

Confraternal Gleanings from Post-Tridentine Piacenza: Bishop Paolo Burali d'Arezzo and the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament

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Summary: This article focuses on the situation in the diocese of Piacenza during the episcopate of Paolo Burali d'Arezzo (r. 1568–1576) by placing his work within the post-Tridentine context. One of the most important objectives of the Church after the Council of Trent was the recovery of a closer relationship between the clergy and the faithful and it was pursued through the establishment and renewal of confraternities. In Piacenza, Bishop Burali encouraged the founding of many lay associations and took care to amend and revitalize existing ones, such as the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament. For the one in the cathedral, documentary sources give us much useful information that allows us to speculate on the decorations (no longer extant) in the chapel dedicated to the Most Holy Sacrament executed by Giulio Mazzoni (1519–ca. 1590). Archival sources and local historical-artistical guidebooks allow us to propose a comparison between what Mazzoni achieved in Piacenza and Rome.

This article offers a first glimpse into the situation in the diocese of Piacenza in the post-Tridentine period through an analysis of the city's lay confraternities. The decision to use confraternities as privileged subjects of analysis is founded on the awareness of the growing importance that confraternity studies has enjoyed over the last few decades, especially in the lively academic discussions carried out both at international conferences and in print. Already in 2009 Ludovica Sebreghondi asked whether it is possible to speak of “confraternity art” that is somehow identifiable in its distinctive characteristics and distinguished between art works commissioned for lay religious organizations and those commissioned for churches, convents, civic buildings, or private residences.² While lamenting the lack of specific analyses on this, Sebreghondi nonetheless pointed out some general attempts in this direction referring, among others, to the contributions made in publications that followed

¹ I would like to express my sincere thanks to prof. Konrad Eisenbichler; I am grateful to him for the interest that he has shown for my research and for his translation of my article.

² Sebreghondi, “Arte confraternale,” 335.

important conferences and seminars organized by Barbara Wisch, Diane Cole Ahl, and Konrad Eisenbichler.³ It thus seemed appropriate to offer a sketch of the situation in Piacenza so as to begin to insert it into the broader landscape of discussions on Italian confraternities in the Early Modern Period. The Piacentine case can, in fact, raise some interesting considerations, especially in light of the presence of significant personalities in local church government and, more broadly, its close connections with the situation in Milan during the episcopate of Carlo Borromeo.

Paolo Burali d'Arezzo, Bishop of Piacenza (r. 1568–1576)

In light of this, an analysis of the episcopate of Paolo Burali d'Arezzo is of considerable interest. Born in Itri Gaeta in 1511, Burali grew up in the Theatine spiritual environment of San Paolo Maggiore in Naples and in close contact with Gaetano da Thiene (1480–1547) and Giovanni Marinoni (1491–1562). He served as bishop of Piacenza between 1568 and 1576 and was then elevated to the archbishopric of Naples where he died in 1578. He was beatified in 1772.

Burali's episcopal positions were modeled on those of Cardinal Carlo Borromeo (1538–84), archbishop of Milan, whom he met in Rome in 1564. The friendship they struck at that time guaranteed a constant exchange of ideas and was particularly significant for Burali when he was appointed to administer the diocese of Piacenza. The emotional bonds and common purposes the two men shared is documented in the testimonies made during the beatification proceedings, in the information contained in various editions of his *Vita*,⁴ as well as in their extensive correspondence that merits further analysis.⁵ In the Duomo and State

³ Eisenbichler, *Crossing the Boundaries*; Wisch/Cole Ahl, *Confraternities and the Visual Arts*; but see also the bibliography of recent articles and books on confraternities published by *Confraternitas* and the Society for Confraternity Studies at <https://www.crrs.ca/Confraternitas/collect.htm>

⁴ ASDPc, *Servi di Dio*, I, fol. 43v: Bonifacio Rivalta: "everyone is aware of the friendship that tied the Holy Bishop of Milan with the Theatine Bishop of Piacenza" ("è nota a tutti l'amicizia che legò il Santo Vescovo di Milano al Vescovo Teatino di Piacenza"); fol. 72r: Pasquale Rocchetta recalls that at least two or three times a year Burali went to Milan to consult with "his greatest friend" ("suo più grande amico"). As for the many editions of his life, see: De Tufo, *Historia della Religione dei Padri Chierici Regolari*; Cagiano, *Vita di Paolo Burali d'Arezzo*; Bagatta, *Vita del Ven. Servo di Dio Paolo Burali d'Arezzo*; Bonaglia, *Vita del Beato Paolo Burali d'Arezzo*; Avellino, *Brevi cenni sulla vita del Beato Paolo Burali d'Arezzo*.

⁵ Burali's letters to Borromeo are in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan. Borromeo's letters to Burali can be reconstructed, in part, thanks to the rough copies kept at the Ambrosiana and, by cross-referencing the information that can be drawn from the sources. See Ponzini/Molinari, "Elenco con regesto delle lettere del Burali."

Archives of Piacenza there are letters that document the ongoing relationship between the two dioceses in terms of synods and councils and attest not only to the efforts of the Archbishop of Milan to retain, if only informally, control of the diocese of Piacenza, but also Burali's will to follow Borromeo's pastoral program.⁶ This relationship of dependence is evident, as we will see, in Burali's work with Piacentine confraternities.

In presenting a preliminary statement on the state of the art, one must remember that Burali's biography and spirituality have already been widely studied by Franco Molinari.⁷ As Giuseppe Alberigo observed, Molinari carried out extensive research on local and non-local sources focussing primarily on Burali's spiritual reform initiatives, however, his work on the bishop remains nothing more than a summary of seventeenth and eighteenth-century sources.⁸ Molinari's self-avowed research perspective was certainly and predominantly oriented towards the reconstruction of the figure of the ideal post-Tridentine bishop.⁹ Nonetheless, one must recognize that it was not only Molinari's indifference for the purely biographical and "human" aspects of Burali that mitigated against a fuller treatment, but also the practical difficulties in locating the documentation on the bishop's daily life since most of it has been lost or destroyed.¹⁰

For these reasons, one can certainly agree with Alberigo when he points out that lack of any information on Burali's training, relations, cultural assumptions or religious views creates a large grey area in our understanding of the man and obliges us to use a transversal approach when tackling the question.¹¹ And so, if earlier contributions sought to illustrate Burali's extensive efforts at reform in close affinity with

⁶ ACCPc, *Lettere al Capitolo della Cattedrale*, Cassetta XII, vol. 1.2, n. 2; ASPc, *Culto*, b. 1, fol. 1^r, 9 *Atti e lettere*.

⁷ Molinari, *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali*; Perini/Molinari, *La figura psicologica e la personalità morale*; Molinari, *Il seminario di Piacenza e il suo fondatore*; Molinari, *Epistolario del beato Paolo Burali*; Molinari, *Piacenza e il B. Paolo Burali*.

⁸ Alberigo, "L'applicazione del Concilio di Trento in Italia," 275: "il lavoro di F. Molinari sul card. Burali, [...] utilizza convenientemente fonti locali e non, e anche archivi parrocchiali esplorati con notevole cura ma con la limitata prospettiva degli atti di riforma: onde il valore del titolo del lavoro risulta gravemente limitato dalla rinuncia esplicita e completa a qualsiasi ricerca biografica sul Burali, a proposito del quale vien dato solo un sunto delle biografie sei-settecentesche."

