Appendix

Biographies of the Designers and Artists of the Sacro Monte di Orta

The information for the biographies that follow comes from a variety of sources (see notes). The identification of dates and artists associated with each specific chapel in the essays are, in the main, sourced from placards at the site created by the Governing Authority of the Sacri Monti, and the guides by Fr. Angelo Manzini, and Elena De Filippis and Fiorella Carcano.

Bascapè (1550–1615), Carlo, Bishop of Novara (1593–1615)
Born in Milan, Bascapè rose through the ranks of the church as a Barnabite. His position as secretary to Carlo Borromeo led to his appointment as Bishop of Novara. His dedication to the post-Tridentine reform and church renewal is manifest in the multiple building projects to which he dedicated himself, including his meticulous concern for the Sacro Monte di Orta, for which he played an integral role in selecting artists and designing the artistic program of the site.

Beretta, Carlo (Il Berettone, d. ca. 1763), Sculptor, Chapel XIV
Beretta’s early history is unknown, but according to the Annali della fabbrica del duomo di Milano, dall’origine fino al presente, by 1716 he was regularly employed at the Duomo in Milan where he was working on the sculptural program and designing bronze bas-reliefs. At the Sacro Monte di Orta, Beretta created the terracotta statues for Chapel XIV (and Chapel XV according to the Dizionario Biografico, though De Filippis and Carcano, and Manzini give credit to Prestinari). Rossana Bossaglia notes that Beretta was well regarded by his peers, though she describes his work as often “superficially sweet” and “unimaginative” yet imbued with “rococo gracefulness.”

Bianchi, Federico (ca. 1635–1719), Painter, Chapel XIII
Bianchi was a Milanese scholar and teacher under the patronage of the Duke of Savoy, who conferred a knighthood on the artist. He was active at Orta in 1692, where he, along with Giovanni Battista Cantalupi and Giovanni Grandi, painted the wall frescos of Chapel XIII, “The Humility of St. Francis.” Bianchi also worked at various churches, palaces, and cloisters around Northern Italy. Bossaglia describes the baroque painter’s skill as evolving over time from the “awkward and cumbersome” paintings at Orta to the “noble,” “airy and graceful” work of his later years. Giuseppe Pacciarotti is kinder when describing most of Bianchi’s work as “traditional,” noting the “great theatricality” and “powerful expressions” of his frescos at the Sacri Monti.
Busca, Antonio (1625–86), Painter, Chapels XIX and XX
Busca was student of Ercole Procaccini the Younger (1605–1675/1680), a noted baroque artist in his own right and member of the Procaccini family of painters who established the great art academy in Milan.\(^8\) Busca also apprenticed with Carlos Nuvolone (brother of another painter known at the Sacro Monte di Orta, Giuseppe Nuvolone), and was later appointed director of painting at the Ambrosian Academy in Milan. Busca worked with sculptor Dionigi Bussola at both the Sacro Monte di Varese and at the Sacro Monte di Orta. While his frescos could be “pleasant and friendly owing to the clear and bright palette,” Michael Bryan suggests that after a promising start, Busca never lived up to expectations. Hampered by ill-health (a serious case of gout), Busca “sank into a mannerist, and contented himself with frequently repeating the same subjects.”\(^9\) This lackluster assessment of Busca’s work is at odds with the finely executed architectural framing and vignettes of the walls of Chapel XX, and theatrically and colorfully expansive ceiling of that same chapel.

Bussola, Dionigi (1615–87), Sculptor, Chapels II, VI, VII, X, XVII, XVIII, and XX
Bussola was a Milanese sculptor, working in both clay and bronze, whose style is characterized by Gabriella Ferri Piccaluga as, in the main, “a fusion of classicism and baroque.” He taught at the Ambrosian Academy and worked on the Duomo of Milan.\(^10\) But it was with his work for the Sacro Monte of Varallo, of Varese, of Domodossola, and of Orta, Piccaluga believes, that Bussola achieved full baroque theatrically of expression.\(^11\)

