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A TABERNACLE
BY GIOVANNI BONAZZA
IN FAŽANA, ISTRIA

On the main altar of the Parish church of Sts Cosmas and Damian in Fažana (It. Fasana) there is a marble tabernacle which, due to the quality of execution and sculptural inventiveness, stands out in the interior otherwise lacking baroque marble altars and sculpture.¹ The tabernacle consists of a richly decorated front which masks the niche made of marble slabs and surmounted by an arched top. Its front base, as well as its sides, is mildly concave. The central part of the front is occupied by a cartouche in the form of the elongated oval which echoes in the tabernacle door made of silver-plated copper. The tabernacle is sided by two volutes surmounted by multi-profile, semi-circular cornice with a cherub head with fledged wings on its top, while the strings of flower buds spring from the upper scrolls of the volutes. Two unclothed angels with their wings missing are seated on the volutes. The one to the left is extending his arms towards the tabernacle in a vivid gesture, holding the drapery which is falling on his shoulders and twisting around his hips. The one to the right is raising the ends of the drapery to his chest. On the top of the tabernacle there is a small polygonal support sided by two winged angels' heads of a somewhat smaller dimension.

¹ Fažana is situated near Pula (It. Pola), on the west coast of Istria. The parish church, first mentioned in the 12th century (arch-parish from 1688), has a single nave, a square presbytery, a lateral sacristy and a detached bell-tower. Its present appearance is the result of the rebuildings in the 16th century and in 1680. The church furnishings include five wooden altars dating from the end of the 16th to the mid-17th century, altarpieces by Leonardo Corona, Baldassare D'Anna, and Zorzi Ventura, as well as several anonymous works dating from the late 16th to the first half of the 17th century; there is also a wooden sculpture of Virgin and several fragments of fresco paintings. Cf. Sergio CELLA, Fasana, gentile borgata sul mare, *Pagine Istriane*, III, V/17–18 [March–June], 1954, pp. 43–45; Marijan JELENIĆ, *Vodnjan i okolica*, Vodnjan 1997, pp. 100–104; Nina KUDIŠ BURIĆ, in: Višnja Bralić – Nina Kudiš Burić, *Istria pittorica*, Rovigno – Trieste 2005, pp. 111–115 (cat. 134–138); EADEM, in: Višnja Bralić – Nina Kudiš Burić, *Stikarska baština Istre*, Zagreb 2006, pp. 164–170 (cat. 69–73).

GRADIVO



1. Giovanni Bonazza, Tabernacle. Fažana, Sts Cosmas and Damian, main altar



2. Antonio Bonazza, Assumption of the Virgin, detail. Padua, Cathedral



3. Giovanni Bonazza, Tabernacle, detail. Fažana, Sts Cosmas and Damian, main altar

The style and typology of the sculptural decoration on this tabernacle are very similar to the forms and execution of the workshop of Giovanni Bonazza (Venice 1654–Padua 1736). He initially embraced



4. Antonio Bonazza, Assumption of the Virgin, detail. Padua, Cathedral



5. Giovanni Bonazza, Virgin Immaculate, detail. Padua, Chiesa dei Carmini

the influence of the most important sculptor of the second half of the 17th century in Venice, Giusto Le Court (Ypres 1626–Venice 1679), only to accept subsequently the ideas of Filippo Parodi (Genoa 1630–1702). Giovanni Bonazza was thus at his best, finding, as it were, the “middle way”, by combining influences of both artists into an original and specific personal style. The monumental and highly expressive sculpture by Giusto Le Court had to play the decisive role in the initial shaping of the young sculptor, since in his early but also in some more mature works, characteristic details could be found. These are, for example, the naked *putti* that are energetically clenching in their small fists the ends of the drapery, creased into tiny folds and held by straps. This motif, which reoccurs in Giovanni Bonazza’s sculptural oeuvre, as well as the softened gestures and somewhat sugary physiognomy of the *putti*, indicates quite clearly that he never abandoned Le Courtian “maniera grande”. After Bonazza moved to Padua in 1696, his work revealed the influence of Filippo Parodi. This collaborator of Gianlorenzo Bernini was at the time engaged in execution of the sculptural furnishings for the Paduan Basilica del Santo. The lyricism and ethereal quality of figures sculpted by Parodi, his supreme and highly characteristic treatment of marble easily recognisable in the trembling linear plaits, the faces of the *putti* and angels pervaded with



