

Section 2. Study of art

<https://doi.org/10.29013/EJHSS-22-5-9-12>

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“SETTECENTO RIFORMATORE”: LUIGI VANVITELLI BETWEEN ROMA AND NAPOLI

Abstract. The passage of Luigi Vanvitelli from Rome to Naples took place in 1750, when, after the peace, the balance between the Pope and the King of Naples had again been put at risk because the events related to neapolitan masonry. This essay aims to highlight the role of the eclectic and skilled diplomat cardinal Silvio Valenti Gonzaga, in the transfer of Vanvitelli, architect from the reforming climate in Rome, to the service of Carlo.

Keywords: Roma, art, cultural, Caserta, eighteenth century, reformer.

The Royal Palace of Caserta, symbolic architecture of the dynastic power of King Charles of Bourbon, was at the center of a project for the enhancement of Terra di Lavoro. In the idea of the King, the royal palace was to be the administrative centre connected, through a network of paths, to Naples and to other real peripheral sites, conceived as productive and leisure centres [1; 31]. Luigi Vanvitelli [21; 11] was the material architect of the complex utopian project matured in a period identified as “Settecento riformatore” [25]. The enlightened despotism of the rulers, who had the merit of promoting economic, social and political reforms in order to make their State better, was matched by greater papal tolerance. In this sense stands the progressive figures of Benedetto XIV and Silvio Valenti Gonzaga [3]. They produced effective agreements between the Santa Sede and the European Monarchies to guarantee peace and stability in Europe and to defend the centrality of Rome, in response to the crisis that the papacy was going through on the political-economic level. The

main problem that the young king faced in Naples was the relationship with the Santa Sede which boasted its sovereignty. For which with the concordat signed in Rome (June 2, 1741) provided for “terminar le dispute e controversie che da più secoli nel Regno di Napoli sono state su diversi capi tra le Curie laiche ed ecclesiastiche e per torre con ciò ogni occasione di discordia tra le due potenze” [15]. This important event in the history of Southern Italy is remembered in two paintings by Giovanni Paolo Pannini (1746) [2; 5, 26–36] today preserved in the Museum of Capodimonte in Naples. The first was commissioned by the king after the victory of the Bourbon troops over the Austrian ones, and intends to celebrate Charles’ visit to Rome by the Pope in 1741 in the recent building built by Ferdinando Fuga. At the center are the protagonists of the story, the king and Cardinal Gonzaga, surrounded by a crowd of people while you can see Benedetto XIV through a gap hit by a white light. The second, of which it is believed that the painter had been an eyewitness

of the event, portrays the king on horseback at San Pietro with the continuation of the major personalities of Spain in the space berniniano in front of the classical facade of Maderno. Lambertini and Gonzaga were promoters of many interventions in the cultural and artistic of the *Urbe*, started in 1740 and fully developed after 1748 in the climate of European peace following the Pace di Aquisgrana. An initiative worthy of note was the Editto Valenti, which took the name by the cardinal, and was aimed at containing the dispersion of the local cultural heritage with the clarification that the preservation of works of art “porge incitamento a’ Forastieri di portarsi alla medesima Città per vederle, ed ammirarle” [13; 96]. This edict was taken up in *Prammatica LVII* (October 16, 1755) by King Carlo which extended the protection to “pitture antiche, o in tele, o in tavole, o di legno, o di rame, o d’argento, o tagliate da muri” [13; 228] with reference to the archaeological discoveries of Ercolano and Pompei. The Cardinal began an intense program of urban renewal in Rome, demonstrating classical culture, modernity and openness to scientific, technological and scientific innovations, with particular attention to the existing historical heritage [14]. Rome with its famous ruins, became a prolific construction site involving numerous architects as the same Pannini, Luigi Vanvitelli e Ferdinando Fuga both for recoveries and for new buildings. The happy association of the Pope with Gonzaga is documented in the beautiful picture “Benedetto XIV e Silvio Valenti Gonzaga” by Giovanni Paolo Pannini (1749) kept in Palazzo Braschi di Roma. In this painting, a combination of two portraits sanctioned by the international success, that of the Pope of Pannini and the cardinal of Pierre Subleyras, the physical, moral and cultural characteristics of both characters in the field of the arts are exalted [2]. In the center is represented the dome of Michelangelo symbol par excellence of the Church of Rome. In fact, in *Elogio del cardinale Silvio Valenti Gonzaga* is reminded that it was Valenti to suggest to the Pontefice the restoration and embellishment of many Roman monuments and Giovanni Poleni, in his famous 5 books of *Memorie Istoriche della*

