

CORRADO GIAQUINTO'S CRITICAL FORTUNE IN ROME AND THE REASONS FOR HIS DEPARTURE FOR MADRID

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Around 1751, Cochin pointed out that the best painters then in Rome were Masucci, Mancini, Battoni and “le chevalier Corado”. Cochin’s statement would seem to be one of the most meaningful indications of the artist’s fame. Modern criticism, however, tends not to distinguish between the nature of Giaquinto’s and Masucci, Mancini and Battoni’s success: while the latter three artists had definitively established themselves as history painters in oil and could work for international patrons without leaving Rome, Giaquinto never succeeded in asserting himself in that capacity and in this medium. Indeed, in his letter Cochin mistook Corrado for the more famous and well-known knight Sebastiano Conca. Being summoned to Madrid was certainly a great achievement for Giaquinto, but leaving Rome was somehow a forced choice because in the 25 years he had spent there since 1727, the painter had never achieved the success to which he aspired.

Key words: Corrado Giaquinto; Giambattista Tiepolo; Francesco De Mura; Francesco Algarotti; Baroque painting; painting in Rome.

LA FORTUNA CRÍTICA DE CORRADO GIAQUINTO EN ROMA Y LOS MOTIVOS DE SU PARTIDA POR MADRID

Alrededor de 1751 Cochin indicaba a los que eran considerados los mejores pintores de Roma en la época: Masucci, Mancini, Battoni y “le chevalier Corado”. El pasaje de Cochin representaría una de las demostraciones más significativas de la notoriedad del artista, pero la crítica moderna propende a no distinguir la diferente esencia del éxito de Giaquinto con respecto a lo de los varios Masucci, Mancini y Battoni, citados en la carta de Cochin: mientras que estos últimos habían triunfado definitivamente como pintores de historia al óleo, y podían trabajar para clientela internacional sin dejar Roma, Giaquinto nunca logró imponerse en aquella función. En la carta, de hecho, Cochin confundía y sobreponía Corrado a lo más célebre Sebastiano Conca. La llamada a Madrid fue un gran éxito por Giaquinto, pero la salida fue una elección obligada porque en veinticinco años que pasó en Roma, el pintor nunca obtuvo aquel reconocimiento a lo que ambicionaba.

Palabras clave: Corrado Giaquinto; Giambattista Tiepolo; Francesco De Mura; Francesco Algarotti; Pintura barroca; pintura en Roma.

In a famous letter of around 1751, Charles-Nicolas Cochin listed the names of the painters who were at the time considered the best in Rome:

The best painters in Rome are *Mazucci, Mancinni, Pompeo Battoni*, and *Sir Corado*; the panels of the first three seem to me to be nothing more than a compendium of things drawn from the various Italian masters [...]¹

¹ Chennevières, 1851: 173; Clark 1967: 260; Rosenberg, Michel 1987: 25-26.

Whilst Cochin associated Corrado Giaquinto with the more famous heirs of Carlo Maratti (mentioned a few lines earlier as their guiding light) he also made a clear distinction between this painter, who had not received his early training in Rome, and the masters who in his eyes were no longer producing anything truly original. In the context of Giaquinto's critical fortune, Cochin's passage is one of the most important indications of the fame achieved by the artist at the mid-point of his career, on the eve of the departure for Madrid that marked his greatest professional success. By this time, the painter's reputation transcended regional borders and he had already been invited to work in Turin on several occasions. However, in my opinion modern criticism often fails to distinguish clearly between Giaquinto's success and the very different reputations of artists such as Masucci, Mancini and Batoni, also mentioned in Cochin's letter. Whereas the latter were fully established as historical oil painters and enjoyed an enviable professional status that allowed them to paint in part for an international clientele without ever leaving Rome and without having to work on the dusty (and sometimes dangerous) scaffolding of fresco worksites, Giaquinto never managed to establish himself in this capacity and this medium. According to the rigorous dictates of Roman classicism, the natural talent of a painter like Giaquinto was perfect for fresco decorations but not for the more prestigious and often staid altarpieces or historical canvasses: only commissions for these works, on the highest rung in the hierarchy of painting genres, meant complete success for an artist, especially in Rome. In his letter, indeed, Cochin confused and superimposed Corrado with a painter who had actually been knighted (Giaquinto was never awarded this honour), the more famous and well-established Sebastiano Conca. According to this reading of events, Giaquinto's summons to Madrid was without doubt a great achievement, but in some ways his departure was also a forced choice, since during the twenty-five years that he spent in Rome from 1727, the painter had never achieved the recognition to which he aspired. The more renowned Francesco De Mura, by contrast, refused to leave Naples, where he was fully established.

In 1792, less than thirty years after Giaquinto's death, Luigi Lanzi published the first volume of his *Storia pittorica*, dedicated to the schools of central and southern Italy; Giaquinto was covered in the discussion of the Roman school:

Corrado Giaquinto was another pupil of Solimena, who moved from Naples to Rome. Here he associated with Conca to learn about colouring, in which he followed more or less the same rules. He is a less correct painter but talented and resolute, known in the Papal States for various works executed in Rome, Macerata, and elsewhere. He is even better known in Spain, where he served at the Royal court to the almost universal satisfaction. Spanish taste, which for many years had followed the dictates of the school founded there by Titian, had changed some years earlier: people here admired Giordano, his liveliness, his frankness, his immediacy, the same qualities that they found in Corrado².