6. Giovanni Bonazza, Virgin and child. Strà, Villa Pisani



7. Giovanni Bonazza, St Anthony of Padua. Padua, Basilica del Santo

grace and free from emotional turbulence and psychological tension these all became the other constant which helped Giovanni shape his personal idiom. By combining the influences of both sculptors, the works by Giovanni Bonazza gained a specific character reflected in the extremely skilful and meticulous treatment of marble, soft and pliant surfaces, typical physiognomies, vivid and solemn gestures, and, above all, an authentic *joie de vivre*.²

² Camillo SEMENZATO, Giovanni Bonazza, *Saggi e memorie di storia dell' arte*, II, 1959, pp. 283–314; Matej KLEMENČIČ, s. v. Giovanni Bonazza, *La scultura a Venezia da Sansovino a Canova* (edd. Andrea Bacchi, Susanna Zanuso), Milano 2000, pp. 702–704. For Le Court and Parodi cf. Andrea



8. Francesco Bonazza, Tabernacle, detail. Motovun, parish church, main altar

The two seated angels on the tabernacle from the parish church in Fažana function as the freestanding sculptures due to their high sculptural quality. Their form reveals strong analogy to the sculpture of Virgin with Infant Christ by Giovanni Bonazza, formerly in the Church of St Gimignano in Venice, today in Villa Pisani in Strà, and to the figure of infant Christ held by St Anthony of Padua from the Basilica del Santo by the same author. The sculptures from Fažana also resemble the high relief, the *putto* figure in the Allegory of Time on the Memorial monument to Silvestro Valier in the Church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice.³ The closely-knit silhouette of the figures, their straightforwardness and grace, and above all, the treatment of masses as well as numerous details in the typology of the angels on Fažana tabernacle suggest that it was executed by Giovanni Bonazza himself. The elevated quality of the composed but at the same time fluent forms of the solemn and yet vivacious disposition, together with brilliantly balanced feeling for detailed treatment contrasted with a schematic rendering, relate the sculptural decoration of the tabernacle in the Parish church of Sts Cosmas and Damian to the mentioned works by Giovanni Bonazza. In fact, they are of higher quality than the angels on the attic of the altar of Our Lady

BACCHI, s. v. Giusto Le Court, Filippo Parodi, *La scultura ...* 2000, cit. n. 2, Milano 2000, pp. 741-744, 772-773.

³ Cf. KLEMENČIČ 2000, cit. n. 2, figg. 263, 267, 268.

GRADIVO



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9.–12. Giovanni Bonazza, Tabernacle,
detail. Fažana, Sts Cosmas and Damian,
main altar

13. Giovanni Bonazza, Allegory of Time,
detail. Venice, Santi Giovanni e Paolo,
Monumento Valier

of the Rosary in the Dominican church in Bol on the island of Brač,⁴ and the angel holding the Veronica's veil, situated in the upper part of the main altar of the parish church in Perast.⁵

The motif of the three somewhat smaller winged angels' heads on the top of the tabernacle relates to the one on the base of the Bonazza's Virgin and the Child, presently in Strà. It is also similar to the angels situated on the top of the niche enclosing the already mentioned statue of St Anthony in Padua. There are also significant resemblances between the cherubs' heads on the Fažana tabernacle and the angels on the antependium of the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary from the island of Brač, which testify to the same meticulousness and quality in Bonazza's sculptural approach regardless of the scale of the sculpture he was working at.

