

Francesco Borromini

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Francesco Castelli, who later took the name Borromini, was born in Bissone in September 1599, the son of Giovanni Domenico Castelli, a builder of whom little is known, and of Anastasia Garovo.¹ He trained as a stonemason in Milan, where he worked at the cathedral, and went to Rome around 1619, where he joined Maderno's workshop at St Peter's as a carver and draughtsman. After Maderno's death he worked with Gian Lorenzo Bernini on the baldachin of St Peter's and on the Palazzo Barberini before the two men parted in rivalry.

Borromini's independent works include San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (from 1634), built for the Spanish Trinitarians, the Oratory of the Filippini (from 1637), Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza (1643–1662), the rebuilding of the nave of San Giovanni in Laterano for the Holy Year 1650 and the continuation of Sant'Agnese in Agone.² He died in Rome on 3 August 1667 and was buried, at his own wish, in Maderno's tomb in San Giovanni dei Fiorentini. His heir and the keeper of his drawings was his nephew Bernardo Castelli Borromini, which shows how the estate of even the most individual of these artists was handled as family property.³

1 A chain of kinship

The careers of Fontana, Maderno and Borromini form a chain that runs through three villages on a few kilometres of lake shore (Melide, Capolago and Bissone) and through two or three interlinked families. Uncle recruited nephew, and nephew recruited a young distant relative. Each generation of the workshop trained the next. Around the three famous names stood dozens of less known relatives and neighbours, such as Giovanni Fontana, Domenico's brother, who built aqueducts and hydraulic works for Paul V, and later Carlo Fontana of Rancate in the Mendrisiotto, who was principal of the Accademia di San Luca in the 1690s and became architect of St Peter's in 1697. The sculptor Stefano Maderno, whose statue

of Saint Cecilia is one of the best-known works of the period, was long counted among them, although recent research places his origins in Palestrina or Rome.⁴

Essentials. The Roman careers of the lake masters rested on three institutions. The first was the family workshop, which recruited and trained relatives from the home villages. The second was the patronage of a pope or cardinal, which could open the public building offices to a whole network. The third was the *nazione lombarda*, whose confraternities and churches offered religious community, credit, burial and a forum for disputes. The fortunes earned in Rome were exposed to political risk, as the fall of Domenico Fontana in the 1590s shows, and were therefore often transferred home or diversified across Rome, Naples and the lake villages.

2 Notes

1. Carboneri, "Borromini, Francesco" (cited above), which gives the date of birth as 27 September 1599. ↩
2. Carboneri, "Borromini, Francesco" (cited above). ↩
3. Carboneri, "Borromini, Francesco" (cited above). ↩
4. Wikipedia, "Giovanni Fontana (architect)", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Fontana_\(architect\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Fontana_(architect)) (used as a last resort); Helmut Hager, "Fontana, Carlo", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 48 (Rome 1997), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-fontana_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-fontana_(Dizionario-Biografico)/); Harula Economopoulos, "Maderno, Stefano", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 67 (Rome 2006), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/stefano-maderno_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/stefano-maderno_(Dizionario-Biografico)/). ↩

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