⁹ Molinari, *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali*, 47, note 4: "Il presente paragrafo, di contenuto esclusivamente biografico è il meno originale di tutto il lavoro. Non si appoggia su ricerche nuove né mette in luce documenti inediti (e non ho ritenuto opportuno effettuare ricerche in proposito in quanto estranee al punto focale della tesi)."

¹⁰ Even the family archive contains very little information, so much so that the biography compiled by a Burali descendant does not provide any further documentation; Perrone Burali d'Arezzo, *Il cardinale beato Paolo Burali d'Arezzo*.

¹¹ Alberigo, "L'applicazione del Concilio di Trento in Italia," 275, note 3.

Tridentine precepts and to point to his adherence to Borromeo's model, the information that has emerged, duly updated, can be of great relevance for a broader series of inquiries.

Religious orders and lay confraternities for a “moral renewal of the people”

The realization that it was impossible to delay work on re-establishing a direct relationship between the clergy and the faithful so as to regain the confidence of the laity towards the Church hierarchy led Burali to invite various religious orders known for their strong connections with the laity to come to Piacenza. He began with the Theatines, who officially arrived in 1571; he then gave the church of Santo Stefano to the Somaschan Fathers (1573), opened the doors of San Bernardino to the Capuchins so that they might turn it into a centre for the care of the poor; and he established the convent of the *convertite* and the hospice (*collegio*) for poor orphan girls.

This strategy proved to be successful also thanks to Burali's strong effort in promoting confraternities, convinced as he was by the results obtained in other dioceses and especially by Borromeo in Milan.¹² As Alessandro Serra pointed out,

Confraternities, especially in the early modern period, present themselves as a sort of mediating element between ecclesiastical authorities and lay piety. In fact, parish structures, religious orders, and the authorities themselves use them in their efforts to intervene in the area of lay piety so as to shape it according to their own intentions and with various strategies, all equally successful: indulgences, cults, ceremonies.¹³

¹² For Borromeo's efforts and results, see the various articles by Zardin and especially his “Governo dei laici”; “La ‘perfezione’ nel proprio ‘stato’”; “Milano spagnola”; and “Riscrivere la tradizione.”

¹³ Serra, (review of) “Confréries et dévotions dans la catholicité moderne,” 271: “Le confraternite, soprattutto in età moderna, si propongono come una sorta di elemento di mediazione tra le autorità ecclesiastiche e la pietà laicale. Servendosi di esse, infatti, strutture parrocchiali, ordini religiosi e le stesse autorità tentano di intervenire sul terreno della religiosità popolare per modellarla secondo le proprie intenzioni con strumenti di vario genere ma tutti egualmente efficaci: le indulgenze, i culti, le cerimonie”.

Along the same lines, Lance Lazar notes that “voluntary collectivities like confraternities can provide exceptionally useful models for reconnecting belief to society, because membership was so clearly embedded within political and economic, as well as familial and fraternal attachments that pull at individual hearts.” Then, alluding to the “disciplining of consciences” already mentioned by Paolo Prodi,¹⁴ Lazar points to their awareness of the role they could play in re-aligning the faithful on the path of Catholic orthodoxy that sought to intervene in every single aspect of life, both spiritual and secular: “precisely because of the rupture (at least on a mythic level) of the unity of Christianity due to the Reformation, the need to find associative spiritual communities became still more pressing, and the toleration of dissent became still less likely.”¹⁵

The promotion of confraternities during Burali’s episcopate was focused primarily on the city, where he fostered the development of devotional and social organizations by pursuing the double objective of devotion to God and love of one’s neighbour. The major confraternities are those of the Most Holy Trinity, of the Most Holy Sacrament, and of the Capuchin laity of Santa Maria della Torricella around which, as Molinari points out, the other confraternities rotate in the orbit of Tridentine reform like smaller, less important satellites with a more slender organizational structure and a more exclusively devotional character.¹⁶

In following the example set by Carlo Borromeo and the will of Pope Pius V, one of Burali’s first concerns was to urgently set up a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.¹⁷ It was not so much an effort at creating a new confraternity, but at reviving a pre-existing one that, on account of widespread religious illiteracy, had long before become inactive. A series of deeds preserved in the State Archive of Piacenza reveals the efforts to find and assign a suitable home for the renewed confraternity, which became a reality on 25 August 1569 when the parish priest of Sant’Alessandro ceded some adjacent rooms to the bishop so that they might be used to teach Christian doctrine, as living quarters for the teachers, and as headquarters for the confraternity.¹⁸ In strict adherence to the regulations that governed this specific type of confraternity, members were required to contribute to the spread of the Catechism, to adhere to a code of conduct, and to participate in the care and custody of churches. The

¹⁴ Prodi, *Disciplina dell’anima*.

¹⁵ Lazar, “Belief, Devotion, and Memory,” 7–8.

¹⁶ Molinari, *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali*, 306. The smaller confraternities are, for example, those of San Rocco, of the Santo Rosario, of the Carmine, and of the Cordone, all connected to local churches and devotional chapels.

¹⁷ Molinari, *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali*, 265–266.

¹⁸ ASPc, Archivio Notarile, Rivalta, 19, 25 August 1569.

various administrative positions were in line with the typical governing structures of confraternities of the time, even though a major role was played by the bishop, as the constitutions of the diocesan synod seem to suggest.¹⁹

In order to remedy one of the most reprehensible habits of the local population, Burali encouraged people to enrol in the Confraternity of the Most Holy Name of Jesus that sought to combat blasphemy and, in the appendix to the Synod of 1570, included three papal bulls that promised rich indulgences to members.

We have very little information on the Confraternity of the Most Holy Trinity, which is to be seen as part of the broader phenomenon of confraternity promotion connected with the Jubilee Year of 1575.²⁰ The confraternity was strongly promoted by Burali so that it might assist passing faithful on their way to and from Rome. Molinari has collected a number of deeds that allow us to reconstruct the early history of this organization:²¹ on 1 May 1576 forty-seven citizens gathered near the church of San Niccolò delle Casse and took an oath to formally establish the Confraternity of the Trinity, which clearly had been operative already during the Jubilee of the previous year, and were officially recognized by the bishop's vicar, Gasparo Silingardi. Two months later, on 1 July, with a power of attorney in favour of Antonio Casati, Giulio Malvicini, and Antonio Martinelli, the confraternity began the proceedings, completed the following day, to aggregate itself with the main confraternity by the same name in Rome.²²

As the Jubilee Year was coming to an end, the resulting drop in the number of pilgrims passing through Piacenza led the members of the confraternity to set themselves a second charitable goal—the care of convalescents. Daniello Lattanzi's manuscript minutes record that the funds necessary to pay the rent on the Civardi-Rossi house that stood in front of the church of Saint Antoninus were drawn, starting on 1 May 1576, from contributions freely set by individual members. This suggests that the average member came from the urban bourgeoisie consisting of notaries, lawyers, and merchants. In spite of such generosity, only in the

¹⁹ *Constitutiones*, 28, 51.

