

# Jacopo da Pietrasanta

Italian Renaissance architect, engineer and sculptor

(d. 1495)

The date of birth of this marble maker, master builder and architect active in Rome in the second half of the fifteenth century, originally from Pietrasanta, son of Cristoforo, Leonardo's brother. He was present in the port of Civitavecchia around 1484-85 carpenter of the apostolic palace and of Lorenzo.

His activity in Rome is well documented since the middle of the 15th century, as well as the increasing appreciation by the pontiffs succeeded by Nicholas V to Innocent VIII. Instead, it is the result of different interpretations of the role played by the most important Roman sites. The documents sometimes indicate it as a marbleworker, sometimes as an architect. What is certain is that Jacopo, who originated in an area rich in marble quarries and therefore of skilled craftsmen in marble processing, came to Rome just as an expert in this field.

As a "marbleworker" Jacopo began in the Campidoglio yard, promoted by Pope Nicholas V from 1451, carrying chisel work, including coats of arms, thresholds and steps, door and window frames. At the beginning of his career he also had to work with Bernardo Rossellino - the favorite architect of the same pope - if the scope of the catastrophe of 1457 indicates this among the creditors of this, referring to a working relationship at the time already concluded

In 1463-64 Jacopo appears to be "superstans fabricae pulpiti" of the loggia of the blessings, commissioned by Pius II Piccolomini at the Basilica of St. Peter. The most recent criticism however intends his role as the director of the workers used in the decoration work rather than as an architect: an interpretation confirmed by his role as a stonecutter, subordinate to the direction of a sculptor like Isaia (Ganti) da Pisa, of the tabernacle of S. Andrea, made by Pope Piccolomini inside the Vatican basilica to guard the apostle's head.

Under Paul II he played a prominent role in the important construction site of the St. Mark's complex. In 1466 he signed the contract for the works together with Francesco del Borgo and Bernardo di Lorenzo; but, although he was part of the group of architects, his operational scope was probably still reserved for architectural decoration. In fact, it was precisely in his capacity as an expert in marble that he followed the complex operations of transporting a large ancient basin in serpentine from the area of the Colosseum to the area of the Venice Palace. In addition, in 1467, he appeared in the construction site as "superstans marmorariis labantibus lapides marmoreos", to direct the workers used in the execution of the elements of architectural decoration.

Jacopo's extensive credit with the pope earned him the nomination in 1468 to "praesidens fabricae palatii apostolici", a title that indicated him, however, not as an architect in the full sense of the term but rather as the person responsible for stone and marble works. And in fact he was registered as such in 1468-69 for various works in the Vatican and for the restoration of the S. Angelo bridge.

He also commissioned under Sixtus IV, who in June 1472 sent Jacopo and Bernardo di Lorenzo to perform an inspection in the basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi, with the aim of planning an unspecified "necessariam reparationem" (probably work stone), directed perhaps by Jacopo alone, as evidenced by a payment in February of the following year.

The fruit of the private initiative of Cardinal Guglielmo d'Estouteville was the entrusting of his major work to J., certainly on this occasion in his capacity as a true architect: the expansion of the church and convent of St. Augustine.

In the documents relating to the building - from the contract of start of work, dated 4 Nov. 1479, until their conclusion in 1482-83 - Jacopo is called "magistrum architectorem principalem". He collaborated with Sebastiano Fiorentino, as Jacopo "peritus in art architecturae". However, Jacopo's role was very limited from the point of view of decision-making and design. Although the sources attributed to the Cardinal the merit of promoting the reconstruction of the church from the foundations, in fact it was the continuation and conclusion of a construction site inaugurated a century earlier: this is evidenced by the recent technical analysis of the work, from new documentary evidence and lastly from the same late-memory reminiscences which had contributed to the definition of Jacopo as a clumsy architect with backward taste. Jacopo probably found himself having to design from scratch only the dome, the side chapels, part of the interior decoration and the facade of the church: elements which instead indicate its modernity, if compared to other contemporary buildings.

For Innocent VIII, besides designing the apparatus for the ceremony of his coronation and directing the restoration of the lateran palace, Jacopo collaborated in the construction of the Vatican Belvedere villa. However, his role in the construction of this yard, which lasted from 1484 to 1487, is doubtful. According to Giorgio Vasari, the author of the project was Antonio Benci, known as Pollaiuolo, although the construction "was conducted by others, since he did not have much experience in bricklaying". The most recent criticism attributes the direction of the construction site to Baccio Pontelli, or Giovannino (Giovanni) Dolci, and to Jacopo the management of the works in the more general context of the villa.

Jacopo died in Rome before March 31, 1495, the date on which the Apostolic Chamber made the last payment, but addressed to his wife, for work previously done in the Villa del Belvedere.

by Sara Magister

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