

A detailed marble bust of St. Charles Borromeo, showing his head and upper torso. He has short, wavy hair and is looking down with a serene expression. His hands are visible at the bottom, resting on a surface. The marble is highly polished, reflecting light.

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Giovan Battista Foggini,

from a model by

**St Charles Borromeo  
in Adoration of the Crucifix**









Giovan Battista Foggini,  
from a model by  
(Florence 1652 - 1725)

*St Charles Borromeo  
in Adoration  
of the Crucifix, 1755 ca.*

White porcelain; height 39, 5 cm  
Ginori porcelain Factory at Doccia

The composition of this porcelain sculpture is drawn from Giovan Battista Foggini's *St Charles Borromeo*, of which the version in gilded bronze was displayed at the exhibition *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Italian Sculpture* of 1965 and again at *Gli ultimi Medici* of 1974, described at the time as being in a private New York collection (p. 55, cat. no. 18; Fig. 1).

Nothing is known about this commission but given the considerable size of the piece (39,5 cm high), the presence of gilding and the use of lapis lazuli in the representation of the pillow, it must have been unusually important. In the catalogue of the 1974 exhibition, Jennifer Montagu observes that for these characteristics the sculpture resembles those on devotional themes executed by Foggini at the Galleria dei Lavori. She also

notes the absence of the original crucifix and the replacement of the pillow with one in red marble, and connects this work to a plaster cast on the same subject listed in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century *Inventory of models* of the Ginori porcelain factory at Doccia as "by Foggini". This mention further supported her hypothesis that the bronze version should be attributed to Giovan Battista Foggini.

In 2016, a drawing attributable to the sculptor and identifiable as our *St Charles Borromeo* appeared on the antique market (d'Albuquerque 2016, pp. 62-63, cat. no. 28; Fig. 2). Despite the rapidity of execution that characterizes it as a sketch, the figure's pose, identical to that of the bronze version, is already clearly defined except for the position of the left arm with the hand clutching the crucifix. In the sketch, the crucifix is raised to the





1. Giovan Battista Foggini, *St Charles Borromeo*, formerly private collection, New York



2. Giovan Battista Foggini, *St Charles Borromeo in Adoration of the Crucifix*, private collection

height of the saint's face, with which it establishes a dialogue, while in the sculpture it is level with the flank. The orientation of the head is identical in both versions, but in the bronze Borromeo's gaze is lowered, turned towards Christ in a more intimate prayer.

The first entries in the Factory's registers of *Accounts and Receipts* relating to the collaboration with the sculptor Vincenzo Foggini, Giovan Battista's son, date to 1744. From an examination of these documents, he appears to be engaged in the execution of moulds and "casts" in wax based mainly on the works of his father (see the payment notes reported by Klaus Lankheit in the margin of the transcription of the *Inventory of Models*; Lankheit

1982, pp. 99-162). It therefore seems quite odd for Vincenzo to have made a plaster cast of the saint, which might however still have been in his father's workshop and which he himself therefore probably sold to Marquis Carlo Ginori, who founded the porcelain factory of the same name in the village of Sesto in 1737.

As concerns the factory inventories, in the aforementioned inventory of models the statue is described as: "No. 31 St Charles Borromeo on his knees, in plaster with a mould. By Foggini" (Lankheit 1982, p. 129, 29:31), while in the inventory of moulds it is listed as: "No. 31 St Charles Borromeo p.<sup>1</sup> 6" (AGL, filza 37/22).