²⁰ Rossi, *Ristretto di storia patria*, 65: "il Giubileo, e l'esempio del Pastore, che infervorarono molti ad iscriversi alle tre Confraternite, quest'anno stesso vennero dal Vescovo Burali istituite cioè quella della Trinità, ora eretta in Santa Margherita, la quale ebbe origine da sessanta circa tra giureconsulti, notai e mercanti, che da principio univansi nella Chiesa di San Nicolò de' Zanlonghi, [...] i quali, parte col proprio, parte andando ad accatto per la Città, pensavano a mantenere i pellegrini."

²¹ Molinari, *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali*, 313–315.

²² Notarial documents by Camillo Mazzari, Ottavio Branciforti, Cesare Solari cited in BCPL, Ms. Pallastrelli 21, Lattanzi, *Piacenza Sacra*, III, 147.

following decade were members able to fund and maintain their own chapel, which they eventually chose to do in the church of Saint Hilary that would later be flanked by the new Ospedale dei Pellegrini across from it.

The penitential confraternity of San Giorgio has been examined in depth by Stefano Quagliaroli in a *tesi di laurea* whose results were later summarized in an article;²³ the confraternity's art-historical patrimony, however, is still unexamined in spite of the inventory drawn up and extant in its archive, but not yet been published and discussed.

The Confraternity of the Lay Capuchins of Santa Maria della Torricella has been the subject of several important studies that have examined its charitable activities and its comforting work with those about to be executed. A recent survey of its archive has brought to light significant information on the confraternity's art commissions and on the various forms of worship practices by the confraternity over the centuries.²⁴

The Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament in the Duomo

In his usual enthusiastic manner, Molinari recognized the Confraternita del Santissimo Sacramento as Burali's "masterpiece in the field of Eucharistic piety."²⁵ Considered as one of the pillars of the Tridentine renewal, the confraternities of the Most Holy Sacrament were foremost in the interests of the ecclesiastical hierarchy already from the time of Gian Matteo Giberti, bishop of Verona (r. 1524–43). In the second half of the century they became a bulwark against dissidents and key players in the healing of parochial structures. As Lance Lazar pointed out, "both for confronting heretical movements and for inoculating the populace against any further spread [...] perhaps no confraternity represents those goals better than The Most Holy Sacrament confraternities that became the most widespread of the new reform-minded confraternities."²⁶

In this, too, Paolo Burali showed himself eager to tread in the footsteps of his most distinguished colleagues. In line with the provisions of the First Provincial Council of the bishops of the province of Milan (1565), archbishop Carlo Borromeo had proclaimed the need to introduce a confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament in every parish, making

²³ Quagliaroli, "La confraternita di San Giorgio."

²⁴ For the history of the confraternity, see Bertuzzi, *La Confraternita dei Cappuccini conversi*; Carrà, *Le esecuzioni capitali a Piacenza*. For the art works, see Quagliaroli, "Note storico-artistiche."

²⁵ Molinari, *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali*, 296.

²⁶ Lazar, "Belief, Devotion, and Memory," 10.

it, from then on, a constantly reiterated preoccupation in future decrees, in government, and in pastoral visitations. In Danilo Zardin's words,

The preferred option of Borromean reform, determined to create a confraternity system accessible to the faithful from every social level and from every place, turned from the very beginning in favour of the confraternities of the body of Christ. Their task, in fact, was to nourish the cult that justified the very existence of the Church as a community of believers gathered around the reality of God made man for the salvation of the world. In the repetition of the Eucharistic sacrifice [...] the faithful rediscovered their fundamental reference point and strengthened their connection with the sacrament that was the physical sign of being one single thing.”²⁷

The confraternity was already extant in Piacenza, as the 1564 statutes indicate,²⁸ but Burali's intervention brought about significant additions, as is evident from a reading of the “newly established orders” of 1570.²⁹ Their preface mentions that it is a flourishing sodality characterized by a large membership numbering in the thousands.³⁰ High membership figures were necessary for the confraternity to cope with the many commitments the *confratelli* assumed. A reading of the *Ordini* suggests, in fact, a two-pronged approach to the confraternity's mission—on the one hand, the rituals and pious actions that pertained to the Host (frequent communion, bringing the Viaticum to the infirm, the ceremonies for the celebration of Corpus Domini), and on the other hand paying homage to Christ through service to others (financial aid, the distribution of dowries, paying for funerals and burials, visiting prisoners and the infirm). The *Ordini* also reveal an organizational structure in line with what we know of contemporary confraternities. They describe in detail the election, composition, and activities of the twelve rectors (ten

²⁷ Zardin, “Milano spagnola,” 23.

²⁸ *Statuti, ovvero constitutioni*. I thank dott. Tiziano Fermi for having pointed them out to me.

²⁹ *Ordini nuovamente stabiliti*. Molinari published the document as an appendix to his *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali* (“Costituzioni della Confraternita del SS. Sacramento,” 402–410), lamenting however that he was able to locate only one copy of the *Ordini* and that was in the Tononi manuscripts in the archive of the Collegio Alberoni in Piacenza.

³⁰ “la qual compagnia fino allora presente si ritrova moltiplicata a numero di qualche migliaio di persone, con speranza ancora che più nell'avvenir debba augumentarsi”; as cited in Molinari, *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali*, 402–403.

laymen and two priests), clearly distinguishing between their various obligations.³¹

Burali's care for the Eucharist and for the confraternity charged with its devotion was therefore very high and also evident from his very first years in the city. He donated the white damask baldachin that the community had specially commissioned for his solemn entry into the city to the confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament in the cathedral.³² The scrupulous pastoral visitations, which he inaugurated on 18 November 1568 right in the Duomo, document his meticulous inquiries into the presence and correct storage of the Eucharist. In the cathedral, he found that the Eucharist was already kept under lock and key in an ivory box inside the decorated and gilded tabernacle on top of the altar in the chapel of the Crucifix, so he simply ordered that it be wrapped in the corporal and kept clean, still under lock and key, in that same tabernacle away from dust and dirt.³³ In his second cycle of visitations, begun in very early 1572, the examination of the chapels always began with the most significant, that is, with those where baptism was administered and the Eucharist given to the faithful. Frequently, he complained that in far too many churches the Eucharist was kept in an unsecure place,³⁴ or in a not very "honourable" place.³⁵

The emphasis that the host be kept well was prompted by a very specific pastoral concern: to encourage the faithful to receive the sacrament during Mass and to have it immediately available for communion for the sick and the dying.³⁶ The underlying symbolic implications of such

³¹ The confraternity's executive consisted of the twelve rectors who rotated, on a monthly basis, among themselves the position of prior (fols. ii-iv). They chose a treasurer from among themselves, a chaplain in charge of the spiritual care of the members, a *cursore* (courrier) in charge of delivering notices, and a chancellor who would take minutes of meetings, register new members, keep the cash book up to date (fols. viii-xi). Meetings were of two types: a solemn meeting called a *Congregazione generale* that was held on the second Sunday of Lent and on all exceptional occasions (fol. xvi), and an ordinary meeting called *Congregazione particolare* that was held every week in the presence of at least seven rectors (fol. xiii). In the *Ordini* the confraternity also declared itself subject to the bishop, into whose hands the twelve rectors swore their oath of office (fol. ii).

³² Molinari, *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali*, 58, 373.