Finally, even the overall idea and the decorative motifs of the Fažana tabernacle indicate that it must be related to Giovanni Bonazza and his circle. The oval form with the volutes of marked plasticity that extend into space can be also seen on the base of Heraclites' bust by Giovanni in Ca Rezzonico,⁶ as well as on the pediment of St Agnes sculpture in the cathedral in Chioggia, a work by Giovanni's son Antonio (1698–1763). Significant are also the analogies with the Bonazzian tabernacle in the archipretal church in Noventa Vicentina. Furthermore, very similar strings of flower buds are present on the antependia in the parish church in Bovolenta executed by Antonio Bonazza.⁷

Giovanni Bonazza started a workshop in which numerous Paduan sculptors got their formation. Among them were also his three sons Francesco (Venice 1695–ca. 1770), Tommaso (Venice [?], ca. 1696–Padua 1775) and Antonio (Padua 1698–763).⁸ If we compare the works

⁴ Radoslav TOMIĆ, Novi prilozi o skulpturi 18. stoljeća, *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti*, XXV, 2001, pp. 189–193.

⁵ MASSIMO DE GRASSI, *Venecijanska skulptura u Boki Kotorskoj*, Podgorica 2001, pp. 18, 66–71.

⁶ SIMONE GUERRIERO, Le alterne fortune dei marmi: Busti, teste, di caratteri e altre "sculture moderne" nelle collezioni veneziane tra sei e settecento, *La Scultura Veneta del Seicento e del Settecento nuovi studi* (ed. Giuseppe Pavanello), Venezia 2002, pp. 88, 123 (fig. 45).

⁷ CAMILLO SEMENZATO, *Antonio Bonazza 1698–1763*, Padova 1957, pp. 53, 55–56.

⁸ MATEJ KLEMENČIČ, s. v. Antonio Bonazza, Francesco Bonazza, Tommaso Bonazza, *La scultura ...* 2000, cit. n. 2, Milano 2000, pp. 701–702, 704–705.

by Giovanni's most talented son Antonio to the Fažana tabernacle, we notice significant analogies in various elements. Still, Antonio's angels on the holy water stoup in the Cathedral of Padua lack the typical fluidity and tenderness of Giovanni's infantile individualised faces that radiate grace and serenity. The winged cherubs' heads on the tabernacle by Francesco Bonazza in the parish church in Motovun demonstrate quite inferior quality of execution due to rough, schematic forms. Finally, in his effort to emulate the works by his father, Tommaso produced markedly expressionless and vapid sculpture.

In addition to specific typological and compositional solutions, the high quality of the Fažana tabernacle indicates the period when Giovanni was working on the Monumento Valier in the Church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice (1702–1708) or the already mentioned sculptures of St Anthony of Padua (1708) and the Virgin with Child now in Villa Pisani, Strà. It is quite probable that this remarkable piece was brought to the parish church of the small fishermen's village only at the later date. Furthermore, it is situated on the wooden altar that can be dated to the end of the 16th or the very beginning of the 17th century. One could suppose that it was purchased at one of the numerous auctions held at the beginning of the 19th century as the result of the decision of the French to close down numerous religious institutions and churches in Venice. The person who might have had something to do with the acquisition of this tabernacle is Gaetano Grezler, a painter who moved from Venice to Vodnjan, situated only few kilometres from Fažana. The painter brought to his new residence numerous artistic and religious objects originating from the suppressed Venetian churches. Among others, he brought the lid of the sarcophagus of Blessed Leone Bembo (1321) by Paolo Veneziano, a fragment of the polyptich by Lorenzo da Venezia and two adoring angels (1616) in polychrome wood by Francesco Terilli.⁹ It is thus possible that the tabernacle of such outstanding sculptural quality, perhaps originally part of some important dismantled group by Giovanni Bonazza in Venice, was sold or even donated to the parish church in Fažana by Gaetano Grezler.