Modern studies have significantly downplayed the importance of the relationship between Conca and Giaquinto. It was never mentioned by the artist's most important biographer, Bernardo De Dominici; in 1743, after discussing the artist's early training in Puglia and Naples, under Nicola Maria Rossi and the great Francesco Solimena, he wrote:

[...] finally, he was led to move to Rome to learn drawing perfectly; he himself admitted that he was poor at this and incapable of drawing precise outlines [...]³

The twenty-four year old Giaquinto must already have been an accomplished painter on his arrival in Rome in 1727, but although he was not apprenticed to Conca (nor did Lanzi claim that

² Lanzi, 1792: 366.

³ De Dominici, (1742-43) 2008: 1368-1369.

he was)⁴, it was certainly thanks to his relationship with this established painter, also trained in Naples, that he almost immediately obtained a fairly prestigious commission in 1730: the execution of an altarpiece for the basilica of Mafra, in Portugal, ordered by father d'Evora for John V (a *Crucifixion*, now in the National Palace)⁵. Many other painters active in Rome executed altarpieces for the large church of this Portuguese monastery: alongside Conca himself and Masucci, they included Trevisani, Bianchi, Odazzi and Zoboli⁶. Although Bianchi and Zoboli also lacked the indisputable prestige of Masucci and Conca, Giaquinto was at the time the only one of these painters to be a virtual novice in Rome; he was the youngest of the artists involved in this enterprise and only a recommendation from Conca can explain father d'Evora's choice⁷.

Corrado, moreover, must have trained principally as a fresco painter. In 1731, he signed the contract for the execution of the frescoes in the vault over the nave and in the dome of San Nicola dei Lorenesi: this extremely taxing but not particularly prestigious commission (the monks paid the artist only 500 *scudi* for the whole job) marked the start of his public career in Rome⁸. On 6 June 1733 Marquis d'Ormea mentioned Giaquinto's name to the Savoy court, writing that:

He has publicly displayed his talent in a dome that has been universally praised⁹.

So the painter left for Turin to work on the frescoes in Villa della Regina, where he also executed the splendid overdoors with the *Stories of Aeneas* now in the Quirinal Palace¹⁰. In this case, too, the commission must have been facilitated by the painter's relationship with Conca. After his move to Turin in 1714, the architect Filippo Juvarra had become the absolute arbiter of the local art scene. The result was a flood of commissions over the following years from the Savoy court for paintings by artists in the circle of Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni. This circle, whose main members were Trevisani and Conca, both court painters of Ottoboni, had shaped the architect's own taste¹¹. Giaquinto was not in fact one of the influential prelate's favourite artists; his collection contained only three paintings of Giaquinto, and these did not receive a flattering valuation when the *post mortem* inventory was drawn up in 1740¹². Nonetheless, Giaquinto connections with Ottoboni and Conca must have been valid credentials at the Savoy court. When Juvarra, now in Madrid, drew up a project in 1735 for the decorations of the Chinese room in the Royal Palace of La Granja, and needed to commission eight overdoors from painters of the major foreign schools, he noted down:

- 2 from Placido Costanzi, Rome
- 2 from Corrado Giaquinto a Neapolitan living in Rome
- 2 from Francesco Monti, Bologna
- 2 from Monsieur Vallò, Paris¹³

⁴ Recent criticism has on several occasions rejected the theory that Giaquinto studied under Conca (Gabrielli, 1993: 35; Meyer, 2000: 562) but it is worth stressing that Lanzi himself never claimed that he did.

⁵ Pietro Amato, entry in Vasco Rocca /Borghini, 1995: 339-341, no. 45. Quieto, 1988: 92-93.

⁶ Vasco Rocca, 1995: 307.

⁷ Gabrielli, 1993: 36.

⁸ For the contract cfr. Gabrielli, 1993: 55, note 36. According to the scholar this was an extremely important commission. For Giaquinto it was certainly an opportunity to display his abilities as a fresco artist in Rome; however, in the opinion of the present author the payment agreed alone demonstrates that this was not a particularly prestigious commission.

⁹ Baudi di Vesme, 1966: 528.

¹⁰ di Macco, 2008: 71-82.

¹¹ Olszewski, 1997-98: 545-565. On Cardinal Ottoboni see the seminal pages by Haskell, 1985: 260-263.

¹² Olszewski, 2004: 80, no. 132; De Angelis, 2008: 70.

¹³ Battisti, 1958: 278.

The architect, then, preferred to turn to Giaquinto as a representative of the Neapolitan school, rather than to Francesco De Mura (another, even more prestigious, canvas had already been commissioned from Solimena for the Throne Room)¹⁴. The paintings were in the end never ordered.

In June 1734 Corrado was back in Rome, where he married, and though he seems to have returned to Piedmont immediately afterwards¹⁵, a letter of 20 September 1738 addressed by the Savoy agent to Marquis d'Ormea tells us of a proposal made to

the painter Mr Corrado to return to Turin to paint the ceilings of some rooms in the Royal Palace; but there was no agreement on the price¹⁶.