³³ ASDPc, *Visita Burali*, I, fols. 2^r-7^v: "continuato tempore tentum et custoditum [...] ad altare crucifixi in tabernaculo honorifico et deaurato supra altari dictae capellae esistenti cum clave clauso in quodam vasculo eburneo [...] muniri et fodrari intus corporalibus sacris et in dicto tabernaculum ipsum conserueretur nitidum et ita clausum ne pulvis et aliae immonditiae in eodem ingrediantur."

³⁴ For example, ASDPc, *Visita Burali*, I: SS. Faustino e Giovita, fols. 34^r-35^r; SS. Simone e Giuda, fols. 37^v-38^r.

³⁵ For example, in ASDPc, *Visita Burali*, I: SS. Nazaro e Celso, fols. 30^v-31^v; S. Sepolcro, fol. 32^r; S. Maria del tempio, fols. 43^r-44^r; S. Giorgio, fols. 36^v-37^r.

³⁶ Torre, *Il consumo di devozioni*, 262.

practical and liturgical reasons are quite clearly evident. In the overall structure of ecclesiastical space, every physical detail that went into the interior of a Christian church “assumed, in the eyes of the Counter-Reformation Church, a completely different character, for it had to express a truth jealously defended against error, a salvific certainty, a definitive choice. [...] It reflected a global vision of religious experience tied to the concept of ‘justification by works’; and so, even those objects meant to implement it—furniture, furnishings, liturgical instruments—had to be consistent with the same overall design.”³⁷

Complying with the provisions of the thirteenth session of the Council of Trent (11 August 1551), the extraordinary decoration of the altar and the tabernacle had to correspond with the constantly reiterated dignity of the Eucharist. Not surprisingly, therefore, the *Ordini* of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament in the Duomo of Piacenza included the maintenance and decoration of the altar. Section XXIII ordered that “the money that will be received as alms or for whatever other reason should be primarily received [...] to honour the Most Holy Sacrament and to adorn its chapel both with paintings or with drapes, or with anything else that is necessary.”³⁸ In this case too, the local situation seems to be fully in line with what was happening in Milan where, in fact, “far from leading to reductions in confraternity commissions, Carlo Borromeo’s promotion of confraternities stimulated an extensive campaign of construction and decorative renewals. The first to be so influenced were the altars and chapels belonging to confraternities in parish churches.”³⁹

³⁷ Vitta, “La questione delle immagini,” 386–387: “nella visione della Chiesa controriformata assumeva un carattere del tutto diverso, giacché doveva esprimere una verità gelosamente difesa dall’errore, una certezza salvifica, una scelta definitiva. [...] rifletteva una visione globale dell’esperienza religiosa, legata al concetto della “giustificazione per opere”; e dunque anche gli oggetti destinati a porla in atto—suppellettili, arredi, strumenti liturgici—dovevano risultare omogenei al medesimo disegno complessivo.”

³⁸ Molinari, *Il card. teatino beato Paolo Burali*, 409 (citing from the *Ordini*): “i denari che si riceveranno per elemosina o per qual altro si voglia modo si prendano principalmente [...] in onore il SS. Sacramento e in adornare la sua cappella così di pittura e di drappi, come di ogni altra cosa necessaria.”

³⁹ Vanoli, “Le confraternite lombarde nell’età post-tridentina,” 78: “lungi dal provocare contrazioni nella committenza delle confraternite, la promozione borromaica delle compagnie devozionali stimolò una vasta campagna di edificazioni e di rinnovamento decorativo. Ad esserne interessati furono, in primis, gli altari e le cappelle di pertinenza dei sodalizi delle chiese parrocchiali.”

The decoration of the Chapel of the Most Holy Sacrament

The chapel of the Most Holy Sacrament in the cathedral in Piacenza replaced the previously existing chapel of the Crucifix at the front of the right transept. Its decorations were completely lost in the restorations promoted by Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini in 1897–1901; today, in fact, this space appears completely transfigured by a neo-Gothic decoration carried out at that time by the Roman painter Eugenio Cisterna (1862–1933).⁴⁰ Photographs taken before these restorations and now in the photo-archive of the Biblioteca Passerini Landi do not give us any insights into the sixteenth-century decorations because they frame only the lower part of the chapel around the altar (fig. 1).

Although there are no written records in the cathedral archives that might tell us about any commissions or payments, Mons. Luigi Tagliaferri, in his work on the cathedral, reported that in 1570 an altar was erected that had an altarpiece depicting the Madonna with Saints Antoninus and Justina, but it was still not finished in 1579 at the time of the apostolic visitation of Giovanni Battista Castelli, bishop of Rimini, who, in his long report, lamented the fact that the chapel was still in an unfinished state.⁴¹ Castelli's report does not mention the altarpiece that, with its representation of the three patron saints (Mary for the cathedral, Antoninus of Piacenza for the city, and St. Justina of Antioch for the lower church) fit perfectly with the chapel of the Sacrament which, for obvious pastoral-theological reasons, would be understood as a miniature double of the basilica itself.⁴²

The altarpiece may well have served as an iconological model for the panel now in the parish church in Travo (fig. 2)—the Madonna holds in her arms the infant Jesus who leans towards St. Justina, represented

⁴⁰ Cerri, *Piacenza nei suoi monumenti*, 37–38, 40, 41: “Nel secolo XVII e nel successivo altre deturpazioni eransi arrecate all'interno, ma tutte furono tolte ridonando alla chiesa la sua originaria fisionomia in seguito ai lavori di ripristino eseguiti negli anni 1897–1901 [...] Furono rimesse in pristino le due grandi absidi della traversa ch'erano state sfondate per oltre 80 cm. di spessore a scopo di innicchiarvi i due grandiosi altari del Ss. Sacramento e della Madonna del Popolo, lavori dell'epoca barocca. [...] ma durante questi lavori l'arte ebbe a deplorare gravi iatture, quali la distruzione dei pregevoli Evangelisti dipinti dal piacentino Mazzoni (sec. XVI), e della Resurrezione del Fiammingo (sec. XVII), questa esistente nel catino dell'abside del Sacramento, quelli nella volta contigua [...]. Le pitture dell'abside sono dello stesso Cisterna, tutte relative al Ss. Sacramento.”

⁴¹ Tagliaferri, “Il Duomo prima dei restauri del '900,” 104: “nel 1570 fu costruito un altare con una pala rappresentate la Madonna con i santi Antonino e Giustina, che non era ancora terminato nel 1579, come risulta dalla Visita Castelli.” Unfortunately Tagliaferri offers no further information, not even in his previous work, *Il duomo di Piacenza, Storia, Arte, Costume*, 35–36.

⁴² ASDPc, *Visita Castelli*, I, fols. 37^r–37^v, 71^v–72^r.



Fig. 1: The Altar of the chapel of the Most Holy Sacrament in the cathedral in Piacenza. (Late nineteenth-century photo). Biblioteca Passerini Landi, Piacenza.

according to traditional iconography dressed as an abbess, while to the right of the Virgin the fourth-century martyr St. Antoninus of Piacenza holds the banner of the Theban legion from which the banner of the city is supposedly derived. The panel is first mentioned in the minutes of the 1787 pastoral visit, but is to be dated to the late sixteenth century on both stylistic and technical grounds (oil on a panel).⁴³ In spite of the severe damage it suffered, the painting is attributable to a Cremona workshop or to an artist sensitive to the style of Giulio Campi, active in Piacenza in

⁴³ ASDPc, *Visita Cerati*, XI, fol. 210^v.



