

## GIUSEPPE PIAMONTINI

### Saint Mark

Giuseppe Piamontini was a follower – though twelve years younger – of Giambattista Foggini (1652–1725), founder of the school of Florentine late Baroque sculpture which flourished under the last members of the Medici dynasty of Grand Dukes (Kader 1996). He studied in the short-lived, but effective, Medici academy founded by Cosimo III in Rome between 1681 and 1686. When he returned to Florence, the heir apparent, Gran Principe Ferdinando (1663–1713), took a special interest in Piamontini – perhaps partly because they were almost the same age – and commissioned from him many sculptures, the first when the sculptor was only fourteen, in marble, Saint John the Baptist for the Baptistry of the Cathedral (exh. cat. Florence 2013).

The present statuette is a modello for a colossal marble statue of Saint Mark that Piamontini carved for the new, Baroque, church of Santi Michele e Gaetano in the centre of Florence (fig. 1; Chini 1984, pp. 217–18, pl. 258): this was attributed to him first by Lankheit (1962, pp. 165–66) and confirmed by Montagu (1974, fig. 27), who identified it as one of the two statues on the interior façade of the church that are called in the sculptor’s autobiography only “due Apostoli Grandi”: “and having now some familiarity with [Piamontini’s] style, we can suggest his authorship for the ‘St Mark’ and the ‘St Simon’, or ‘Judas Thaddeus’ [now believed to be St Luke]. Both of them wear heavy cloth, with thick rather angular ridges, which served also for the ‘Abraham’ of a quarter of a century later, and the ‘St Mark’ makes use of an old physiognomic device, repeating in the prominent cheekbones long nose and downturned mouth exaggerated by centuries of dust, the features of the lion at his feet. In the raised foot and complex twist of the body we can compare his pose to that of the porcelain Faun or the bronze Satyr.”

The Saint Mark is unique among the series of statues inasmuch as the original contract of 27 April 1693 between the sculptor and his patrons, the Theatine monks, has survived (Chini, 1984, p. 304, doc. 40). It was to follow a signed drawing and to be carved out of a single block of white Carrara marble standing about four braccia high (i.e. c. 233 cm, or just below eight foot, tall). It had to be finished within six months and Piamontini would be paid 350 scudi, of which he received an advance of 100 scudi, followed by a number of much smaller instalments of just 12 scudi, which then merged in 1694–95 with those for three narrative reliefs to go below his and other similar statues (Chini 1984, pp. 305–06, doc.

41).

Alas, there is no specific payment for a clay model, although, for statues of Hope and Poverty that had been carved previously for the façade by Permoser, that sculptor had been paid 10 scudi on 15 December 1685 for the full-size modelli, and “other small ones to show to the Grand Duke” (Chini 1984, p. 303, doc. 39: “Per li detti Modelli grandi ed altri piccoli da mostrarsi al Ser.mo Gran Duca”). The present model could well have been the subject of the first instalment that the sculptor received about one month later, on 5 June 1693, while the statue – presumably all but finished – was installed in its niche by a mason and labourer (replacing an earlier, old-fashioned image) just under a year later, on 30 May 1694. It may also have been an – otherwise undescribed – statuette exhibited under Piamontini’s name at Santissima Annunziata

in 1705 (Meloni Trkulja 1977, p. 584: Piamontini: ...“una statuetta”).

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#### Related Literature

Giuseppe Richa, SJ, *Notizie storiche delle chiese fiorentine ...*, Florence, 1745, III, pp. 191–230, esp.

p. 214 (Piamontini's name in a list of the sculptors who participated in carving the twelve Apostles and two saints for the interior of the church)

K. Lankheit, *Florentinische Barockplastik: Die Kunst am Hofe der letzten Medici 1670–1743*, Munich, 1962

F.J. Cummings and M. Chiarini, eds., *The Twilight of the Medici: Late Baroque Art in Florence, 1670–1743 / Gli Ultimi Medici: Il tardo barocco a Firenze, 1670–1743*, exh. cat., Detroit Institute of Arts / Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 1974

J. Montagu, 'Some small sculptures by Giuseppe Piamontini', *Antichità Viva*, XIII, no. 4, 1974, pp. 1–19

S. Meloni Trkulja, 'I due primi cataloghi di mostre fiorentine', in *Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Ugo Procacci*, 2 vols., Florence, 1977, II, p. 584

E. Chini, *La chiesa e il convento dei Santi Michele e Gaetano a Firenze*, Florence, 1984, pp. 217–19

S. Bellesi, 'L'antico e i virtuosismi tardobarocchi nell'opera di Giuseppe Piamontini', *Paragone*, XLII, (N.S. 28), no. 497, July 1991, pp. 21–38, pls. 25–52

G. Pratesi, *Repertorio della scultura fiorentina del Seicento e Settecento*, Turin, 1993, pp. 55–56

A. Kader, 'Piamontini', in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. J. Turner, London 1996, vol. 24, pp. 696–97

M. de Luca, 'Bronzetti e marmi del Gran Principe Ferdinando nell'inventario del 1713', in *Arte Collezionismo Conservazione*, Scritti in onore di Marco Chiarini, Florence, 2004

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Circa: 1693