From these facts, in my opinion, we can deduce that Giaquinto wished to live and establish himself in Rome and was anything but eager to leave the city. Making one's mark in Rome was not an easy task, and at this time Conca was certainly more renowned and well-regarded than Giaquinto. Cavalier Sebastiano had also worked on several occasions for the Turin court, like other great masters of the period, Roman, Venetian and Neapolitan (we should at least mention Sebastiano Ricci, Trevisani, Masucci and Solimena himself), without ever having to travel to Piedmont in person. And of course Ricci, Conca and Solimena were also great fresco painters: but for artists who had reached the peak of success leaving their own city to spend a long period at another court does not usually seem to have been an attractive prospect.

In 1739, Giaquinto painted the *Assumption of the Virgin* for the parish church of Rocca di Papa (420 x 280 cm), commissioned by Ottoboni¹⁷. As already noted, the painter must have been introduced to the court of this refined collector during his early years in Rome, thanks to Conca's mediation, but the cardinal only commissioned him to paint a truly important canvas at the end of the fourth decade. Although this was a public work, ordered by one of the most important patrons in 18th-century Rome, its importance should not be overestimated: the altarpiece was sent to a very peripheral church outside the city. Two years earlier, for the decoration of his chapel in San Lorenzo in Damaso, Cardinal Ottoboni had employed Andrea Casali, a painter who grew up, so to speak, at his academy, as the pupil first of Conca and then of Trevisani¹⁸. Thanks to the support of the cardinal and his circle, Casali, Giaquinto's contemporary, was knighted by the Pope for his frescoes in San Sisto Vecchio in 1729¹⁹; though in 1737 he had not yet painted any really important public work in Rome, he was commissioned to execute both the frescoes and the altarpiece for the Ottoboni chapel. And when Tommaso Ruffo, who had taken Ottoboni's post at the Cancelleria, decided to renovate the chapel in San Lorenzo in Damaso opposite that of his predecessor in 1743, he commissioned the altarpiece from Conca, entrusting to Giaquinto only the fresco decoration of the vault²⁰. Like Trevisani, Cavalier Sebastiano executed numerous altarpieces during his career in Rome: some of these canvases were sent out of Rome, to cities reached by his fame. These must have been the most attractive opportunities for painters; suffice it to remember that Giaquinto himself received 500 *scudi* to paint the *Assumption* for Rocca di Papa alone, the same sum that he had earned for the fresco decorations of San Nicola dei Lorenesi²¹.

¹⁴ Battisti, 1958 and Álvarez Lopera, 1997: 37-46.

¹⁵ On his moves between Turin and Rome in these years cfr. especially Gabrielli, 1993: 39-40.

¹⁶ Baudi di Vesme, 1963: 356.

¹⁷ Rybko, 1990: 151.

¹⁸ Olszewski, 1997-98: 545-565; on Casali's work in San Lorenzo, p. 559; De Angelis, 2008: 65-66.

¹⁹ Lo Bianco, 1989/1990: 316-317.

²⁰ De Angelis, 2008: 69-70.

²¹ See also, for a comparison, the payments received by artists active in Rome between the 16th and 18th centuries for altarpieces documented in Spear, 2000: 85-88.

The grandiose campaign of mosaic decorations in St Peter's, on which many important painters had worked in the early decades of the 18th century, was still underway at this time²². In 1734, Bianchi received the first payment for the altarpiece with the *Immaculate Conception*, destined for translation into mosaic; his heirs were paid for the work after the painter's death in 1740 (the canvas, like the others listed below, is now in Santa Maria degli Angeli)²³. In 1735, Masucci obtained the prestigious commission to paint a copy of Raphael's *Transfiguration*, also to be executed in mosaic: the artist's illness led to the cancellation of this commission after the initial payments but it is worth stressing that Masucci was to receive the large sum of 1000 *scudi* for his work²⁴. In 1734, Costanzi too obtained a commission for a large altarpiece to be translated into mosaic: he was paid for the *Resurrection of Tabitha* between 1736 and 1740, and for some reason later painted a second version in 1756-1757²⁵. During the 1730s, as already mentioned, Giaquinto was not yet fully established in Rome²⁶, and his situation did not improve in subsequent years.

Cardinal Ottoboni's death in February 1740 virtually coincided with that of Clement XII. Whilst Casali left for England in the same year in search of work, according to critics Giaquinto spent the fifth decade of the century "fully established on the Roman scene"²⁷. Olivier Michel's research has shown that during these years the painter did achieve a degree of economic prosperity²⁸, and Giaquinto's major Roman works, especially those for Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and San Giovanni Calibita, certainly date to the 1740s. But if we examine the largest and most prestigious public commissions during this period in Rome as a whole, Giaquinto does not seem to play a truly prominent role, of indisputable prestige. The papacy of Benedict XIV "eliminated from fashion the trivial strain in the Rococo [and] resurrected some of the grandeur of the High Baroque [...]":²⁹ this was certainly not a circumstance favourable to Giaquinto's more natural style. From 1740, Benedict XIV had decided to commission from Pierre Subleyras a new altarpiece, to be translated into mosaic, for St Peter's: the painter was entrusted with this task in 1743, and the *Mass of St Basil* was completed in 1747 for the substantial sum of 1200 *scudi*³⁰. From 1745 to 1749 Mancini received payment for the altarpiece with *St Peter Curing the Lame Man*³¹, whilst between 1746 and 1755 we see the long and complex genesis of Batoni's *Fall of Simon Magus*, for which the artist received 1200 *scudi*, and an additional 300 for expenses³². Not only was Giaquinto never called upon to paint an altarpiece to be executed in mosaic, he was not even commissioned for the cartoons for the decoration of the domes in the chapels. In 1742, the aforementioned Zoboli signed a contract to execute the cartoons for the mosaics in the chapel of Madonna della Colonna; the agreed payment was 3000 *scudi*³³.