Fig. 2: Artist in the circle of Giulio Campi, *Madonna with Child between Saints Antoninus of Piacenza and Justina of Antioch* (end of the sixteenth century). Travo (Piacenza), parish church. Ufficio Beni Culturali Ecclesiastici della Diocesi di Piacenza-Bobbio.

the 1580s and popular well into the next century. The quality of the work does not seem to be very high, with some rather unattractive sections; the saint's well rendered armour, even in the details of the gathered fabric on the right wrist, is in contrast to the rather cursory depiction of the setting and the roughly painted faces.

If, in the chapel of the Sacrament in the cathedral there was an altarpiece such as the one described above, it was there for only a century and a half. In 1732 it was replaced by a painting by Giovanni Battista

Tagliasacchi (1696–1737) depicting the *Supper at Emmaus* (today in the church of Corpus Domini). Art-historical guides confirm the description of the chapel penned in 1780 by its earliest editor, Carlo Carasi:

On the altar of the Blessed Sacrament the painting that represents our Saviour when he reveals himself to the disciples in Emmaus at the breaking of the bread is a most beautiful work by Gio. Battista Tagliasacchi from Borgo San Donnino. [...] The fresco painting above the altar, that is the Holy Doctors of the Church with some angels and further up the Resurrection of the Redeemer is a work of the above-mentioned Flemish [artist]. In the vault, then, divided into four compartments, there are the four Holy Evangelists by Giulio Mazzoni from Piacenza.⁴⁴

Thus we know that the Flemish artist Robert de Longe (1647–1709) frescoed, at an unknown date between his arrival in Piacenza in 1685 and his death in the city twenty-four years later, *Four Fathers of the Church and Angels* on the band above the altar and a *Resurrection of Christ* in the vault to complement the stucco decorations and paintings by Giulio Mazzoni (1519–ca. 1590).

For chronological reasons, only this last work can be seen as a Burali commission, thus confirming the minutes of the beatification process that report that he build most of the bishop's palace and that he had the chapel of the Sacrament in the cathedral painted, stuccoed, and gilded at his own expense, incurring debts he hoped, with God's help, to be able to pay.⁴⁵ Giovanni Battista Bonaglia, who composed Burali's biography as part of the beatification process, noted the bishop's munificence in renovating and embellishing the cathedral and other churches in town and in the diocese and made special mention of the paintings, stucco work, and gilding in the chapel of the Sacrament.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Carasi, *Le pubbliche pitture di Piacenza*, 11–12.

⁴⁵ ASDPc, *Servi di Dio*, I, fol. 79r: “che poi detto Cardinale habbia fatto fabricare la miglier parte del Vescovado, e dipingere, stuccare, et indorare la cappella del S.mo Sacr.mo nel Duomo a sue spese questo è cosa notoria, e so ch'egli faceva delli debiti co speranza di pagarli col favore di Dio”; fol. 195r: “per l'honore e somma riverenza della SS.ma Eucarestia [il vescovo Burali] fece a sue spese dipingere, stuccare e indorare la cappella del SS.mo Sacramento in Duomo, com'è cosa notoria e al'hora pubblicamente si diceva.”

⁴⁶ Bonaglia, *Vita del Beato Paolo Burali d'Arezzo*, 97: “ma molto poi di sua munificenza ei dimostrò non solo in questa Chiesa, ma nella altre ancora sì di Città, che di tutta la Diocesi, nel rinnovare, o abbellire i sacri arredi, e talvolta eziandio le mura istesse. Nella

There are many sources, though later in various centuries, that, with their interesting descriptions and anecdotes, help us reconstruct the chapel's appearance during Burali's episcopate. Our interest, however, is drawn to the attribution of the frescoes in the vault to Giulio Mazzoni, as mentioned by Cattanei in 1828 and then consistently reported by nineteenth and twentieth-century commentators.⁴⁷ The two 'rival' guides by Scarabelli and Buttafuoco, composed in the same months and in open competition one with the other, pick up the description Carasi already made of Mazzoni as a "student" of Daniele da Volterra, thus helping to cement and spread the negative opinion of a Mazzoni supposedly unable to render foreshortened figures in a pleasant and realistic manner.⁴⁸

The subject of several studies already, Giulio Mazzoni deserves at least a brief summary that sets out his profile, training, and stylistic debts and helps us to imagine the forms and style of the lost decorations.⁴⁹

Mazzoni's place in the landscape of late-Mannerist art in Emilia can be inferred from the simple fact that Giorgio Vasari mentions him in the *Lives of the Artists* saying that he had taught the young man "the first principles" of art when working together in Florence and Naples, before he had him transfer to the workshop of Daniele Ricciarelli da Volterra where Mazzoni learned the technique of stucco so well that he equalled his teacher. In the works he carried out in Rome in the third quarter of the sixteenth century Mazzoni proved himself to be an eclectic artist able to consider the major artistic experiences of his time and synthesise them in a personal manner. In fact, he was very familiar with the figurative

Cattedrale volle a sue spese ornata a stucchi, e oro, ed a varie dipinture divote la Cappella del SS. Sacramento."

⁴⁷ Cattanei, *Descrizione dei monumenti*, 23: «i quattro Evangelisti nella volta, che sono di Giuseppe Mazzoni piacentino.» (Cattanei is incorrect in Mazzoni's baptismal name). For later commentators, see: Ambiveri, *Monumenti ecclesiastici piacentini*, 53; Cerri, *Guida di Piacenza*, 28; Aurini, *Piacenza e provincia*, 40–41. In 1894 the frescoes must have appeared quite dark on account of candle smoke for Pollinary to comment that there were "assai cresciute di tono" (Pollinari, "L'arte nella cattedrale di Piacenza," 198).

⁴⁸ Scarabelli, *Guida ai monumenti storici ed artistici*, 13–14: "i quattro Vangelisti della volta sono di Giulio Mazzoni piacentino, il quale è stato scolare di Daniele da Volterra, tenne poi del buonarrotresco; e perciò fu lodato dal Vasari e dal difficile Milizia. Egli vivea ancora nel 1583 ma senza aver e bene appreso le leggi del sotto in su"; Buttafuoco, *Nuovissima guida della città di Piacenza*, 52: "Nella volta poi, in quattro spartimenti, sono pitturati i quattro Evangelisti da Giulio Mazzoni piacentino. Ebbe questi i primi principi dell'arte dal Vasari, cui poscia perfezionò sotto il magistero di Daniello Ricciarelli da Volterra, dal quale anche apprese a lavorare di stucchi, e diventò pari al maestro. Dalla scuola di Daniello, dice il Lanzi, non recò l'intelligenza di sotto in su, e peccò in questa: molto ragionevole nel rimanente. Viveva nel 1568." See also Lanzi, *Storia pittorica dell'Italia*, 329.

⁴⁹ On Mazzoni, see Pettorelli, *Giulio Mazzoni da Piacenza*; Pugliatti, *Giulio Mazzoni e la decorazione a Roma*. The undersigned is currently completing a PhD thesis on Giulio Mazzoni through the "Sapienza—Università di Roma".

culture of Emilian art (Correggio and Parmigianino), the refined Fontainebleau model filtered through the teachings of Perin del Vaga and Daniele da Volterra, the sensuality of the mature Titian, and, above all, a Michelangiolism, at times exasperated, practiced on the basis of direct observation of the master's works.

