

Presentation summary: The Church of SS. Severino e Sossio in Naples (Luisa Elena Alcalá)

The church of SS. Severino and Sossio in Naples was the most important Benedictine church in the city. The Benedictines had been present in the city since the 10th century. Situated in the older part of Naples, the church was regarded as a prestigious place, and in the sixteenth century the friars seem to have capitalized on its attraction as a place of burial for the new rich, including lower nobility and other persons as well, such as the fresco painter Belisario Corenzio who worked in the church extensively throughout his life.

In terms of Spanish connections, it is important to recall that Alfonso II was especially attached to the Benedictines. He seems to have donated a considerable amount to the monastery in 1494 for a new building. However, because of the French invasion in 1495 and his abdication, it is not entirely clear what happened to that donation. It is also worth noting that upon abdicating, Alfonso retired to a Benedictine convent.

Despite the lack of documentary clarity regarding the monastery and its buildings during the transitional years of the early sixteenth century, it is evident that the church's wealth made the construction of an entirely new building possible starting in the 1530s. This new church was consecrated in 1571, and the following decades saw intense activity in the arena of pictorial and sculptural commissions for the interior decoration.¹

SS. Severino y Sossio preserves many original works from the sixteenth century, a time of considerable artistic eclecticism in Naples. However, it is not a church of "masterpieces" and the works that are by renown artists, such as Giovanni Merliano da Nola's tombs of the three assassinated children in the Sanseverino chapel, or the attribution to Bartolomé Ordoñez of the gracious tomb of Andrea Bonifacio, were made before these masters had attained the apex of their fame. Other artists working here, such as Belisario Corenzio and Marco Pino seem to have used the chapel commissions to build a solid reputation for themselves.

It is the period in which these later artists (Corenzio, Pino, and others) worked, between the 1570s and 1600, that I find most interesting and relevant for study in the context of this project. Like many artists working in Naples in the sixteenth century, Marco Pino was not of Neapolitan origin. He seems to have been Sienese, a follower of Beccafumi, and to have developed his early career in Rome. It seems probable that, like most artists flocking to Rome, he found it difficult to stand out amidst the tremendous competition there. He appears working in Naples by the 1550s, but it is not clear how he arrived. The absence of information suggests that he may simply have considered Naples a place of opportunity considering the wealth of the city and the many building and decoration campaigns at that time. This would be a different case of "mobility of the artist" from some of the others discussed during our trip, who we noted went to Naples with commissions and patrons already secured. In these years, Pino seems to have taken over the local artistic scene, especially regarding large narrative altarpiece painting. Nonetheless, he attempted a second sojourn in Rome between 1568 and 1570, only to

¹ However, in the current church, there are some tombs and objects which predate the consecration period considerably; and it is not entirely clear if they were made for the still existing older "lower" church or while construction was being undertaken on the new church.

return to Naples once more. In 1571, Pino produced two large paintings, *Assumption of the Virgin* and *Adoration of the Magi* for SS. Severino and Sossio. A few years later, in 1581, he signed an *Adoration of the Shepherds* for another chapel, now demonstrating a more baroque and less mannerist style. He died in Naples in 1583.

The bibliography I was able to read regarding the church and its decoration, in the time allotted and with the resources available in Madrid, was limited, and thus I also pursued some general readings on Neapolitan art of the period in order to gain a sense for the place of this church and especially its pictorial decoration in the wider context. With regard to the latter, I found Giovanni Previtali's 1978 monograph (a long essay really), *La pittura del cinquecento a Napoli e nel vicereame*, to be quite interesting and suggestive in relation to the kinds of art historical questions involved in our project.

In this book, Previtali analyzes Pino and others in order to understand how Naples's rich and heterogeneous community of painters and patrons impacted on the development of certain pictorial styles. In terms of Pino, he notes that his style changed once he arrived in Naples. Previtali identifies his early works in the city with clear Michelangelesque leanings in the overly large treatment of the human form and the serpentine figures. However, some years later, he seems to tame down his style, and it becomes more reformed. What I find interesting in his analysis are the questions and methodology employed to address this stylistic change. Previtali considers whether this is a sign that Pino was adapting to a Neapolitan style, but also asks if such a thing as a "Neapolitan style" even existed at this time. He ponders whether Pino is adapting to Neapolitan patrons, many Spanish, of a more marked severe spirituality. And, with common sense, Previtali considers the extent to which this transformation might have been a logical stylistic evolution in Pino's career, considering overall changes in the period and the presence of other foreign artists in the city.

Leaving aside the details and ways in which he steers this analysis through these questions, Previtali's text invites us to study Pino in terms of several processes related to the mobility of the artist in Italy (and, in general, in the Early Modern period, including Latin America), such as pictorial adaptation and negotiation (or Juana Gutiérrez's *koine*). By analyzing Pino - as Previtali does - , in relation to other contemporary painters, he becomes a piece of the puzzle that is "Neapolitan painting" in this period prior to its development as a "school" with clearer stylistic features in the seventeenth century (from Ribera on).

My thoughts and comments on Pino and this church have been largely informed by Previtali's book, not because he deals directly with this church or its paintings in any depth, but because he deals with questions of the geography of art and the identity of artistic "schools" in ways that ring familiar and appropriate for Latin America.

Other monuments studied in this visit and issues raised in group discussion:

1. Tomb of the young boy Andrea Bonifacio attributed to Bartolome Ordoñez (ca. 1516-17):

- Relationship of texts to images and, in this case, the inscription (poem) to the art work. This tomb includes an inscription by the famous poet Sannazaro, leading literary figure in Naples. Is the style and the emotive component in this example (especially as seen in the *Lamentation* relief below) inspired or indebted in any way to the poet? We also remarked on the abundance of inscriptions in Neapolitan churches vis-à-vis other parts of Italy.
- Opportunities for Ordoñez to work in Naples in his mid-career. Later does one of the royal tombs in the Royal Chapel in Granada Cathedral.



2. Tombs of three boys of the Sanseverino family by Nola (1539)

- An example of an early work by Nola, who later does the tomb of Pedro de Toledo in S. Giacomo. Nola is often associated with the rise of a local Neapolitan school of sculpture. How does this work fit into this framework?
- Relationship of figural representations to surrounding space and activation of space and gazes through the arrangement of the tombs and of the reliefs above them.



Additional bibliography on different parts of SS Severino e Sossio

D'Aniello, Lawrence R. "La cappella medici di Gragnano nella chiesa dei Santi Severino e Sossio a Napoli", in *Napoli Nobilissima*. Volume VI, n° 1/4, January-August 2005.

Farina, Viviana. "Un episodio di committenza genovese nella Napoli del primo quarto del seicento: la cappella Massa ai Santi Severino e Sossio", in "*Napoli è tutto il mondo*". *Neapolitan Art and Culture from Humanism to the Enlightenment*. Rome, 2008.

Pagnotta, Laura. "Per Antonio Solario: un riesame critico e alcune proposte attributive", *Bollettino d'Arte*, XCVI, 2011, n° 9, pp. 59-108.

Tamajo Contarini, María. *Chiesa dei Santi Severino y Sossio: la sacrestia*, Napoli, 2014.