The years between 1743 and 1750 also saw the execution of the small oval altarpieces for the new altars in the recently restored Santa Maria Maggiore: working on this cycle were Masucci, who received the highest payment, 300 *scudi*, the equally well-established Batoni, who like

²² Di Federico, 1983.

²³ Savettieri, 2000: 556-558.

²⁴ Savettieri, 2000: 565-566.

²⁵ Savettieri, 2000: pp. 642-643.

²⁶ Only De Angelis (1993: 70-71) has demonstrated that the painter was at the time not yet one of the protagonists of the Roman scene.

²⁷ Meyer, 2000, p. 564.

²⁸ Michel, 1996: 297-318; De Angelis, 1993: p. 71.

²⁹ Clark, 1967: 263.

³⁰ Rosenberg, Michel 1987, p. 333, cat. 116.

³¹ Savettieri, 2000: 605-607.

³² Clark, Bowron, 1985: 261-262, cat. 184.

³³ Di Federico, 1983, p. 67; Savettieri, 2000: 704-705.

Costanzi and Stefano Pozzi received 250 *scudi*, whilst Sebastiano Ceccarini had to be content with only 150 *scudi*; Mancini was accorded the honour of executing the altarpiece for the high altar³⁴. Giaquinto was not excluded from all these commissions simply because he was considered mainly a specialist in fresco painting: in other words this was not merely a technical issue. He was ruled out because his style, precisely because it was typical of a fresco artist, did not conform to the dictates of Roman classicism in any of its many possible guises; as a fresco painter he could only be called to work on decorative cycles. Thus, his name was omitted from the list of artists chosen to execute the colossal frescoed altarpieces for the side aisles of San Giovanni in Laterano. Before his death in 1731, Odazzi had begun work on his *Assumption*, later finished by Ignazio Stern; in 1742, Costanzi executed the *Immacolata*, whilst Conca's *St John of Nepomuk* has been lost³⁵.

In the 1745 edition of Gregorio Roisecco's *Roma antica, e moderna*, Giaquinto's name still appeared only once, for the frescoes in San Giovanni Calibita (“[...] with the vault decorated with fine paintings by the Neapolitan painter Corrado Giaquinto”). Neither his work in San Nicola dei Lorenesi, then as now one of Rome's lesser churches, nor the canvases on the ceiling of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme were mentioned; none of the painter's altarpieces was still to be found on an altar in the city³⁶. In 1746, Giaquinto again worked for the fathers of San Nicola dei Lorenesi, executing the two canvases with the saint's miracles next to the high altar. Originally, these were to have been fresco paintings; however, the clients did not have the funds necessary to secure the artist's services for a large job (the decoration of the entire apsidal area) and after complex negotiations Giaquinto was again forced to accept a mere 500 *scudi*. Though the documents do not state this explicitly, it is probable that the passage from fresco to oil was a compromise solution³⁷. Certainly, towards the end of the 1740s, things had changed to some extent and Roisecco recorded many more works by Giaquinto in the 1750 edition of his guide book, starting with the three altarpieces in Santi Apostoli, Santa Maria dell'Orto and –the only truly important work– that over the high altar in Santissima Trinità degli Spagnoli; this was the commission that later paved the painter's way to Madrid³⁸. In January 1750, Corrado signed the contract for the frescoes in the dome of the chapel of Santa Maria del Popolo in Cesena cathedral, executed between November 1750 and February 1751, and between July and August of the same year, for 1400 *scudi*³⁹. Albeit for just a few months, then, the painter was again forced to leave Rome to work on the scaffolding of a fresco project and not even in an important town: the pay, this time, was considerable, but was still not comparable to that agreed by Subleyras, Batoni or Masucci for the altarpieces in St Peters. There can be no doubt that genuinely established painters like Mancini or Costanzi, not to mention Conca or Batoni, were not on the lookout for commissions of this type.

From the 1740s onwards, all four painters mentioned were contacted by the Deputati al Negozio dei Parati of Pisa cathedral to execute the large canvases for the side aisles of the church: Conca's work, *Urban VI Approves the Order of the Blessed Pietro Gambacorti*, commissioned in 1743 and sent to Tuscany in 1748, was extremely well received. However, when he received a second commission in the summer of the following year, Cavalier Sebastiano declined; the Florentine Giovanni Domenico Ferretti, and not Giaquinto, was called in his place. Mancini's *The Blessed Pietro Gambacorti Establishes his Order*, commissioned in 1744, had already arrived in Pisa in 1746. For his part, Batoni initially accepted the criticisms levelled at his small preparatory

³⁴ Barroero, 1988: 248-252.

