certainly had a role in Mattei's professional training) as an architect of the Mattei and Spada Veralli families.

For Mattei, during 1686, the "modernization" of the chapel of the family in the church of Araceli, entitled to S. Matteo, designed by Giacomo Del Duca (1586-87), opting for an

unpublished, original, conservative restoration. Always for the Mattei, between 1710 and 1711, he cared for the design of the new parochial church of the Jupiter feast, which was completed only many years after the death of the artist by one of his brightest pupils and collaborators, Francesco Ferrari he will also be the architect of the Spada Veralli since 1722.

In the church of S. Maria in Montesanto, in piazza del Popolo, he designed the Montioni chapel completed in 1687. The decorative affliction of this work of Mattei, "will mark the first Roman rococo".

On commission of Canon Giovanni Battista Sabatini designed the choral choir for the canons of S. Maria in Cosmedin, which was also completed by 1687; as in the Montioni chapel here too Mattei was assisted by Carlo Maratti for the pictorial and sculptural decoration.

The work that marks the full maturity of Mattei is the Church of the Miracle in Bolsena, adjacent to that of S. Cristina, designed in 1693 for the cardinal bishop of Orvieto Savo Millini and completed in 1699.

In the church of the Miracle, the circular spatial space of the dome with entrance nooks, side chapels and the basement presbytery room is amplified by the scenic connection between the different environments. It thus develops the starting points of the chapel of the Voti, drawn by Bernini for the Chigi in the cathedral of Siena and the homonymous church of the Miracle of Carlo Rainaldi in piazza del Popolo in Rome, to which he refers to the general typological system. In the design of stylistic parties, Mattei refers, with explicit quotations, to the great masters of the just-passed generation; it is the case of capitals of semiplasts alongside the columns of the classroom taken from the Borrominian oratorian or Filipino stuccoes adorning the altars of the side chapels, while the Rainaldeschi and Berniniani influences come to the edifice of the main altar.

Millini's commission is to be reported to Mattei the Orvietan churches of St. Joseph (1683-85) and, almost certainly, of S. Maria della Cava (1683), both of them with central plan, and a drawing for the new entrance of the bishop's palace of Orvieto (1693). It is also possible to exclude Mattei's involvement in the drawing of Millini's tomb in S. Maria del Popolo in Rome.

Prior to the end of the 17th century, Mattei made two important works: in 1697 he designed a large ephemeral setting in Carroceto, near Anzio, and in 1699 he led a considerable campaign to restore stucco and sculptures Casino of the Vasanzio to Villa Pinciana.

The ephemeral setting of Carroceto factories was erected for the purpose of hosting Pope Innocent XII Pignatelli and his court being parked while on the way to the port of Anzio. The size of the work was such that it would require even more spending than needed for the construction of the new harbor. Among the other ephemeral installations designed by Mattei are the catafalco for the burials of Charles II in S. Giacomo degli Spagnoli and the theater erected at the entrance of Piazza Mignanelli, both on Spanish commission, respectively in December of 1700 and in the " April of 1701. The activity for Giovan Battista Borghese was very intense and directed above all to the care of family

feudals outside Rome. A lot of work that suggested to Mattei to establish a home and a professional studio near the Borghese palace, in Monte d'Oro square, where he has been living since 1694 and where since 1703 he lived with his wife, Maria Teresa Pennagalli, married on end of that year, from which he had two sons, Carlo Francesco and Anna Maria Felice. Prior to the replacement of Mattei in the office of architect Borghese by his other pupil and collaborator, Francesco De Sanctis, his design was erected in 1715 on the facade of the church of S. Lucia della Tinta along the Via Monte Brianzo.

Conspicuous was also activity for the Spada Veralli. Between 1691 and 1707, following numerous maintenance and renovation works, Mattei attributed a new face to the family villa at Porta S. Pancrazio.

The refurbishment of the main casino culminated in the construction of a new staircase enclosed by a decorative fountain (now extensively trimmed) - where the motif of grotesque and a sculptural group composed of Baccho, Hercules, two dolphins, a masquerade and a cobwebs seem to allude to berniniana opera in Piazza Navona - and in the fountain in the courtyard of Rospigliosi palace in Rome. Also inside the Capodiferro-Spada palace, Mattei carried systematic maintenance and refurbishment campaigns: between 1698 and 1702 the renovation of the so-called window tunnel and the construction of new stables and remodeling next to the prospect and the modernization of the private chapel. Around 1705 goes back to the facade of the Uccelliera, located as the prospectus backdrop of a terrace, an emblematic work of the decorative inflection of the architecture of the early eighteenth century. At Mattei's design, behind the family building in Piazza Colonna, a new rental house was also erected (1702).