The highly personal characteristics of Mazzoni's work, already mature from the time of the decorations in the Palazzo Capodiferro-Spada (1550–53), are evident both in painting and the sculptural modelling of his stucco works. Critics have pointed out the continuity that links the Capodiferro-Spada decorations with a number of Roman works that draw from, and elaborate on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. At the same time, it is not possible to offer an exhaustive stylistic analysis of Mazzoni's stuccos without taking into due account the decisive precedent of the Sala Regia. In this hall the eclectic artwork by Perin del Vaga and Daniele da Volterra's 'Michelangiolism' meet and are cleverly blended.

A second valid reference point strongly advanced by scholars is the sumptuous plastic and pictorial apparatus that adorns certain rooms in the palace of Fontainebleau, built by King Francis I using Italian and French workers. Mazzoni's analysis and its virtuoso application in the Galleria degli Stucchi (Stucco Gallery) in the Palazzo Capodiferro-Spada is thus to be read as a personal response to a series of aesthetic questions that interested intellectuals in Rome and elsewhere in Europe. More specifically, the complexity of this highly refined decorative apparatus can be fully understood only if inserted into the animated cultural debate in the circle of intellectuals gathered around the Farnese family in its noble palace in Rome. Furthermore, one should remember that from the creation of the duchy of Parma and Piacenza in 1545, when the seat of government was still located in Piacenza, Pier Luigi Farnese and his successors encouraged the circulation of writers, councillors, and artists among the various lands governed by the family, thus helping to spread, in Piacentine territory as well, speculative trends and style motifs of Roman origin.

Two letters recently identified by Giuseppe Bertini attest to the efforts carried out in February 1575 for Mazzoni's return as a salaried employee of the duke.⁵⁰ Why an artist somewhat well inserted into the Roman commissions system should prefer to abandon the city in the Jubilee year itself is a mystery still to be solved. We know, however, that on 7 August 1576 Mazzoni is documented as being already back in Piacenza where he is assigned the task of teaching the art of sculpture to the youth

⁵⁰ Bertini, "Giulio Mazzoni," transcribes the letter by Guglielmo della Porta addressed to Ottavio Farnese dated in Rome on 2 February 1575 (ASPr, Carteggio farnesiano estero, 474, fols. n.n.) and the letter sent by the Urbino architect Francesco Paciotto, again addressed to the duke, dated in Rome on 3 February 1575 (ASNa, Archivio farnesiano, 254–255, fols. 674–675).

in the city for a symbolic salary of 5 gold *scudi*.⁵¹ Pettorelli, however, advances the hypothesis that Mazzoni may have returned earlier and painted some works in the cathedral.⁵²

There is no precise start date for the work promoted by Bishop Burali. Some sources suggest a first commission in 1576 given to Ferrante Moreschi, extended several times, and then finally picked up by Mazzoni.⁵³ One can thus hypothesize that Burali, who quite unexpectedly left the city in the fall of 1576, never saw the start of work on this project and that it was the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament that oversaw it and carried it to completion.

Those who had the good fortune of seeing the *Evangelists* in the cathedral expressed a positive judgement on them, such as Michelangelo Gualandi who described them as “drawn and coloured frankly in a Michelangiolesque way and very praiseworthy,”⁵⁴ or Stefano Ticozzi who said that they were “very well preserved and they bear witness to the master’s skill.”⁵⁵ But it is Luigi Ambiveri who describes them most accurately, saying:

Piacenza has the four evangelists painted by Mazzoni on the vault above the altar of the Most Holy Sacrament in the cathedral, very well preserved and so beautiful that they garner the admiration not only of artists, but also of those who are ignorant in the fine arts. In fact, who will not contemplate without feeling grateful the inspired face of St. John; the

⁵¹ ASPc, Archivio storico comunale, Registro delle Provvisioni dal 1575 al 1577, 142, fols. 176–177. These documents are published in Fiori, “Documenti su pinacoteche e artisti piacentini,” 250–251.

⁵² Pettorelli, *Giulio Mazzoni da Piacenza*, 19: “Ma forse un po’ prima egli era ritornato nella città natia, eseguendo, fra l’altro, le pitture della cattedrale.”

⁵³ Scarabelli, *Guida ai monumenti storici ed artistici*, 13: “Quel bacino era stato il 1576 alloggiato a Bernardo Moreschi, ma egli tenne a bada i committenti e non fece mai nulla. Però cesse l’opera nel 1580 che toccò poi al fiammingo.” Fiori, “Notizie biografiche di Ferrante Moreschi,” 112, note 13: “Ms. Gorla 474, Biblioteca: parrebbe che l’atto in data 12 dicembre 1583 sia stato steso dal notaio Pier Paolo Abbati nei cui protocolli non esiste però l’originale del medesimo. Così pure non esistono nei protocolli del notaio G. Francesco Querceto gli accordi per l’esecuzione delle opere che dovevano essere stati stesi il 25 febbraio 1577.” The biographical and artistic career of the stucco artist and painter Ferrante Moreschi (Piacenza 1533–1584) appears rather similar to Mazzoni’s; both returned from Rome at around the same time and were tied by deep trust and stylistic affinities that allowed them to collaborate on several occasions; see Arisi, “Considerazioni su Ferrante Moreschi,” 161–170.

⁵⁴ Gualandi, *Memorie originali italiane*, I, 166: “disegnati e coloriti francamente alla Buonarrottesca e molto lodevoli.”

⁵⁵ Ticozzi, *Dizionario degli architetti, scultori, pittori*, II, s.v. Mazzoni Giulio: “molto ben conservati, ed attestano la bravura del maestro.”

meditative attitude and the rational muscular development of St. Luke that brings to mind something Michelangiolesque; the beautiful speaking head and lively expression of St. Mark and the finesse of St. Matthew's contours?⁵⁶

Mazzoni picked up the same theme in the Alicorni Theodoli chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome where he created "four corner areas in which beautiful candelabras stretch out, and four intermediary areas in which the four Evangelists are painted in fresco: the Eternal Father is depicted in a small medal in the centre"⁵⁷ (fig. 3). In Piacenza Mazzoni might have drawn inspiration exactly from this much appreciated work of his in Rome that "presents a harmonious and well-wrought elegance that places it among the most successful decorative enterprises in the circle of Daniele [da Volterra]."⁵⁸ This vault scheme seems to be in Mazzoni's repertoire, as the chapel in the Palazzo Capodiferro suggests and as a comparison with the drawings published by Peter Dreyer for some decorative projects confirm.⁵⁹ These are three sketches—the two on the *recto* more completely defined and one on the *verso* more ornamental in character—that can very well be placed in the Roman context in the third quarter of the sixteenth century because of their evident adherence to the prevailing taste in the city at that time. Dreyer proposed that the sketch on the left half of the *recto* was a preliminary idea for the ceiling of the Gallery of the Stuccos in the Palazzo Capodiferro, while the sketch on the right half, read in close proximity to the basic motif on the ceiling of the Theodoli chapel, is to be seen as a project for the funeral chapel for the family of Pope Julius III Del Monte (r. 1550–1555), because of the presence of "death trophies" under the pontifical tiara. The system of trapezoid partitions enriched with rosettes that create a patterns of octagons and Greek crosses follows closely the motifs in the Stanza della Cleopatra at the Vatican, a work by Daniele da Volterra from 1551–52,⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ambiveri, *Gli artisti piacentini*, 80–81: "Piacenza possiede del suo Mazzoni i quattro evangelisti dipinti sulla volta dell'altare del SS. Sacramento nella cattedrale, benissimo conservati e così belli da cattivarsi l'ammirazione, non dirò degli artisti soltanto, ma dei profani eziandio alle belle arti. Difatti chi non contemplerà senza grata impressione la faccia ispirata di S. Giovanni; l'attitudine meditativa e il ragionato sviluppo muscolare di S. Luca, che qualche cosa di Michelangiolesco ci richiama alla mente; la bella testa parlante e la viva espressione di S. Marco e la finezza di contorni di S. Matteo?"