³⁵ Barroero, 1990: 167.

³⁶ Roisecco, 1745: I, 414-415 (San Nicola dei Lorenesi), 190 (San Giovanni Calibita), II, 455-456 (Santa Croce in Gerusalemme).

³⁷ Bonnard, 1932: 161-163.

³⁸ Gabrielli, 1993: 64, note 145.

³⁹ Savini, 1984: 40.

study (in September 1748), but then pulled out of the enterprise in 1753; his place was taken by Costanzi, whose *Martyrdom of St Torpes* was left incomplete on his death in 1759 (it was later finished by the local painter Giovanni Battista Tempesti)⁴⁰. Conca and Batoni's refusals are understandable: the payment for the execution of each of these large canvasses (about 450 x 490 cm) was only 550 *scudi*, and even Giambettino Cignaroli in 1768 had unsuccessfully requested 800 *scudi* for a second canvas (after the *Rediscovery of the Head of St Torpes*)⁴¹. Compared to the mere 200 *scudi* accepted by Giaquinto in 1751 for the altarpiece with the *Nativity of Mary* for the church of the Suffragio in Cesena (290 x 170 cm)⁴², this was a large sum; but, in any case, the Deputati never contacted Giaquinto.

In light of these considerations, we cannot fail to be surprised by Cochin's letter describing Giaquinto in around 1750 as one of the four greatest Roman painters alongside the far more famous Masucci, Batoni and Mancini. Indeed, if we reread the passage carefully, we see that the author speaks of a "chevalier Corrado", though Giaquinto was never knighted. This is a revealing detail: in his *Voyage d'Italie* of 1758, Cochin wrote of the first two paintings in the Pisan cycle:

[...] two panels by modern Roman painters, one by Corrado, the other by Mancini. That by Mancini is extremely poor; that by Corrado is better, although neither is particularly fine. The latter depicts a Pope⁴³.

In other words, the author erroneously attributed Conca's painting to Giaquinto; he also mixed the two painters up on another occasion, ascribing to Conca Giaquinto's *Translation of the Relics of Eutyches and Acutius* painted in 1744 for the Duomo of San Gennaro in Naples:

In the choir are two large paintings, of which that by Sir Conca represents a Procession in which relics are carried⁴⁴.

This confusion, or superimposition, of the two painters is explained by their shared provenance from the school of Solimena. Of the former's overdoors at Villa della Regina in Turin Cochin wrote:

In the same house there are several overdoors by Sir Corrado, a pupil of Solimena, of striking effect and ingenious composition⁴⁵.

In other words, Conca's knighthood had passed automatically to Giaquinto, and Cochin failed to distinguish clearly between the two painters, a confirmation of the close relationship immediately established between these masters of southern origin. When he spoke of "Sir Corrado", then, Cochin mostly had in mind the fame of his far more famous friend and colleague, Conca: in 1750 Conca was certainly one of the best established painters in Rome; the same could hardly be said of Giaquinto.

As already mentioned, at the very end of the 1740s Giaquinto finished his three Roman altarpieces. Shortly before his departure for Madrid, by the end of 1753, he sent to Pisa his *Nativity of Mary*, commissioned not by the Deputati al Negozio dei Parati, but by the Congregazione della Vergine, and destined not for one of the aisles but for the presbytery⁴⁶. In a way, this canvas

⁴⁰ On the Pisan cycle cfr. Sicca, 1990: 229-283.

⁴¹ Sicca, 1990: 281, note 88 and 282, note 104.

⁴² Savini, 1984: 42.

⁴³ Cochin, 1758 (1991): 249.

⁴⁴ Cochin, 1758 (1991): 148.

⁴⁵ Cochin, 1758 (1991): 91.

⁴⁶ Gabrielli, 1993: 50.

belonged to the same series as the paintings by Costanzi, Conca and Mancini, but it should be stressed that Corrado was never invited to work on that cycle; he was contacted by a different client, perhaps less concerned with the prevailing rules of classicism and perhaps wishing to promote an alternative to the choices of the Deputati al Negozio dei Parati. This was in any case an important oil painting that established a dialogue, albeit at a distance, with the works by masters of the Roman school as acknowledged by Batoni himself, who wrote in a letter of September 1753 sent to Pisa:

[...] and so I think it is to the advantage of this cathedral, as was in fact the case with the painting sent by this painter Corrado, which could not fail to meet with their approval and as has been the case with the king of Spain, who desired to have him in his service. I am therefore honoured to mention that here in Rome there are other painters of equal and perhaps superior ability: Agostino Masucci, and Placido Costanzi and a new Saxon painter⁴⁷.

By this time Giaquinto had left Rome, in March of that year, to replace Amigoni at the court of Ferdinand VI of Spain. But Batoni also mentioned Costanzi, Masucci and “a new Saxon painter” who can be identified as Mengs, stating that they were «perhaps superior» to Giaquinto, of whom he evidently did not have a particularly high opinion. Mancini had already painted a canvas for Pisa cathedral and was therefore not mentioned by Batoni; the latter's name, in the company of Masucci, Costanzi and Mengs recalls another group project by the Roman school that probably represented the final chapter in Giaquinto's misfortunes in the city.