The correspondence of the numbering in the







3. *Figure of Saint*, ca. 1750-1755, cm 38 PROVENANCE: Gisella Fattorini collection, Florence BIBLIOGRAPHY: d'Agliano 1996, sheet 57

two registers suggests that both the model and the related group of moulds arrived at the factory simultaneously, or alternatively that the Doccia mould-makers created them when the cast was acquired. This would also explain the three known translations into porcelain, a not inconsiderable number given the subject depicted, the high cost of porcelain and the technical difficulties of making sculptures of this size. This consideration brings us to the aforementioned presence among the factory's models of a cast in plaster rather than wax, though most of the compositions drawn from inventions by Giovan Battista Foggini were made of the latter material. It may therefore be

a model sought out by the factory, perhaps for a specific patron, thus justifying the rather unusual execution in plaster. As suggested, it may have reached Doccia from the master's workshop or through other channels, or even been executed by the factory's mould-makers based on the original, as was the case for some bronzes in the Corsini collection in Palazzo alla Lungara (AGL, XII, 5, f. XXIV, lett. 26, Letter from Guido Bottari to Carlo Ginori, Rome, 10 February 1753. See also Balleri 2014, p. 121).

As mentioned, there are currently three known 18<sup>th</sup>-century porcelain versions; a fourth, whose whereabouts are presently unknown, is men-







4. Giovan Battista Foggini, *St Charles Borromeo in Adoration of the Crucifix*, Cagnola, Gazzada Collection



tioned by Montagu as being on the Florentine market in 1973-1974 and described as having a different and poorly positioned head. This feature is not found in the known pieces (Montagu 1974, pp. 54-55, cat. no. 18), with the exception of the *biscuit* version executed in the 1960s under the direction of the factory's chemist, Gino Campana. He undertook a casting campaign using the antique moulds at the time still in the factory, which was in the process of being transferred to its current premises, in order to document the models concealed within them. The *biscuit* version of our piece is the only one cited by Lankheit in the notes to the entry for the model (Lankheit 1982, p. 129, 29:31). The 20<sup>th</sup>-century masters, unfamiliar with the original, assembled the various parts of the figure in an approximate way, making a direct comparison with the 18<sup>th</sup>-century versions unhelpful. However, the *biscuit* version does pro-

vide some equally interesting information given that, as mentioned above, the cast was made using the antique moulds, presumably those of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The saint holds a thin, flat object in his left hand, apparently to prevent the fingers from closing in a fist and thus making it possible to insert the crucifix after firing. The latter was thus a movable element, as it must also have been in the bronze version, since it would not otherwise have been lost (1974, pp. 54-55, cat. no. 18). Its curious absence in the aforementioned porcelain versions suggests that it was not made by the factory, though it seems rather strange for the saint to have lacked this attribute given its importance in the iconography of the composition.

The *biscuit* version also confirms the presence of a rectangular base like that of the mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century porcelain version. The latter was displayed at the exhibition *Lucca e le porcellane della Manifattura*





*Ginori* of 2001 (p. 233, cat. no. 173 Fig. 3) and differs from the other known specimens mainly for this peculiarity: both the work in the Cagnola collection in Gazzada (Varese; Fig. 4) and that examined here have an imitation rock base, typical of the factory's production in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. A defect shared by all three versions, but particularly evident in that displayed at Lucca and in ours, is the deep cracking at the base. This results from the weight of the figure during the "softening" process, which takes place during firing at 1400°C, when the vitrifying porcelain shrinks in volume by 12-14% and becomes compacted. A consequence of this chemical phenomenon in our piece is that the saint is off-balance to his left, as the underlying pillow collapsed onto itself due to the emptying of the base beneath. However, this is a necessary expedient to prevent the air inside the clay from causing the breakage of the composition during firing. It seems that the prop serving to support the left arm was not used or that it yielded. This prop was necessary to maintain the balance of the composition during firing.



If we compare the underside of the base of our statue with that in the Cagnola collection, which as we have said is the most similar to our piece, we see that obvious countermeasures have been introduced in the latter version. The supports have been extended to the entire length of the inner part of the base, in order to keep the ends of the base together and in alignment, while in our sculpture they were limited to the area of the edge and therefore absent from the central part, which, being hollow, expanded and allowed the figure to sink.

Given these characteristics, we can assume that the *St Charles* discussed here was an early, if not the earliest, version of this composition produced by the factory. Its refined modelling, also apparent in the Gazzada version, suggests that our piece is slightly earlier and should therefore be dated to around 1755.

Rita Balleri

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