⁵⁷ Pettorelli, *Giulio Mazzoni da Piacenza*, 16: "quattro zone angolari in cui si allungano candelabre vaghissime, e quattro zone intermedie, in cui sono dipinti ad affresco i quattro Evangelisti: in una piccola medaglia del centro è rappresentato l'Eterno Padre."

⁵⁸ Pugliatti, *Giulio Mazzoni e la decorazione a Roma*, 201: "presenta un'armoniosa e compiuta eleganza che la pone tra le più riuscite imprese decorative della cerchia di Daniele."

⁵⁹ Dreyer, "Giulio Mazzoni as a Draughtsman."

⁶⁰ Tosini, "La Cappella Alicorni Theodoli," 503.



Fig. 3: Giulio Mazzoni, *Evangelists* (1555-'57 / 1569-'75). Rome, S. Maria del Popolo, Cappella Alicorni Theodoli. Photo: Dario Beccarini.

but more generally adheres to a Sangalloesque ornamental typology inspired by classical Roman antiquity evident in the barrel vault of the presbytery of Santa Maria di Loreto near Trajan's Forum and the ceiling of the Sala Regia at the Vatican.⁶¹

The vault of the left transept of the cathedral (fig. 4) and the cupola of the chapel of Santa Vittoria in the church of Santa Maria di Campagna (fig. 5) can, to this day, suggest the effect of the successful blend of

⁶¹ Joyce, "Studies in the Renaissance Reception of Ancient Vault Decoration."



Fig. 4: Artist in the circle of Giulio Mazzoni, Church Fathers and Evangelists (1580-ca.1590). Piacenza, Cathedral, left transept. Ufficio Beni Culturali Ecclesiastici della Diocesi di Piacenza-Bobbio.



Fig. 5: Giulio Mazzoni and Ferrante Moreschi, vault decorations (ca. 1577). Piacenza, Santa Maria di Campagna, Chapel of Santa Vittoria. Photo: Serena Quagliaroli.

the decorative painting and stucco ornamentation that Mazzoni so well represented and spread in Piacenza and its territory.

It is surprising that the decorations, completely in fresco, of the vault in front of the chapel of the Holy Family in the left transept of the cathedral seems to have been completely forgotten. They are not mentioned in local guidebooks or in scholars' notes up until Rapetti.⁶² It is perhaps possible that the frescoes were brought back to light in the restorations promoted by Bishop Scalabrini in 1897–1901 and, curiously enough, were not sacrificed for the “purity” of the Romanesque. The debt these *Doctors of the Church*—set inside faux architectural frames outlined with pendants of fruits and masks—and the *Four Evangelists* owe to the Romanizing culture brought to Piacenza after 1576 by Giulio Mazzoni has rightly been pointed out. Unfortunately heavily damaged, in a stylistic analysis these figures appear a little rough when compared to Mazzoni's hand, but related to the paintings in the chapel of Santa Vittoria in the features of the faces and the construction of the serpentine poses achieved through the use of puffy draperies around the legs and rotating busts with bare arms in animated attitudes. The illusionistic architecture appears a little weak in its general formulation, perhaps in keeping with that ignorance of perspective that was attributed to Mazzoni and which he would therefore have passed on to his collaborators and students, but is redeemed by the unfolding of numerous decorative elements dear to sixteenth-century tradition culminating in the central trompe-l'oeil of two flying putti seen from below.

The chapel of Santa Vittoria, which has been brought back by some recent restoration work, was also completely neglected by ancient guidebooks, so much so that even Mazzoni's first biographer did not attribute it to the artist.⁶³ The few documents and a chronicle from 1580 composed by a Franciscan friar attribute the frescoes to Ferrante Moreschi,⁶⁴ but it seems more than plausible that the idea for the project and the stuccos belong to Mazzoni (fig. 6).⁶⁵ One can thus hypothesize that the two

⁶² Rapetti, *Guida al Duomo di Piacenza*, 62: “Volta—vi sono dipinti da ignoto pittore, negli angoli i quattro Evangelisti e nel mezzo degli spicchi i Dottori della chiesa.”

⁶³ Pettorelli, *La chiesa di S. Maria di Campagna*, 26: “le pitture della volta, Storia di S. Vittoria e Profeti, sono attribuite ai fratelli Campi.” Pettorelli was perhaps drawing his information from Buttafuoco, *Nuovissima guida*, 133: “la storia di Santa Vittoria e i profeti nell'alto di questa cappella, si dicono dei fratelli Campi, e fatti dipingere dall'ultimo Priore Commendatario della chiesa di detta Santa.”

⁶⁴ Celli, “Nel quarto centenario della consacrazione della basilica di S. Maria di Campagna,” 17–21: “tutta la capella di S.ta Vittoria e Anatolia, tanto nelle figure di stucco, quanto di pittura fu fatta et finita diligentemente et adornata nel 1579 di mano di messer Ferrante Moresco Piacentino quale ha dipinto più ordini in bellissime figure tutta la vita dell'una e dell'altra santa secondo che s'è potuto intendere per alcune scritture antiche di Roma.”

⁶⁵ Pugliatti, *Giulio Mazzoni e la decorazione a Roma*, 207: “a lui ci riporta infatti sia la loro qualità che la magistrale organizzazione del partito decorativo, ma soprattutto la specifica



Fig. 6: Giulio Mazzoni and Ferrante Moreschi, detail of the vault decorations (ca. 1577). Piacenza, Santa Maria di Campagna, Chapel of Santa Vittoria. Photo: Serena Quagliaroli.

artists collaborated on the chapel, possibly starting in 1577,⁶⁶ which then would put the decorations of the chapel of Santa Vittoria in the context of work that Mazzoni carried out in the church of Santa Maria di Campagna until 1589.⁶⁷

Pettorelli points out that Mazzoni decorated the first and second vaults of the four arms that constitute the Greek-cross plan of the church; his work was so appreciated that, in 1585 he was commissioned to paint the third and then, immediately after, the fourth arm. He then added that, according to ancient sources, Mazzoni decorated the barrel vaults with arabesques on a gold background and with large figures inspired, perhaps, by what Parmigianino had done in the church of Santa Maria della Steccata in Parma and then added several statues on the frame of the entablature

tipologia fisica dei telamoni.”