In the summer of 1752, Horace Mann wrote to Cardinal Alessandro Albani informing him that Hugh Percy wished to commission copies of the city's most famous paintings from artists in Rome. The gallery in which they were to be displayed would have room for five canvasses and on 12 August the cardinal compiled a list both of the works to be copied and the painters who might be engaged:

Masuzzi, Pozzi, Costanzi, Menci [sic: Mengs], Battoni or Corrado⁴⁸.

In July 1752, Conca seems to have left Rome for Naples⁴⁹; ten years after Casali, he too abandoned the excessively competitive Roman scene, oriented towards a more rigorous form of classicism than his own measured Arcadian style. Perhaps thanks purely to Cavalier Sebastiano's departure, Corrado was listed for the first time among the prestigious names of the Roman school. By September 1752, Mengs was at work copying Raphael's *School of Athens* (his painting is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; the whereabouts of the other canvases in the cycle is currently unknown)⁵⁰. In a letter of 22 December, Mann described the enterprise to Horace Walpole, stating that he had stipulated contracts with almost all the painters involved: Mengs, Batoni, Masucci and Costanzi⁵¹. A week later, Albani told Mann that he had come to terms with the always greedy Masucci (1100 crowns for one of the canvases) and with Batoni (1500 crowns for two)⁵². Giaquinto's name no longer figured in the list of painters, nor did that of Pozzi, and for this reason Batoni was to execute two canvases and not one. Giaquinto's departure from the scene could be explained simply by the painter's invitation to go to Spain at almost exactly this time: he had agreed to go on 5 December and left Rome in March of the following year⁵³. The enterprise launched by

⁴⁷ Frosini, 1968: 80.

⁴⁸ Roettgen, 1999: 190, doc. no. 8.

⁴⁹ Michel, 1981: 32.

⁵⁰ Roettgen, 1999: 190, cat. 129, doc. 14.

⁵¹ Roettgen, 1999: 191, cat. 129, doc. 16; Wood, 1999.

⁵² Roettgen, 1999: 191, cat. 129, doc. 17.

⁵³ Urrea Fernández, 2006: 38.

the Englishmen in 1752 was a fairly complex one: Costanzi finished his work in 1754, the other three painters in the following year⁵⁴. Giaquinto, on the eve of his departure for Spain, might in any case have been forced to give up this opportunity: the first in which he was placed on the same level as the greatest painters of the Roman school.

However, Giaquinto would have been able to start work immediately between the summer and winter of 1752 had his name been approved by the patron, but neither he nor Pozzi were considered equal to the task⁵⁵. Albani had compiled a list of potential names, six for the five paintings to be executed, so that one would in any case have been rejected. Pozzi, born in 1699 and trained first under Procaccini and later under Masucci (in Albani's list his name followed that of the patriarch of Roman painting), was intended to represent the quintessence of the Marattesque tradition. His fame, in fact, had never passed much beyond the boundaries of the Papal States⁵⁶, but as we have seen he had been called on to paint an altarpiece for Santa Maria Maggiore. In 1745, he was entrusted the prestigious copy of Raphael's *Transfiguration* for St. Peter's, which his master Masucci was unable to complete due to ill health (a new contract was only drawn up in 1756, specifying that Pozzi was to receive 800 *scudi* for the canvas: the high point of his career)⁵⁷. Despite his credentials, Pozzi had not obtained the commission to execute one of the copies for Percy, making it highly improbable that Giaquinto would have been called to work alongside Batoni, Mengs, Masucci and Costanzi on this enterprise, even had he not had to leave Rome in early 1753; not even the better-regarded Mancini, as we have seen, was considered. The commission for these copies was a genuine turning point in the history of Roman painting: although Masucci and Costanzi were still able to keep pace, the new names of Batoni and Mengs would later leave increasingly little space for painters of the old guard, and Conca's departure for Naples in the same year of 1752 amply confirms this interpretation. Had he remained in the city, Giaquinto, whose painting style was so strongly indebted to the teachings of Giordano⁵⁸, would shortly have become a true relict of a bygone era.

The invitation to Madrid was very different from that received from the Turin court in 1737 and rejected by the painter, nor was it comparable to that which took Giaquinto to Cesena in 1751. It was not easy to refuse to work as first painter to one of Europe's most affluent patrons and the changes in Rome outlined above would have made it evident to Giaquinto that staying in the city was not a good idea. Yet we should not forget that Corrado was chosen over De Mura because the latter was unwilling to leave Naples⁵⁹. The Spanish agent Clemente de Aróstegui stated that

[...] his wife, who is his master, did not allow him to⁶⁰.

Of course it is certainly possible that Anna Ebrù, De Mura's wife, was not keen to leave Naples, but the painter, now aged fifty-six, may also have used this as an excuse to avoid a journey and the type of work –the vast fresco decorations of the Palacio Real in Madrid– that awaited the artist who accepted the invitation. The Neapolitan painter had considerable experience as a fresco

⁵⁴ Roettgen, 1999: 189-196, cat. 129; cfr. also the account provided by Giuseppe Dionigio Crivelli in a letter of 19 January 1754, Ferrari, 1998: 472-473.