Canobio, Amico (1530/32–1592), Patron of the Sacro Monte di Orta (c. 1590–1592)
Amico Canobio, son of a wealthy Novarese family and abbot of the Benedictine-affiliated St. Bartholomew of Vallombrosa monastery in Novara, took charge of the initial promotion and construction of the Sacro Monte. He commissioned and funded three of the first chapels, Chapels XVIII, XIX, and XX—together a simulacrum of the Basilica of Assisi. He left a generous legacy in his will to fund the ongoing work of the Sacro Monte.\(^12\)

Cantalupi, Giambattista (active c. 1772), Painter, Chapels XII and XIII
Very little is known about this artist, except that he specialized in frescos and was employed in the areas around Vercelli and Miasino, both cities near Orta san Giulio. He was at one point a teacher at the Academy of Parma.\(^13\) Luigi Mallè describes Cantalupi’s work in Chapel XIII as “refined and sensitive”\(^14\) and believes that his frescos have been undervalued.\(^15\)

Cleto da Castelletto Ticino (1556–1619), Chief Architect of the Sacro Monte di Orta (1594–1619)
There is no information about Father Cleto’s early years or his training (if any) in architecture and construction. It seems that he joined the Capuchins around the age of twenty and by 1585 appears in diocesan records as the head of a convent (no longer in existence) in Romagnano Sesia, where his duties would have included overseeing its construction.\(^16\) In 1590, he appears once again in this capacity for the monastery of Verano Brianza. Also in that year Cleto became involved in the construction of the Sacro Monte di Orta, though the records indicate that he did not take charge of the project, a position to which he was elected, until 1594. Over the next couple of decades, and in addition to his duties at Orta, Cleto was involved in multiple construction projects throughout the region [in Milan, Quarona, Fara Novarese, Locarno (across the border in Switzerland), Soriso, Omegna, Auzate, Varallo, Doccio, Cannobio, Ivrea, Faido, Pallanza, and Cerro Maggiore] on behalf of Bishop Carlo Bascapè who, among his other administrative responsibilities, coordinated these projects for the Province of Novara. Cleto’s job at the Sacro Monte di Orta was “hands on”: he designed
the layout of the mountain, including the streets, chapels and trees; he helped determine a fair salary for artists; and Cleto traveled to the nearby area of Vercelli to procure clay for the sculptors. A letter from Bascapè also indicates, with a reference to Cleto’s request for Cesare Ripa Perugino’s work Iconologia, that Cleto was instrumental in selecting the iconographic program for the chapels.19

Crespi Castoldi, Anton Maria (1598?–1630), Painter, Chapel VII
Born into a family of painters from the commune of Busto Arsizio in the area of Varese, most of his surviving works are found in and around Como where he lived. Though nothing is known of his training, Crespi Castoldi painted in the style of Milanese artists such as Morazzone and the Fiammenghini and was noted for his accomplished portraiture. He, along with his wife and children, died in Como of the plague in 1630.20

D’Enrico, Giovanni (1560–1644), Sculptor and Painter, Chapels VII, VIII, IX, and XI
Giovanni Romano describes Giovanni d’Enrico as a gifted sculptor, who both modeled and painted terracottas at Varallo, Oropa and Orta. Along with his brothers Melchiorre (the Elder, 1570–1641) and Antonio (Tanzio, 1574–1635), Giovanni operated within the large d’Enrico family workshop in the Val Sesia.21 Giacomo Ferro is mentioned as an assistant to Giovanni in the records of the fabbricia for Chapel IX.22 Though Giovanni’s work at Orta was prodigious, he is probably best known for the period he directed the construction of Varallo and where he spent most of his professional life.