⁶⁶ Fiori, “Notizie biografiche di Ferrante Moreschi,” 112. On 6 May 1577 the notary Gaspare Moreschi drew up a notarial deed dealing with the “mesura fatta della capella quale m^{sr}. Ferrando Moreschi dipinge a nome del Signor Alessandro Borla incominciando nella sommità della capella lassando fori il lanternino.” This information is confirmed by the inscription on the intradoses of the arches of the chapel: ALE. BURLA / DIV. VICTOR. PRIOR / HOC SACELLUM / V.NI ET M.RI DICATUM / EXORNAVIT / MDLXXVII.

⁶⁷ Scarabelli, *Guida ai monumenti storici ed artistici*, 128–129: “Il Mazzoni cominciò il suo lavoro nel 1577: erano figure in campo d’oro, e rabeschi, opera che gli durò dieci anni. Riscosse per tre braccia, dal Comune 780 scudi d’oro, 690 dal duca, 880 dalla fabbrica della chiesa, in tutto quanto 30.000 franchi, oro per oro; del resto non sappiamo ma pare che godesse di altri 900 scudi.” All pertinent contracts are published in the appendix to Arisi/ Arisi, *Santa Maria di Campagna a Piacenza*.

“to break the severity and monotony of the bare lines.”⁶⁸ Unfortunately, nothing is left of this remarkable work, as well. Starting in the eighteenth century, a negative view began to weigh down on Mazzoni’s work that may well have started with Carlo Carasi who says that the paintings, realized around 1583, were not well conceived from the very start because Mazzoni did not understand the laws of perspective painting “from below”. He then concludes that, after the grime from candle smoke had been removed and the decoration restored, they revealed “an intolerable deformity”. Carasi’s criticism falls also on the life-size statues that, representing nude males, are not appropriate “to the decency of a church.”⁶⁹ Carasi’s judgement was clearly not objective both because the frescoes, much damaged by time, had been badly repainted by a local artist, and because of the irreconcilable difference between the neoclassic tastes of his times and late-Mannerist art.

However, as Teresa Pugliatti has more recently pointed out, one should assume the possibility that Mazzoni’s work in Piacenza was at least as good as what he did in Rome.⁷⁰ In both Piacentine cases these were highly prestigious commissions, one in the most important chapel in the cathedral, the other in the ducal church paid by the members of the church’s vestry, by the local community, and by the duke himself. One should also remember that Mazzoni could boast a long association with Farnese circles, starting perhaps with his contributions alongside Daniele da Volterra to the decorations in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome and through a first probable contribution in the Sala Regia at the time of Pope Paul III Farnese.⁷¹ Ferrante Moreschi, who was his close associate,

⁶⁸ Pettorelli, *La chiesa di S. Maria di Campagna*, 38–39: “si ricorse all’opera del piacentino Giulio Mazzoni il quale, dopo aver dipinto con plauso il primo e il secondo braccio, nel 1585 venne incaricato di dipingere il terzo e subito dopo il quarto. Per quello che se ne sa, il Mazzoni aveva decorate le botti con rabeschi su fondo oro e con grandi figure, ispirandosi forse a quanto il Parmigianino aveva fatto nella Steccata. Da quel grande scultore che era, egli volle anche porre sulla cornice della trabeazione parecchie statue in plastica che rompessero, a suo avviso, la monotonia di quelle linee nude e severe.”

⁶⁹ Carasi, *Le pubbliche pitture di Piacenza*, 53–54: “la volta della chiesa fu dipinta da Giulio Mazzoni nel 1583. A dir vero queste pitture neppure da principio eran gran fatto piacevoli, poichè tra le altre cose il Mazzoni non intendeva le leggi del sotto in su: con tuttociò perchè erano assai annerite ed affumicate, l’occhio de’ riguardanti ne rimaneva disgustato. Laddove essendo ora state così indegnamente rifatte palesano una intollerabile deformità [...] Del medesimo Mazzoni sono quelle statue sedenti in varj luoghi del cornicione; dubito molto se convengano alla decenza d’una Chiesa, essendo d’uomini grandi al naturale, ignudi, e là collocati senza verun bisogno.”

⁷⁰ Pugliatti, *Giulio Mazzoni e la decorazione a Roma*, 206: “doveroso considerare la possibilità che queste opere piacentine di Mazzoni, contrariamente a quanto sino ad oggi si sia creduto, fossero almeno all’altezza di quelle romane. Ne d’altra parte si spiegherebbe il contrario.”

⁷¹ Redin Michaus, “Giulio Mazzoni e Gaspar Becerra,” 60–61, n. 21. In ASR, Camerale I. 1511, fols. 90–97 Redin Michaus found payments made in 1546 to a certain “Machone

appears among the founders of the confraternity of the Trinity,⁷² which, as we mentioned, had been strongly promoted by Bishop Burali. Both artists might also have come into contact with the bishop through the latter's *maestro di casa*, the Oratorian Alessandro Borla, a member of the noble Piacentine family that commissioned the decoration of the cupola in the chapel of Santa Vittoria in the church of Santa Maria di Campagna and the decorations in the chapel of the Immaculate Conception in the right transept of the church of Sant'Agostino (fig. 7), where, in fact, the inscription "DEVOTO SYLVII BVRLAE AFFECTV" stands out.⁷³

The modalities surrounding this last commission are still to be determined, as are those for the chapel of the Most Holy Sacrament directly across (fig. 8). These two chapels in the large basilica belonging to the Lateran canons appear to be characterized by an architectural configuration and an ornamentation that seems to be strongly influenced by the Roman model of ancient thermal buildings advanced by Sangallo and his *entourage*. The organization of the decorative program is closely akin to Mazzoni's work, though with unequal results in quality. Nonetheless, the late-Mannerist Roman culture brought to Piacenza by Giulio Mazzoni is evident in the figures in the entablature, in the semi-prone figures along the broken arches of the *serliana*, and in the putti holding escutcheons.

Conclusion

Giulio Mazzoni's work for the confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament in the cathedral in Piacenza and for other churches in town is but one example of a larger set of dynamics operative in post-Tridentine Italy. So is Bishop Burali's pastoral work in promoting confraternities and his close connections with the two major poles of Catholic reform at that time—Borromean Milan and papal Rome. Further research into confraternities in Piacenza is thus bound to deepen our understanding of Catholic reform in the diocese and in northern Italy, while further research on the confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament could well unearth new archival documentation that might help to answer some of the questions raised by our case study of Giulio Mazzoni and his late-Mannerist work.

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Translated from the Italian by Konrad Eisenbichler

scarpellino."

⁷² Fiori, "Documenti su pinacoteche e artisti piacentini," 111.

⁷³ Longeri, "La scultura tra maniera e barocco," 553.



Fig. 7: Circle of Giulio Mazzoni, decorations at the head of the transept (1580-ca.1590). Piacenza, Sant'Agostino, Chapel of the Immaculate Conception. Photo: Serena Quagliaroli.



Fig. 8: Circle of Giulio Mazzoni, decorations at the head of the transept (1580-ca. 1590). Piacenza, Sant'Agostino, Chapel of the Most Holy Sacrament. Photo: Serena Quagliaroli.

CITED WORKS

Abbreviations

- ACCPc = Archivio Capitolare della Cattedrale di Piacenza
ASDPc = Archivio Storico Diocesano di Piacenza
ASNa = Archivio di Stato di Napoli
ASPC = Archivio di Stato di Piacenza
ASPr = Archivio di Stato di Parma
BCPL = Biblioteca Comunale Passerini Landi di Piacenza

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