⁵⁵ Pozzi and Giaquinto, among other things, had worked together years earlier, in 1744, on an important task, the decoration of the renovated tribune in Naples cathedral, each executing one of the large side canvases. In this case, almost paradoxically, the lost frescoes on the vault were not executed by the specialist Giaquinto, but by Pozzi, who had travelled to Naples in person, cfr. Pacia, Susinno, 1996: 128-129, cat. 13. Cfr. also note 44.

⁵⁶ Michel, 1996: 28-29.

⁵⁷ Michel, 1996: 35-36.

⁵⁸ Cfr. *supra*, note 2. On this see especially Gabrielli, 1993: 38 and 56, note 43.

⁵⁹ Urrea Fernández, 2006: 37-38.

⁶⁰ Urrea Fernández, 1977: 335, 485; D'Alessio, 1993: 76.

painter, but in the second half of his career oil painting increasingly became his main medium: on Solimena's death in 1747, he had also become the absolute arbiter of the local art scene. Whereas in 1741, following in some sense in Giaquinto's footsteps, he had travelled to Turin to work on the frescoes in Palazzo Reale, he would later continue to paint for the Savoy court but limiting himself to sending canvases from Naples⁶¹. Giaquinto's situation in Rome was completely different: in the early 1750s he had indeed achieved the status as a fresco painter that would later produce the invitation to go to Madrid, but he was far from being a local head of school. In the past, De Mura's situation in Naples has been described as more dire than it probably ever was⁶²: even when Conca returned to the city, Franceschiello's opportunities never diminished, and Vanvitelli's support helped the painter in the final years of his long career. To support Giaquinto's candidature, Aróstegui presented him as an exponent of the "mixed School", with an early Neapolitan training followed by long familiarity with the Roman school⁶³. But in Madrid, where Giordano had left a strong mark on the taste of the court, and where Corrado was to replace an elegant and almost frivolous decorator like Amigoni, the patron was not really looking for someone to reconcile High Baroque decorative style with Roman classicism: Giaquinto was perfectly qualified to perform the task that awaited him but not because of his supposed ability to combine the Neapolitan and Roman schools. Aróstegui complained that Franceschiello worked entirely from experience and that in his house "there is no preparatory study to be seen"⁶⁴, but Giaquinto, despite his time in Rome, did not paint any differently. In 1761, when Giaquinto was still at the court of Carlos III, Tiepolo was invited to Madrid, confirming the lasting popularity in Spain of the Italian decorative tradition, heavily influenced by the teachings of Giordano (incidentally, Mengs also arrived in the city in the same year, leading to a rapid change in the city's artistic climate)⁶⁵. In any case, the canons of judgement prevailing in Rome had not been established in Madrid, where there was no difference in status between fresco and oil painting.

In the same year, 1761, in a letter dated 10 June to Pierre-Jean Mariette, Francesco Algarotti drew a direct parallel between Giaquinto and Tiepolo:

In Cesena the first thing I saw was the famous dome in the Duomo, painted by Corrado, who is currently in the service of the King of Spain [...] This is a fresco of enormous charm, so much so that even a fresco by our Tiepoletto, who is the best in this genre, could barely surpass it⁶⁶.

When Algarotti tried to introduce Tiepolo to the Dresden court in 1744, he described the artist to count Heinrich von Brühl in the following words:

This painter is as excellent in fresco as he is in oil painting, and has an immediacy of execution equal to his excellence [...]⁶⁷

This missive was to accompany the splendid *Banquet of Antony and Cleopatra*, now in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne: having to describe a work painted on the easel, the author immediately felt the need to specify that Tiepolo was as good "in fresco painting as in oils." And the excellence required in paintings on canvas lay above all in the erudite nature of the subject, the principal characteristic of the Roman school, as Algarotti explained:

⁶¹ D'Alessio, 1993: 78-80.

⁶² D'Alessio, 1993: 73 and 78.

⁶³ Urrea Fernández, 2005: 38.

⁶⁴ Urrea Fernández, 1977: 485.

⁶⁵ Haskell, 1985: 302; see also the earlier words of Lanzi, cfr. note 2.

⁶⁶ Letter cited and discussed in Emiliani, 2005: 11-12.

⁶⁷ Haskell, 1958: 213.

We see in two niches, Isis on one side and Serapis on the other, drawn exactly as they are on the ancient monuments of that country; among the ornaments and the rich utensils of the banquet we see the Sphinx, which identifies the place and sets the scene in Egypt and not elsewhere. This pictorial erudition, for which the Roman school is so distinguished, and that confers such prestige on the paintings of Poussin, was, one might say, unknown to the Venetian school. Thanks to this example, the Venetians saw that erudition and the taste for it are not mere scholarly sophistication [...]⁶⁸

Again, the author stressed that Tiepolo's lively brush strokes were in fact, if interpreted and judged correctly, of "extreme refinement":

I do not speak of the manner in which this work is painted; its perspectival effect results from those masterly and direct touches that are modelled on the artifice of Paolo Veronese and, if seen from the right distance, make it appear so magnificent and of extreme refinement⁶⁹.