D’Enrico, Melchiorre (1570–1641), Painter, Chapels VII, VIII, IX, and XI
Though Melchiorre was regionally known as a fresco artist with significant commissions such as the Jucio Universal for the façade of the Church of Riva Valdobbia in Vercelli,23 he is best remembered working alongside his brother Giovanni painting terracotta statues at Varallo and Orta. Romano describes his work as securely within the Mannerist style popular in the sixteenth century and remaining so at the Sacri Monti well into the seventeenth century.24

Della Rovere, Giovan Battista (1561–1630?), Painter, Chapels II, III, IV, V and VI
Giovan Battista and his brother Giovan Mauro were both called The Fiamminghino (together The Fiamminghini) owing to their family’s Flemish origins. Givan Battista was a very well regarded Milanese painter, who worked at both Varallo and Orta as well as the Duomo of Milan, where he was noted for his skill in painting architectural elements and use of perspective. Leonardo Caviglioli makes special note of his adroit use of color, particularly the tonal qualities of pinks, yellows, and bright greens.25

Della Rovere, Giavon Mauro (1575–1640), Painter, Chapels II, III, IV, and VI
A Milanese painter who, like his brother Giovan Battista, was known as The Fiamminghino. Leonardo Caviglioli attributes to Giavon Mauro’s early works a “grandeur and dynamism, compositional safety and refined chromaticism.” Michael Bryan also comments on his compositional grandeur, portraiture, landscapes with animals, and battle scenes. With his brother, Giovan Mauro held commissions throughout Northern Italy (Varallo, Orta, Como, Novara, Brescia, Sorico, and Milan) as well as at the Abbey of Clairvaux.26

Falconi, Bernardo (active c. 1657–96), Sculptor, Chapel XIII
Falconi was famed for his bronze and marble statuary, his skill being such that he had frequent royal commissions, including those of Carlo Emanuele II, the Duke of Savoy. Falconi is known to have worked in Venice, Parma, Turin, Genoa, Padua, and, in 1692, at Orta (along with Rusnati) on the figures and marble columns of Chapel XIII. A year later, he collaborated on the colossal bronze statue of San Carlo Borromeo in Arona. Paola Rossi
suggests that his initial classicizing style matured over the years, retaining a “lingering classical taste” while adding “accents of quiet solemnity to large, emphatic monumental forms.”  

Ferrario, Federico (1714–1802), Painter, Chapel XIV
Little is known about Ferrario, though he was a prolific painter in Milan (not at the Duomo, however), Lodi, Clairvaux, Bergamo, Cremona, Pavia, and Bergamasco. He also served as a director of the Ambrosian Academy in Milan. Though considered a minor artist, his baroque frescos in Chapel XIV at Orta and in the Chapel of St. John at the Church of St. Angelo in Milan are well regarded.

Gianoli, Pietro Francesco (1624–92), Painter, Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel (Chapel II)
Born in the Val Sesia, Gianoli studied in Milan and then Rome, where he a member of the Academy of St. Mark, but nevertheless spent most of his career working extensively throughout Piedmont and Lombardy. He was noted for his portrait and figural work, and the grandeur, sensitivity, expressiveness, and color which characterized his frescoes. Gianoli’s paintings can be found in numerous churches and private Milanese homes, but also in multiple chapels at the Sacro Monte di Varallo (some of his work there is preserved, some is not), and in the Lady of Sorrows Chapel adjacent to Chapel II of the Sacro Monte di Orta.

Grandi, Giovanni Battista (1643–1718), Painter, Chapels XIII and XVII
Grandi was a baroque painter born in Varese. He often worked in partnership with his brother Gerolamo (1658–1718), and they in turn collaborated with Giovanni Battista Cantalupi and Federico Bianchi for the painted program of Chapel XIII at Orta. Grandi was then hired to complete the painting of Chapel XVII, begun by Giuseppe Nuvolone. Both Gerolamo and Giovanni Battista Grandi worked at the Sacro Monte di Varese (with Stefano Maria Legnani) in addition to Orta. Giovanni Battista was quite adept at ornamental and architectural painting, though claims that he was also an architect remain unsubstantiated.

Legnani, Stefano Maria (Legnanino, 1661–1713), Painter, Chapel XVI
Legnanino (“little Legnani” to distinguish him from his father, also a painter) was trained in Bologna and Rome. Legnani’s work is baroque with rococo tendencies and characterized by soft forms, clear colors, and a “high level of technical and stylistic skills.” He had an excellent reputation and was in constant demand among the elites of Turin and Milanese society. Legnani is also identified as one of the most important Lombard architects of the period. In addition to working at Orta, Legnani contributed to chapels at the Sacro Monte di Varese.

