

Representational Strategies in the Baldini Tomb at Sant'Agostino and in other Physicians' Funerary Monuments in Baroque Rome

Abstract

When Giovan Giacomo Baldini died in 1656, he had no inkling that a funerary monument would be erected in his honor. A papal physician whose family had its origins in Apiro in the Marches Region, Baldini lived most of his life in Rome and, upon his death, was buried in the Basilica of Sant'Agostino. In his will, he furnished detailed instructions for his internment under a simple floor slab, an indication of his spiritual concern for the salvation of his soul rather than of a desire for the perpetuation of his memory. Soon after Baldini's death, however, and contrary to his wishes, the project of a grandiose funerary monument was undertaken by his universal heirs, the Twelve Canons of the Collegiate church of Sant'Urbano in Apiro that had been founded in 1633 by the physician himself under the aegis of the then ruling pope, Urban VIII Barberini. The discovery of abundant and hitherto unpublished documentation regarding Baldini's funerary monument sheds new light on this neglected personage. Even more importantly, it allows for the reconstruction of the complex stages of the monument's creation, a lengthy process (1656–ca. 1678) involving artists and architects such as Francesco Borromini, Giovanni Somazzi and Pietro Papaleo, prolonged through interruptions, design revisions, the death of one of the artists, dissatisfaction on the part of the patrons, and even a legal dispute.

To broaden the perspective of the present study and determine whether Baldini's restrictive prescriptions regarding his burial were common among his contemporary colleagues, the paper takes into consideration several last wills of other physicians active in Rome, and examines whether and how they wished to be remembered, were it through a humble floor slab or a monumental tomb.