

La cappella di Antonio e Michele Bonsi in San Gregorio al Celio e alcuni scultori lombardi a Roma

Abstract

The Chapel of Antonio and Michele Bonsi in San Gregorio al Celio and Several Lombard Sculptors in Rome

Only two components still survive of the chapel commissioned by the Florentine brothers Antonio and Michele Bonsi in the Basilica of San Gregorio al Celio in Rome during the second half of the fifteenth century. The first is their monumental wall-tomb, complete with a lengthy inscription and portrait-busts of its patrons. The second is a marble relief featuring three scenes from the life of Pope Gregory I the Great. The imagery of the relief is engaging, as the Gregorian scenes feature a rare episode, the *Mass of St. Gregory*, as well as two unprecedented scenes. The tomb's portrait busts are an innovative element in tomb design in the Urbs, although the exact level of originality depends on the monument's dating. Since an 1893 article by Domenico Gnoli, both elements have been linked to Luigi Capponi, a Milanese sculptor active in Rome from 1485, although doubts concerning the tomb's authorship have been expressed by later scholars. Capponi's oeuvre is, however, notoriously problematic. Only two works of art can be ascribed to him on a documentary basis and it is arguable that even these sources may be questionable. Despite these problems, no study has specifically focused on the Celio artworks, nor tried to interpret them in connection to their patrons. This article revolves precisely around such issues.

The first part focuses on the Bonsi brothers, examining their families, devotional interests, and the specific events and personal connections that might have influenced their choice of the Celio for their patronage, as well as the form and content of the artworks they sponsored. In the second part, the information on Antonio and Michele, as well as a thorough description of the chapel and its now lost components dating from 1578, are used to reframe the imagery of both relief and tomb, as well as the latter's inscription. It is argued that the imagery and inscription betray Antonio and Michele's concern with their reputation, memorialization, and the promotion of their public image. The final section of the article focuses on the dating and attributional history of the Bonsi chapel artworks. Heraldry and references to events and confraternities previously introduced are used to anchor both tomb and relief to specific *termini post quem*, and to argue that they were likely both created in the 1490s. In order to determine if they can be assigned to Luigi Capponi, this section further assesses the type of Lombard culture manifest in the Celio artworks and compares it to the two sculptures generally accepted as by the Milanese artist.