Martinolio, Cristoforo (Il Rocca, active 1620–1648) Painter, Chapel IX
Martinolio, who emulated the style of il Morazzone, was born in the Val Sesia. He worked at the Sacro Monte di Varallo on the frescos of Chapel XV alongside his brother, Gerolamo, who executed the stained glass window for that same chapel, as well as on Chapels XXV and XXX.

Mazzucchelli, Pier Francesco (il Morazzone, 1573–1626), Painter, Chapel XI
Il Morazzone was born in Morazzone in the region of Milan, and began painting in Rome during the Catholic Reformation program of Sixtus V, a renewal that supported a flourishing artistic environment. He then moved to Venice to continue his studies, and later returned to Milan where he worked on the Duomo. Commissions, meanwhile, took him to Varese, Arona, Como, Varallo and Orta. He was so prolific that Alessandro Serafini suspects that Morazzone had a workshop of artists to support the demands of all the commissions. Morazzone was an eclectic and versatile artist, whose bold colors accentu-
Monti, Giacomo Gilippo (active c. 1615), Painter, Chapels I and XVIII
Very little is known about Monti other than he was a local artist, from Orta, whose paintings for Chapel I did not rise to Bishop Bascape’s standards of either skill or orthodoxy, hence he did not receive another commission on the Sacro Monte. It is now thought, however, that the architectural and ornamental motifs of Chapel XVIII are his work. De Filippis and Carcano note that he painted in the Mannerist style, was a portraitist, and previously worked in the twelfth-century Basilica of San Giulio on the Island of San Giulio in Lake Orta.

Nuvolone, Carlo Francesco (c. 1609–62), Painter, Chapels X and XVII
Some biographers report that Carlo Francesco was a student at the prestigious Ambrosiana Art Academy, though there seems to be no contemporaneous documentation. It does seem, however, that he was at the very least influenced, if not trained, by noted Milanese painter Giulio Cesare Procaccini. Carlo Francesco’s work has been described as graceful, elegant, sweet and harmonious. He appeals to traditional forms using his hallmark soft tones in order to capture a grand, narrative sweep of the times. Giuseppe Pacciarotti describes his compositions as equally reflective of seventh-century and late seventeenth-century styles.

Nuvolone, Giuseppe (1619–1703), Painter, Chapels X and XVII
Giuseppe trained under and worked alongside his brother, Carlo Francesco, such that it is often difficult to distinguish the work of one from the other—until, that is, the death of Carlo Francesco in 1662. Even then, however, Giuseppe continued their current projects using the sketches and plans of his brother. Nevertheless, Giuseppe is known by his independent projects in Novara, Bergamo, Brescia, Groppello d’Adda, Chiavenna and several royal commissions in Milan. He also apprenticed some fairly successful students, such as Felice Boselli. While Carlo Francesco was known for soft and harmonious compositions in terms of both tone and expression, Giuseppe created dramatic facial expressions that gave each portrait distinctive emphasis and disrupted compositional harmony. He was adept at chiaroscuro, employing it with “intelligence and vigor.”

Pini, Antonio (Antonio Pino da Bellagio, active c. 1654), Sculptor, Chapel X
The terracotta sculptures of Chapel X have been traditionally ascribed to Diogini Bossola, but compelling research over the last decade or so attributes them instead to Antonio Pini, a regionally well-regarded sculptor and engraver from Bellagio, though nothing is known of his training. The terracottas are attributed to Pini based on dating, as well as recurring compositional and stylistic features in comparison with his other works. His characteristic style is seen in the delicate features of the angels, the bulking anatomical physicality of the demons, and the fabric treatment of the garments.