Gran Cupola del tempio Vaticano (Padova 1748), recalls that this monument in those years, was the subject of an important recovery considered among the most significant in the history of restoration, for which he was flanked by Ruggero Giuseppe Boscovich, Thomas La Seur e Francois Jaquier, scientists training physics-mathematics and Newtonian setting, and by the architect Luigi Vanvitelli. “Nella gestione del cantiere romano, l’architetto diede prova di capacità imprenditoriali, rivelando un tratto della sua personalità che gli avrebbe fatto gioco nell’affrontare la costruzione di una fabbrica mastodontica come la reggia di Caserta [...] La coppia Poleni-Vanvitelli dette vita ad una simbiosi antesignana del futuro degli studi nel campo del restauro, oggi impraticabili senza l’apporto di una pluralità di competenze disciplinari come, ad esempio, la fisica, la chimica, l’archeologia e la storia dell’arte” [8, 11–12].

Another important painting by Pannini, the same year exalts the figure of the cardinal as a refined collector and protector of artists. Here the painter portrays himself alongside the cardinal and shows an imaginary architecture inspired by Palazzo Colonna. There are about 150 paintings from the cardinal’s rich collection, which boasted over 800 pieces [10, 54]. The painting *La quadreria del cardinale Valenti Gonzaga* (1748), in Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford-Connecticut, would portray the cardinal together with his *equipe* of intellectuals in which they were identified Jaquier, Thomas La Seur, Boscovich, as well as the grandson Luigi Valenti Gonzaga, to whom he bequeathed his rich library with the only condition of preserving it without dispersing it. He decided to donate the library collection to the Compagnia di Gesù, which later became the Biblioteca Nazionale di Roma [18, 237–270]. In the elegant villa with spectacular gardens also home to the library the cardinal held conversations on painting, sculpture and architecture [10].

Vanvitelli at this time had relations with the team of Gonzaga engaged in the analysis of archaeological findings that emerged numerous in those areas during the work on the new buildings. In “Il Giornale de’ Letterati”, an important scientific journal sponsored

by Gonzaga and founded by Michelangelo Giacomelli and Gaetano Cenni, an article in 1746 states that while the architect was engaged in the renovation of Villa Rufinella, property of the Gesuiti. Important findings were also mentioned by Winckelmann in his *History of the Arts* [12, 51] and Vanvitelli had demonstrated his collaboration “nel delineare quel che per lo scavo appariva, e nel pigliare di tutto le misure” [27, 116]. Both Giacomelli and Cenni were very influential scholars in Roman academic circles, in particular Giacomelli, considered by Raventós to be a personal friend of Winckelmann [12; 150], was consulted on the question of the collapse of Michelangelo’s dome of San Pietro. Their names recur in numerous letters from the volume of Franco Strazzullo of 1976 and they were involved by the architect in the laying of the first stone of Caserta about the phrases to be engraved on the objects [22, 76, 83, 84]. Luigi Vanvitelli was appreciated by the cardinal for his technical skills in the restoration of monuments, those hydraulic-engineering of the territory, and for the scenography skills that were expressed through magnificent installations rich in symbolic meanings including the decorative project realized in San Pietro in 1746 together with colleagues Sintes and Rinaldi [20]. In particular, “[...] nell’anno Santo del 1750 fu prescelto a dirigere gli ornamenti delle tribune di S. Pietro, e l’Illuminazione di quella cupola, che esegui in maniera tutta nuova. Diresse ancora gli apparati di una santificazione, i funerali della Regina d’Inghilterra, ed il trasporto della Pietà di Michelangelo” [21; 25].

Against this background, it is important to note that Vanvitelli, who participated in the cultural debate of his time through the literary salons he frequented and his illustrious knowledge, in 1750 was able to juggle complicated diplomatic dynamics between King Carlo and Valenti Gonzaga, both sensitive to art, history and ancient and both promoters of important transformations of the territory [9, 111–114]. He was able to interpret first the message of prestige and prestige of the Papal States, then that of peace and alliance between the king and the Pope with the setting of the spectacular ceremony for the laying of the first stone of the Caserta palace, and finally that of strength and power of the Kingdom of Naples with the construction of the same, remembered systematically in the stories of those travelers who from the sixties of the eighteenth century went to the territory of Caserta numerous to enjoy its “delights”. In the first pages of the book by Franco Strazzullo in 1976 we learn that Valenti Gonzaga played a fundamental role in the commissioning of the Royal Palace of Caserta [23, 14; 22, 459]. The laying of the first stone, which took place on 20 January 1752, was an event of extraordinary importance for the Bourbon government, giving rise to the ambitious expansionist program of the king in Terra di Lavoro. The voice of the event came to the courts of Europe with an advertising booklet printed a few days after the event already mentioned in 2000 [25] and the subject of an in-depth study of my recent work [17].

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