

6-2006

# Reviewed Work(s): The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII by Dorothy Metzger Habel

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## Recommended Citation

Moore, John E., "Reviewed Work(s): The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII by Dorothy Metzger Habel" (2006). Art: Faculty Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA.  
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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII* by Dorothy Metzger Habel

Review by: John E. Moore

Source: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Jun., 2006), pp. 306-308

Published by: University of California Press on behalf of the Society of Architectural Historians

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25068281>

Accessed: 09-07-2018 15:51 UTC

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The meaning of citation is particularly pointed in the interpretation of the two designs by Grassi for a three-story version of the façade, which would have been very unusual for Rome. In considering the various signal European churches Grassi may have referenced or drawn from, important questions come into focus. Three-story façades had been designed for the duomos in Florence and in Milan but the one closest to Grassi's is at the Jesuit church of St. Ignatius in Antwerp, whose architect was in Rome in the 1620s. Bösel also considers that such a façade had been designed for the Gesù. Here we have a project in the "center" contributed to by an artist or artists working in Rome (Borromini, Grassi, and Maderno) and others from the "periphery" (Antonio Grassi—the architect of S. Lucia—and Pieter Huysens of Antwerp). Are the ideas coming directly from the Roman architects or from Jesuit architects whose works outside Rome were already synthesizing Roman influences?

The design for the church of St. Ignatius shows what I call the Jesuits' "institutional memory," which is at work in the portfolio as well.<sup>7</sup> Among the engravings are other Jesuit buildings, and among the unidentified drawings are some that may have been made by Grassi (or other architects) after other Jesuit buildings. An additional unpublished portfolio of drawings assembled at the end of the seventeenth century by the Jesuit architect and woodworker Enrico Laloyau includes drawings after Grassi's plans for the church of St. Ignatius (invoked by Bösel to document lost plans). The collections of drawings together reveal layers of historical accretion in the institutional repertoire and, for us, attendant difficulties of attribution. With the church circulating its archive of design over time, it is easier to imagine a "Jesuit style," which relieves us of the burden of identifying individuals in a corporate culture that was just as comfortable doing without them at times.

Though not a catalogue raisonné, *Orazio Grassi* is the first serious study on a Jesuit architect to have appeared since

Pietro Pirri published his studies of Giovanni de Rosis, Giovanni Tristano, and Giuseppe Valeriano in the 1950s. Bösel's strength, apparent in his masterful exegesis of the St. Ignatius design process, lies in his broad and detailed knowledge of seventeenth-century architecture and his ability to show the dense intertextuality of Grassi's design. In this study he is less interested in the motivations and meaning of citations in Jesuit buildings, although he himself has contributed to the archival foundation on which such discussions are based. If the diversity of the Gregoriana drawings, and the difficulty of identification and attribution in some cases, makes for a rather fragmentary study, the portfolio's heterogeneity presents other opportunities. These include Grassi's emergence in his drawings as a wide-ranging polymath and his ambiguous position as a Jesuit corporate author.

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#### Notes

1. For an overview of Kircher scholarship, see Michael John Gorman and Nick Wildung's online publication of Kircher's correspondence at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/STS/gorman/nuovepaginekircher/#10A>.
2. Richard Bösel and Christoph Luitpold Frommel, eds., *Borromini e l'universo barocco* (Milan, 2000).
3. Jean Vallery-Radot and Edmond Lamalle, *Le recueil de plans d'édifices de la Compagnie di Jésus conservé a la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris* (Rome, 1960).
4. See Richard Bösel, *Jesuitenarchitektur in Italien (1540–1773). Teil I. Die Baudenkmäler der römischen und der neapolitanischen Ordensprovinz*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1986), the long-anticipated second volume of which, undertaken in collaboration with Herbert Karner, is about to appear.
5. Dagobert Frey, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der römischen Barockarchitektur," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 3 (1924), 11–43.
6. See Evonnie Levy, "Che cos'è un autore/architetto gesuita? La Cappella di Sant'Ignazio e il problema del disegnare in comitato," in Alberta Battisti, ed., *Andrea Pozzo* (Milan, 1996), 132–39, and *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* (Berkeley, 2004), esp. ch. 3.
7. Evonnie Levy, "The Institutional Memory of the Roman Gesù: Plans for Renovation of the 1670s by Carlo Fontana, Pietro da Cortona and Luca Berrettini," *Römische Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 33 (1999/2000), 373–426.

Dorothy Metzger Habel

### **The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII**

Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002, xxii + 424 pp., 223 illus. \$90, ISBN 0-52177-264-8

Those who have traveled to Rome and wandered admiringly through the Campus Martius will have noticed a certain congruity in the urban fabric. It can be discerned in cornice heights; in the proportional scansion of stories, columns, pilasters, friezes, and rustication; and in the discreet projections of window surrounds and doorways. As one absorbs and commits to memory and expectation largely unconscious perceptions, no single detail seems to conform to a rigid pattern; instead, each element corresponds to others with a magical ease.

