

# Tommaso de Marchis

## Italian Architect (1693-1749)

He was born in Rome in 1693. His training as an architect took place at Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri, to whom he remained closely linked. The first works we know of him, through incisions, are ephemeral structures.

These are the "lights" that he designed, commissioned by the association of the Ss. Crocefisso near S. Marcello, for the procession of the Holy Thursday of the Jubilee year 1725, and the decoration of a machine that the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of the Rosary S. Maria sopra Minerva used in the procession of the first Sunday of October in the same year.

At the beginning of the third decade of the century, De Marchis participated in the survey and surveying campaign of the most important squares and areas of the city.

He did not win any prizes in the Academy of St. Luca contests, a necessary condition for an architect of Roman origin to become "an academeque of merit"; nevertheless it was proposed as such by the "prince" Agostino Masucci in the congregation of 16 November 1738 and in that of November 15 of the following year, by Sebastiano Conca. 3 Jan. 1740 voted on the proposal and de Marchis was accepted. The five major architects present, Girolamo Theodoli, Francesco Ferrari, Ferdinando Fuga, Antonio Derizet and Luigi Vanvitelli, had to be highly esteemed towards the De Marchis; and anyway his apprenticeship at the Bizzaccheri, which in his time was a very active member of the Academy as an instructor, judge in competitions and councilor, was to be a guarantee for the members of the congregation, as well as the fact that he was at the service of Cardinal Nicolò Maria Lercari. The latter, secretary of state under Benedict XIII, employed de Marchis around 1727 as a representative in his interests connected with the purchase of the sites and with the works of his palace in Albano.

The enlargement of the building and the arrangement of the façade towards the street, articulated in the lower floor by a very smooth bossage, and, in the main floor, by large windows accentuated by trabeated profiles, are attributed to him in a manner convincing.

During the years 1738-40 de Marchis is documented as architect of the monastery of S. Sylvester in Capite (now demolished), which was structurally enlarged and refitted in

that period. On June 16, 1738 with F. Fuga and F. Raguzzini, he laid out an appraisal of the Derizet project for the dome of the church of the Most Holy Name of Maria.

At the time of his appointment as an architect of merit he could already trace his contacts with Mario Mellini, who had returned to Rome in 1738 from the nunciature in Vienna. On 3 September 1740 Mellini began to "land" on the northern side of the square and church of S. Marcello al Corso a fifteenth-century palace due to the cardinal Michele Veneziano."to fabricate it again". He became cardinal himself on April 10th. 1747 and ambassador of the Holy Roman Empire to the Holy See in 1748, Mario Mellini could think of a grand cardinal residence.

The current building, which has become one of the most appreciated works of de Marchis, extends in depth from the Corso along via dell'Umiltà, incorporating several pre-existing structures, as can easily be verified by comparing the plan of the Falda with that of Nolli.

This palace and the patronage of a character of such high ecclesiastical dignity and political distinction are indicative of the professional stature now reached by De Marchis. In that same period he was occupied in another project that then had a considerable importance for the cultural life of the city: the transformation of that part of the Cenci palace in the Via dell'Arg dei Ginnasi that the Piarist Fathers had bought on December 24, 1742, to establish the college of Calasanzio "a 'Cesarini", on the initiative of their general curator Fr.Giuseppe Agostino Delbecchi. The building, intended for the elementary and secondary education of nearly a thousand students, was ready for use in 1747, the year of the beatification of the founder of the Pious Schools, Father Giuseppe Calasanzio.

During the fifth decade of the 18th century de Marchis was also at the service of the Barberini, but until now only an assessment of 22 May 1744 has come to light, concerning the Barberini villa and the annexed building structures above the bastions of Porta Cavalleggeri and Porta S. Spirito. Like Domenico Navone and Carlo Nardelli, de Marchis was involved in building activities, although of a very limited nature, concerning this complex; on 21 September 1748 he was entrusted with the ex novo construction of the Germanic-Hungarian college on the right of the church of S. Apollinare, then just finished by the Fuga. It was probably the abbot Revillas who commissioned him to rebuild the basilica of the Saints Bonifacio and Alessio on the Aventine, whose cardinal Angelo Maria Quirini, bishop of Brescia and prefect of the Vatican Library, was held in 1743.

Already on 2 October of the same year the cardinal expressed his satisfaction for the collaboration obtained by the abbot and his willingness to contribute in the future to the realization of the project. An inscription in the wall of the choir, dated 1744, which bears testimony that the cardinal restored, enriched and decorated "ireparavit auxerit ornavit" the basilica, must be interpreted as the beginning of the works that, for the most part, were finished in 'holy year 1750, as reported by a second inscription, above the church door, which says that the temple "vetustate corruptum" was rebuilt and decorated by the cardinal at his own expense. However, the works continued until 1753 when, on October 20, they were given as almost completed inside and outside.

The work of De Marchis consisted in the overall renovation and modernization of the medieval church: probably following the example of F. Fontana in the basilica of the Ss. Apostoli, the height of the church on the Aventine of 16 Roman palms increased, ie 3.52 meters, and also replaced the trusses with a barrel vault. De Marchis projects were probably executed with some modifications, as suggested by the only preserved design which represents the external front of the basilica on the side of the choir and the adjacent monastery. The interior, already rebuilt in 1582, was subsequently disfigured.

The work of de Marchis also includes the facade of the church that opens with a five-arched portico in the lower floor , which is superimposed on a plane with trapezoidal windows. The façade ends above the cornice with a balustrade with decorative vases. To the intervention of de Marchis also belongs the arrangement of the atrium (whose façade was elevated one floor in the 19th century), originally conceived as a single floor with kiosks on the sides of the door, which were originally closed by iron grids and now walled, they have lost the permeability effect expected by the architect.

Given the changes, it is difficult to understand the considerable enthusiasm with which his work was welcomed by his contemporaries.

For the celebration of the first centenary of the death of S. Giuseppe Calasanzio, August 31, 1748, de Marchis was also commissioned by the Piarist Fathers to decorate their church, S. Pantaleo, which brings our attention back to ephemeral decoration tasks with which the career of this architect began.

Like his teacher, Bizzaccheri, De Marchis can certainly not be counted among the eminent architects of his generation who worked in Rome, but it can be said in his favor that he succeeded in continuing the 17th century tradition with dignity and remarkable skill. Luigi Vanvitelli was therefore not far from the truth when, in a letter to his brother dated 19 June 1752, he maliciously wrote that the "among architects is certainly not the

first"; although, just a year later, he was ready to congratulate him, speculating on his position as a reviser of the Apostolic Chamber.

The fact that de Marchis was considered worthy of his time is not only confirmed by the commissions and testimonies mentioned above, but perhaps stands out even more from his election as prince of the Academy of St. Luke for 1748 with a large majority of votes, being present in the congregation on 7 December 1747 well-known or even famous colleagues: Girolamo Theodoli, Luigi Vanvitelli, Antonio Derizet, Clemente Orlandi, Francesco Ferrari, Carlo Marchionni and Ferdinando Fuga. It must be added that his principality was a complete success from an administrative point of view, having placed the finances and the archive of the institution in an exemplary order. And the satisfaction with his service was such that he was promptly confirmed in office for the following year in the congregation of 17 November. 1748. His greatest merit was to have revitalized in 1750, certainly with the support of Benedict XIV, the institution of competitions, languishing for ten years..

He died in Rome on February 26th. 1759.

by Helmut Hager - Biographical Dictionary of Italians - Volume 38 (1990)

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