Prestinari, Cristoforo (1573–1623), Sculptor, Chapels I, II, III, IV, V, VI, XI, XII, and XV
Prestinari is the most prolific of the artists of Orta but least attested in the literature. He was born in Milan and worked as sculptor at the Milan Duomo between 1597–1621, as did his brother Marco Antonio. Together they worked at the Sacro Monte di Varallo and di Crea, and in 1612, Federico Borromeo selected the Prestinari brothers to work at the Sacro Monte di Varese. Cristoforo otherwise worked at Orta between 1604 and 1623, when he died at Orta San Giulio. Francesca Cosi and Alessandra Repossi describe the expression of his nearly life-sized figures as “content and delicate,” and his figure groupings tend toward the symmetrical and harmonious.
Rustinati, Giuseppe (c. 1650–1713), Sculptor, Chapels XIII and XIX
Originally from the area of Como, Rustinati trained in Rome before working on the Sacri Monti of Orta, Varese, and Domodossola. He seems to have apprenticed under Diogini Bussola and, shortly after his work on the statues of Chapel XIII at Orta, he was appointed sculptor for the Milan Duomo.

There were numerous other craftsmen who worked at Orta on the frescos, wooden grills, glass windows, iron screens, marble fixtures, and exteriors. Unfortunately, little more than their names are available to us today. Fr. Manzini has the most comprehensive catalogue of these artists. They include: Paola Rivolta (architect); Biulio Bersano (painter); Pietro Canonica (sculptor); Padre Honorato (architect); Milanese artist Giulio Cesare Procaccini (painter); Agostino da Carcegna (glass and wood artisan); Master Zia da Pella (iron smith); Master Pavese (iron smith); Monti di Borgomanero (architect); Riccardo Donnino (painter); Rossi of Novarra (sculptor); Stefano Penaggio (iron smith); Giovanni Ambrogio Penaggio (iron smith); Pietro Arbana (iron smith); Pietro Ponti (iron smith); Nicolao Pangelino (goldsmith); Giovanni Battista Contini (iron smith); Santini da Lagna (architect); Giovanni Pietro (iron smith); Giacomo Allegrini (iron smith); Giuseppe Malcottro da Borgomanero (iron smith); Bernardo Franzosino D’Antra (metal crafter).
Endnotes


11. For the ledger of his work at the cathedral, see Milan Cathedral, Annali della fabbrica del duomo di Milano: dall’origine fino al presente, 6 vols. (Milan: G. Brigola, 1883), 5:222–43.


14. There is some disagreement among historians as to whether Giovanni Battista Cantalupi worked on Chapel XIII or not. The confusion may arise from the fact that both Cantalupi and Giovanni Battista Grandi (who did paint in Chapel XIII) share a given name. De Filippis and Carcano do not mention Cantalupi’s involvement in the chapel (Guide to the Sacro Monte di Orta, 45), as opposed to Luigi Mallè, who includes Cantalupi among the painters of the chapel. See Luigi Mallè, Figurative Art in Piedmont, 2 vols., trans. Shelia Freeman et. al. (Turin: Officine Di Villar Perosa S.P.A., 1972), 274. Mallè also credits Cantalupi with work on the Church of Saint Nicolo and Saint Francis at the Sacro Monte di Orta (2:237).

15. Cantalupi is mentioned in a biographical dictionary under an entry for the painter Giuseppe Gaudenzio Mazzola, who was also in Parma. See Micaela Mander, “Mazzola, Giuseppe Gaudenzio,” Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giuseppe-gaudenzio-mazzola_(Dizionario-Biografico)/.


17. Ibid., 2:237.
18 The former convent may have been incorporated into the mid-nineteenth-century Villa Caccia, designed by noted architect Alessandro Antonelli (1798–1888). For more on this architect, see Paolo Portoghesi, “Alessandro Antonelli,” Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/alessandro-antonelli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/.

19 Merelli, “P. Cleto da Castelletto Ticino Cappuccino (d. 1619).”


22 Romano, “D’Enrico, Giovanni”; De Filippis and Carcano, Guide to the Sacro Monte of Orta, 45; Manzini, Sacro Monte of Orta, 46.


38 Michael Bryan, “Nuvolone, Carlo Francesco,” in A Biographical and Critical Dictionary of Painters and Engravers, with a list of Ciphers, Monograms, and Marks. ed. George Stanley (London: George Bell and Sons, 1878), 521; Pacciarotti, La Pintura Barroca en Italia, 211.


43 Cosi and Repossi, Da pelligrini sui Sacri Monti, 53.

44 Symcox, Jerusalem in the Alps, 215.


46 Manzini, Sacro Monte di Orta.