The reference models for historical paintings on canvas were by now the works of the Roman school and to establish Tiepolo in this field, Algarotti had no choice but to present the master as an erudite painter of "extreme refinement"; his "facility" had to be left to fresco painting.

The eclectic Venetian intellectual was able to appreciate the qualities most typical of Tiepolo's technique: in his *Progetto per ridurre a compimento il Regio Museo di Dresda* of 1742, an ambitious project entailing the commission of numerous canvases from the best representatives of Italy's painting schools, he introduced the artist with the following words:

Tiepoletto, a painter of excellent brushwork and great wit [...]⁷⁰

It is interesting to compare this passage with that on the painter of the Roman school, Mancini, whom Algarotti wished to involve in the project:

Mancini in Rome, so erudite in drawing and in expressing the true nature and grandeur of the ancient world and competent at composing and ordering a painting [...]⁷¹

The author wished to commission a painting from only one Roman painter, and Giaquinto would never have been preferred to the various Mancini and Conca. However, Corrado's fame had already reached the ears of Algarotti, who in 1743, immediately before his departure for Italy, wrote a *Nota de' principali Pittori, che anno grido maggiore in Italia e altrove*, in which Mancini, Conca, Trevisani and Giaquinto were mentioned for Rome⁷². Unsurprisingly, then, the Venetian was better disposed towards the painters belonging to the circle of Cardinal Ottoboni than to the heirs of Maratti (Masucci, Costanzi or Pozzi). But it is significant that he ended his *Nota* with the clarification that:

In this note we have only listed historical painters ('figuristi'), leaving out painters of architecture [...] just as we have left out landscape painters like Zuccarelli in Venice and Bamboccianti like Chardin in Paris, and Lancret the imitator of Watteau. The most important fresco painters are Tiepoletto, Corrado, and a certain Bigaro, who always paints in the company of Orlandi⁷³.

⁶⁸ Haskell, 1958: 213.

⁶⁹ Haskell, 1958: 213.

⁷⁰ Algarotti, 1792, p. 366.

⁷¹ Algarotti, 1792, pp. 368-369.

⁷² Posse, 1931: 11, note 4.

⁷³ Posse, 1931: 11, note 4

Giaquinto and Tiepolo were indeed listed among the “figuristi”, or historical painters, but were then named as the two greatest “fresco painters” in Italy, a special category of lower rank than that of the pure “Figuristi”, in which Algarotti listed neither Solimena, nor De Mura, nor of course the erudite Roman artists who were nonetheless all great fresco painters. The passage on the Neapolitan school in the *Progetto* of 1742 is illuminating regarding the fame achieved at the time by De Mura:

Franceschiello, the first pupil of Solimena, or Solimena himself, if his advanced age still allows him to paint with the magnificence that we have mentioned [...] ⁷⁴

Algarotti was unfamiliar with these painters and did not attempt to describe their style in detail, but mentioned Franceschiello without hesitation.

We find confirmation in 1752 that De Mura was also the first choice for the Spanish court, when Madrid began to commission the altarpieces destined for the church of Santa Barbara, inside the monastery of the Salesas Reales; again, Franceschiello played a leading role. The construction of the church was sponsored by Maria Barbara di Braganza, wife of Ferdinand VI, starting in 1750. The whole decorative programme for the interior, including the frescoes in the dome painted under the direction of Giaquinto himself, was completed by the end of 1757, but in 1753 the two altarpieces commissioned from De Mura had already arrived from Naples: the *Visitation* for the high altar and the *Virgin between Sts Francis Xavier and Barbara*. The letters specify that the latter was to be placed facing Giaquinto's *Holy Family*, probably already commissioned but not yet executed since the payment orders date to 1757; Giaquinto later painted a different subject ⁷⁵. De Mura, in other words, was without doubt considered a better oil painter than Giaquinto and, in light of his vast experience as a fresco artist too (he had been summoned to Turin to decorate some rooms in the Royal Palace), was the first to be contacted by the Spanish agents to replace Amigoni in Madrid. After his refusal, Giaquinto was the best alternative.

As already mentioned, the invitation to work for the Madrid court was of undoubtedly an extraordinary opportunity for financial gain and Giaquinto certainly grew rich in the almost ten years he spent in Spain. However, we cannot ignore that genuinely established artists with no lack of lucrative commissions in their own cities (though the works were sometimes sent elsewhere), like Solimena in Naples or Trevisani and Batoni in Rome, did not usually embark on long and tiring journeys outside Italy. Canaletto, the oil painter *par excellence*, would probably have avoided travelling to England in 1746, had he been able to continue satisfying his clients (mostly foreign) from Venice. Giaquinto's departure for Madrid in 1753 must have been the outcome on the one hand of De Mura's enduring popularity of at home and his consequent refusal to work in Spain, and on the other of his own failure to establish himself fully in Rome.

⁷⁴ Algarotti, 1792: 369.

⁷⁵ D'Alessio, 1993: 76; Frutos Sastre, 2006: 99.

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