In 1699, Mattei expanded and restored Casali's casino at the Celio villa, demolished to build the current military hospital. The casino's architecture referred to the Bernini opera for Rospigliosi di Spicchio's villa in Lamporecchio near Pistoia and G.A. De Rossi for the D'Aste-Bonaparte Palace in Rome. The activity for Capranica and Del Grillo is still waiting to be carefully studied; but it is certain that the Capranica designed in 1713 the theater in the same name square, restored during the nineteenth century.

A remarkable chapter in Mattei's professional activity concerns the service he has provided for congregations, monasteries, convents and hospitals.

Already Rainaldi's coadjutor since May 1685 as an architect of the oratorian fathers to the New Church at the death of the master took over, initially joined by Simon Felice Delino. At Mattei (who will be Philippine architect until 1725), it is up to the direction and, most probably, the design of the entire stucco decoration of the walls of the main nave of the New Church, executed between 1697 and 1701.

To Mattei, architect of the hospital of S. Spirito for the years 1685, 1697, 1699 and for the period between 1707 and 1717 is attributed the new arrangement of the library of the hospital (1712-14).

From 1696 until 1722 he was an architect of the nation of the Illyrians or of the Croats, for whom in 1715 he supervised the plans for the extension of the hospital, now no longer existing, adding a new factory in the back , adjacent to the church of S. Girolamo

degli Schiavoni. In 1703, for the French minima of the Trinità dei Monti, MATTEI designed the body of the stairs leading from the cloister to the upper floors.

From 1707 to 1724 Mattei was architect of the Benedictine monastery in s. Maria della Concezione in Campo Marzio, where he was assisted by Francesco Antonio Bufalini. Among the works performed for the Benedictines are the external renovation of the church of S. Gregorio Nazanziano (in collaboration with Bufalini) and the modernization of one of the sides of the cloister.

From 1711 to 1713, as an architect of the ecclesiastical noblemen's college, he carried out measurements and estimations of properties located in piazza della Minerva, with the aim of renovating and enlarging the palace, which in all likelihood cared for project and construction.

The most significant work conceived for a religious site is the "sacred ladder", designed and built for the Teresian Sisters of S. Giuseppe a Capo le Case in 1717.

At the peak of his career, Mattei was chosen by Cardinal Tommaso Ruffo of Bagnara to start a massive work of restructuring and modernization of the most representative places of the bishopric of Ferrara, whose Ruffo was named by Clement XI in May of 1717. Mattei was commissioned to completely renovate the bishop's palace and to renovate the interior of the attic Gothic cathedral, continuing a yard set up in 1712 on the design of the architect of Ferrara Francesco Mazzarelli. In the latter case, however, the role played by Mr Mattei, to which the bishop's residence at Voghenza, just outside Ferrara, is still difficult to clarify. It is possible that the title of Knight of Christ has been recognized for Mattei by Clemente XI precisely because of the merits earned in the work of Ferrara.

Undoubtedly the most important work, in terms of content of formal expression and technical commitment, was the restructuring and extension of the old bishopric office, which was begun in 1717 and was conducted at least until 1725, just a few months after death of the Mattei. The original medieval building, refurbished during the fifteenth century, was enlarged along the main course principal. The new and extended facade (denoted by a sober and controlled architectural skeleton embellished by those stylistic accents now autographs of Mattei's work and by a lush and sumptuous entrance door) lay in direct perceptual connection with the castle's estuary. In the invention of the ladder of honor located inside, Mattei provides a wisdom of superb scenic and stylistic dexterity, formulating a double-height united space at a pavilion with central niche mirror, where architecture is entirely absorbed within the plastic-sculptural and pictorial decoration, the latter obtained through delicate pastel shades and the rustic textures of the stucco surfaces. Mattei's staircase, as far as scenery and stylistic formulas were concerned, served (as in general his work in Ferrara) as a model in Ferrara and Emilia-Romagna for the whole of the eighteenth century.

Known amongst the "primary" architects of Rome, since Rainaldi's death he held the office of Ripe architect who kept it until 1725; while in 1723 he was appointed chief architect of the Reverend Apostolic Chamber, replacing Giovan Battista Contini, who had been coadjutor for at least since 1720. In this way, at least three prestigious assignments were conferred on Mattei: in 1724 he was commissioned (in competition

with other architects) to develop F. Borromini's drawings for the façade of S. Giovanni in Laterano. Paid with the considerable sum of 120 shields, Mattei's projects, currently unidentified, did not follow. The same was the fate of the drawings executed by M in 1725, commissioned by Pope Benedict XIII, for the new facade of S. Maria sopra Minerva. In 1724 Mattei had been commissioned by the same pope to restore the ancient basilica church of S. Maria in Domnica: works were completed by 1726, according to cautiously and moderately conservative intentions of pre-existence.

Mattei died in Rome on May 10, 1726 and was buried in S. Giuseppe a Capo le Case.

by Dimitri Ticconi - Italian Biography Dictionary - Volume 72 (2008)

Translated from:

[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tommaso-mattei_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tommaso-mattei_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)