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⁹ Alberto CRAIEVICH, Il pittore veronese Gaetano Grezler, le sue collezioni e il suo soggiorno a Dignano, *Arte in Friuli arte a Trieste*, XVI–XVII, 1997, pp. 345–348, 357, 361 (n. 8).

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TABERNAKELJ GIOVANNIJA BONAZZE V FAŽANI V ISTRI

V Fažani, majhni ribiški vasici na zahodni obali Istre, je na velikem oltarju župnijske cerkve sv. Kozme in Damijana marmorni tabernakelj. Ob osrednjem delu z ovalno odprtino sta dve plastično oblikovani voluti, na kateri sta postavljeni sedeči figuri puttov, na vrhu tabernaklja pa so tri krilate angelske glavice. Izrazita umetnostna kvaliteta in formalne in slogovne podobnosti dovoljujejo atribucijo beneškemu kiparju Giovanniju Bonazzi (Benetke 1654 – Padova 1736). Njegovo delo zaznamujejo vplivi monumentalne in ekspresivne skulpture Giusta Le Courta in postberninijevskega »eteričnega« kiparstva Filippa Parodija. Pri fažanskem tabernaklju zasledimo značilnosti Bonazzeve roke v specifičnih fizionomijah, konstrukciji teles, značilni obdelavi draperije in teles, kot tudi v tipološki rešitvi tabernaklja, ki jo najdemo tudi pri naslednikih, pri treh sinovih Tommasu, Francescu in Antoniju. Kvalitetna izdelava fažanskega dela potrjuje atribucijo Giovanniju Bonazzi osebno, časovno pa ga lahko umestimo v prvo desetletje 18. stoletja, v čas nastanka reliefa Časa na Monumento Valier u beneški cerkvi Santi Giovanni e Paolo (med 1702 in 1708), kipa svetega Antona v baziliki sv. Antona v Padovi (1708) in Marije z otrokom iz Ville Pisani v Strà, ki izvira iz porušene beneške cerkve San Geminiano. Fažanski tabernakelj je edino marmorno baročno delo v župnijski cerkvi Svetih Kozme in Damijana in stoji na oltarju, ki ga lahko datiramo v pozno 16. stoletje. Zato lahko sklepamo, da je bil kupljen v Benetkah na eni od avkcij v prvih desetletjih 19. stoletja. Ker je prav tedaj v bližnjem Vodnjanu bival tudi slikar Gaetano Grezler z veliko zbirko umetnin, ki izvirajo iz ukinjenih beneških sakralnih objektov in inštitucij, bi lahko prav on fažanski župnijski cerkvi prodal ali celo poklonil to izjemno kvalitetno delo.

Slikovno gradivo:

1. Giovanni Bonazza, Tabernakelj. Fažana, župnijska cerkev sv. Kozme in Damijana, veliki oltar
2. Antonio Bonazza, Marijino vnebovzetje, detajl. Padova, katedrala
3. Giovanni Bonazza, Tabernakelj, detajl. Fažana, župnijska cerkev sv. Kozme in Damijana, veliki oltar
4. Antonio Bonazza, Marijino vnebovzetje, detajl. Padova, katedrala
5. Giovanni Bonazza, Brezmadežna, detajl. Padova, Chiesa dei Carmini
6. Giovanni Bonazza, Marija z detetom. Strà, Villa Pisani
7. Giovanni Bonazza, Sv. Anton Padovanski. Padova, bazilika sv. Antona
8. Francesco Bonazza, Tabernakelj, detajl. Motovun, župnijska cerkev, veliki oltar
- 9.–12. Giovanni Bonazza, Tabernakelj, detajl. Fažana, župnijska cerkev sv. Kozme in Damijana, veliki oltar
13. Giovanni Bonazza, Alegorija časa, detajl. Benetke, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Monumento Valier