

Carlo Murena

Italian architect of the late-Baroque period
(1713-1764)

He was born in the Collalto fortress (today Collalto Sabino) on 16 July 1713 by Giuseppe and Dorotea Rolli.

He initially devoted himself to humanistic studies, which he later abandoned to deal with architecture, probably following the meeting with Nicola Salvi, in whose studio, in Rome, he began to work as an architect. The date of his arrival in the City is not known exactly, but it can be considered to be due to the period in which he began his apprenticeship at Salvi. His stay in the papal city proved to be advantageous for his career so much that, already in the thirties, he appeared alongside Luigi Vanvitelli. The collaboration probably began between 1737 and 1738: according to sources, Murena was placed, thanks to his protector, Cardinal Francesco Barberini Jr., Under the direction of Vanvitelli at the time when the latter "built the Lazzaretto of Ancona". From 1739 his name appears constantly alongside that of Vanvitelli, whose design inventions proved to be a faithful interpreter from the beginning of his architectural activity: he participated in the construction of the convent of Montemorcinio (1739-63), near Perugia, covering, in specific, the role of director of the works and, in 1740, was commissioned by the Olivetans to design the ornaments of the chapels of the church annexed to the monastery of S. Maria in Campis near Foligno.

Starting from the fifth decade of the eighteenth century it was active both in Rome and outside. His presence in Fiumicino has been documented since 1740, where he mainly dealt with the maintenance of "passonate", but also with more complex hydraulic problems; in 1751 he replaced Vanvitelli for all purposes.

In 1743 he executed, on behalf of the Olivetans, the design of the new abbey church of S. Croce di Sassovivo near Foligno. In Gubbio, he created, together with Antonio Francesco Berardi, the Great Hospital of the city (the drawings were presented in 1746 but the works began only in 1749). In Rome, he took part perhaps from 1748 to the restoration of S. Maria degli Angeli at the Baths of Diocleziano and then succeeded Vanvitelli, in 1751, as director of the building site; from 1750 to 1763 he signed, as a substitute for Vanvitelli, numerous estimates for works "made for the service of the Acqua Felice"; in 1751 he took over from Antonio Rinaldi as a young man of Vanvitelli in the reconstruction of the convent complex of S. Agostino, begun in 1746 and for which from 1754 it is indicated, in the Augustinian documentation, as a "substitute" of the master; since 1751, after the departure of Vanvitelli for Naples, he took care of the execution of many of his works and began to devote himself to teaching. The experience gained as a trusted collaborator of Vanvitelli also guaranteed him the personal direction of some factories. In 1750 he appears to be the official architect of Cardinal Federico Marcello Lante; the following year he was engaged in the realization, on his project, of the Guidi di Bagno chapel, in the basilica of Ss. Bonifacio and Alessio, commission obtained thanks to his familiar knowledge: his sister Isabella lived, in fact, with his mother and uncle Domenico Rolli (writer and brother of the poet Paolo Rolli), in the home of Monsignor Ricciardo Guidi di Bagno.

The Murena family, thanks also to the friendship with Urbano Vanvitelli, Luigi's brother, managed to fit into the Roman cultural environment, so much so that Isabella and one of the brothers, Francesco, became part of the Arcadia.

Between 1750 and 1760, Murena figure, with Pietro Bernasconi, as assistant to Vanvitelli in the construction of the new church of S. Agostino in Ancona. Also in the Marche it was present in the site of the sanctuary of the S. Casa di Loreto, where between 1751 and 1758 it is documented, as a substitute for Vanvitelli, in the construction of the new bell tower of the Apostolic Palace. In the same decade he took care, always in substitution of the master, to verify the accounts relating to works carried out in Rome in the houses owned by the Congregation of the Lauretans. At the same time he held other important positions: in 1754 he was appointed architect of the chapter of St. Peter, a role he held until his death. By order of the canons he modernized, between 1755 and 1759, the Roman church of the Saints Michael and the Great and in the same period he took care, calibrating measures and accounts, of the maintenance of their real estate existing in Rome and surroundings. Also in Rome, between 1755 and 1760, he collaborated with Vanvitelli on the construction of his house in Via Giulia and was also involved in the material execution of the Sampajo chapel in S. Antonio dei Portoghesi.

In 1752 he was commissioned by the Lazio community of Sant'Oreste to design the "mola" of the city, while in 1754 he dedicated himself to the design of the altar and tabernacle of the cathedral of Terni and, as expert of the Marquis Frangipane, to a report on emissary of the lake of Nemi. In 1755 he took part in a congress of technicians called with the aim of identifying a solution for the cover-up of the port of Anzio. In the same year, he was called by the Fano authorities to intervene on the canal port. He was later still active for Anzio.

In 1758 he was invited, together with Paolo Paolo and Carlo Marchionni, to present a model for the doors of the Vatican basilica; also in 1758 he was commissioned, together with Clemente Orlandi, to evaluate the "new house" belonging to the Rospigliosi-Pallavicini on Piazza Pasquino. The following year he was asked, together with Giovan Francesco Fiori and MauroFontana, from the Congregation of the Oratory of Rome to assess the damage in the oratory of the Filipinos.

In 1759 he was elected academic of merit of the Academy of St. Luke, a title that gave him the right to accept students in his study and to teach at the same Academy. Amongst others were Virginio Bracci, Andrea Vici, GiuseppePiermarini, GirolamoToma, Giuseppe Pistocchi, Ticinese Simone Cantoni and the young Carlo Vanvitelli, Luigi's son.

Between 1759 and 1762 he intervened, modifying the previous design idea of Carlo Maderno, in the church of S. Maria in Trivio in Velletri. Before 1760 the cardinal Federico Marcello Lante commissioned him the reorganization of the Roman palace in Piazza dei Caprettari. In 1760 he designed the church of the Trinity in the monastery of the Franciscan nuns of the Annunciation in Foligno. In the same year he worked as architect of the chapter of St. Peter, the restoration of the church and the parish house of the Saints Lorenzo and Urbano in Prima Porta near Rome. The tasks for the Clarisse of the Roman monastery of S. Silvestro in Capite (1759-64) should also be mentioned among the tasks. Between 1761 and 1762 he realized the high altar of S. Lorenzo in Perugia.

In 1761, he obtained, independently from Vanvitelli, the task for the installation of a painted façade to be performed, as an ephemeral apparatus, in the French embassy of Rome on the occasion of the appointment as cardinal of Jean-François-Joseph de Rochechouart. In the same period he was also called, as an expert, to collaborate in the reconnaissance of the Court of Roads. In 1762 he appears as a coadjutor architect, while in 1763 he is documented as a substitute and coadjutor of Vanvitelli, who at the time was the architect above the R. Fabbrica di S. Pietro. Also in Rome, from 1762 to 1764, he followed the work for the high altar of the church of S. Pantaleo and, in 1763, he worked on behalf of the Neapolitan cardinal Giuseppe Spinelli, for the consolidation of the walls of Palazzo Bonelli (today Valentini) .

Among the less studied works are the choir of the church of S. Fortunato a Todi and the altar frontal (1752, made in collaboration), depicting the *Last Supper* for the Duomo of Syracuse. The topographic map of the city of Andria commissioned, probably in 1758, by the bishop Francesco Ferrante is also remembered.

He died, suddenly, in Rome on May 7, 1764 and was buried in S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini.

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