The weaving of the hidden tissue that lends Renaissance and Baroque Rome its coherence—the result of concentrated and concerted efforts—is the subject of Dorothy Metzger Habel's book. She considers the Quirinal Palace (where Alexander VII preferred to live), the Piazza del Popolo (where travelers from the north caught their first glimpse of the Eternal City), the via del Corso, and that street's southern terminus, the Piazza S. Marco. The projects discussed unfolded simultaneously, and Habel rightly contends that their separate analysis should blind us neither to Alexander VII's synchronous thinking about architecture nor to the relationship of unrealized schemes to completed commissions, such as Gianlorenzo Bernini's Piazza S. Pietro.

At the Quirinal, interventions carried out under Paul V and Urban VIII located the palace within a capillary system of small yet important streets and anchored its main entrance. In the expanded *manica lunga* (long sleeve) that fronts the east-west spine of the homonymous hill, Alexander VII enlarged areas dedicated to service quarters and accommodations for the papal household. Plans for a monumental gateway (perhaps meant to include the

Dioscuri), for a stable block opposite the main palace entrance, and for a square defined by arcades came to naught, but Habel here (and throughout) painstakingly analyzes graphic evidence with instructive results. A sketchy black chalk drawing includes incised stylus marks that enable her to reconstruct sight lines that would have established visual links between the piazza and upper-story windows in the papal residence. The configuration also focused the gaze of those who, moving uphill, would have been drawn toward the palace through the framing device of a gateway.

In this area rises the Salita di Montecavallo, a street whose southeastern end consists of a flight of steps illustrated in figure 28 (46). A lost inscription once commemorated the repaving of the street in 1659, yet a manuscript preserves what is likely the plaque's text, its lettering carefully spaced in order to foreshadow a carved inscription. Habel discusses that text and an alternate version in a footnote (343 n. 193), but it would have been better to reproduce the relevant folio and to discuss the inscription in the main text. Writing on buildings should assume a vigorous role in our interpretations, especially in Rome, where inscribed words have such a millennial history. What is more, to construe the Latin phrase *anno salutis MDCLVIII* as "in the salubrious year of 1659" (*ibid.*) is incorrect; the correct translation is "in the year of salvation 1659." (The same error appears with respect to an inscription dating to 1665 and illustrated in figure 159 [218], which marks the unblocking and straightening of the Corso.)

The close reading of drawings leads Habel to a fruitful discussion of plans for the Piazza del Popolo. Some proposals envisioned a more self-referential square, of different proportions, in which the obelisk raised by Sixtus V, the pilgrimage church of S. Maria del Popolo (built in its present basic form between 1475 and 1477), and the city gate altered by Alexander VII would have fulfilled pronounced spatial functions. Following Bernini's designs, the Chigi pope had the

church remanaged inside and out between 1655 and 1659; moreover, while titular cardinal there, he had already commissioned Bernini to restore and make additions (1652–56) to Raphael's Chigi Chapel (begun 1513–14), thereby paying homage to his illustrious Sieneese forebears. Other projects emphasized the famous trident of streets leading southward and the two centrally planned churches whose eventual construction framed those arteries. The overlapping and coordinated interests of the pope and aristocratic private-property owners conspired to govern developments at the other end of the Corso, at the Piazza S. Marco and along nearby streets. Here in particular Habel's sensitivity to the visual effects of overall massing, patterns of rustication, and the articulation of window frames restores chronological and ocular connectedness to buildings that might otherwise seem unrelated or casually similar.

In chapter four, Habel traces the efforts expended to create a Chigi family palace near the Corso. Formerly resident in Siena, the pope's brother Mario (1594–1669) and his wife, Berenice della Ciaia, required a place to live in Rome; so, too, did their son Flavio (1631–1693), who became a cardinal in 1657. Like his uncle Mario, Agostino Chigi (1634–1705) obtained a high-ranking secular position in the papal capital. Alexander VII had originally intended to eschew nepotism, but once he changed his mind, members of his family faced the same difficulties that had beset their peers since the fifteenth century. Suitable accommodations were always at a premium, while ecclesiastical and secular domestic arrangements called for differentiated architectural enframements; indeed, it seems the ideal would have been to renovate or build from scratch a palace in which two households could be lodged separately and adjacently.

Sites ranging from the Piazza Colonna to the Piazza SS. Apostoli, and buildings such as the Palazzo Mancini (at the southern end of the Corso) to the Palazzo Pamphili (in the Piazza Navona) were considered and then discarded.

Examining site surveys and drawings for remodeling and enlarging palaces, Habel illuminates the functions these delineations must have played in various deliberations. She also offers a new contextual reading of a famous elevation and less-well-known plan by Pietro da Cortona (175, figs. 132, 133). That unexecuted proposal would have offered paired yet distinct apartment suites, either for two secular princes or for one secular prince and a cardinal. The curved façade would have included a fountain and been aligned so as to suppress one's perception of the nonaxial alignment of the palace and the Column of Marcus Aurelius.

Turning in chapter five to a discussion of the Corso and to Cortona's façade of S. Maria in Via Lata, Habel makes a distinction between the *fastigium* ("columns . . . carry[ing] an arcuated lintel and a triangular pediment" [233]) and a *serliana*. She also recalls that the motifs, both works of Bramante, exist "literally back-to-back" in the Sala Regia of the Vatican Palace, the *serliana* visible on the exterior, the *fastigium* on the interior (239). She strives to identify the formal sources of the *fastigium* in imperial and late-antique buildings in far-flung locales such as Constantinople, Ephesus, Sardis, and Split; even the Missorium of Theodosius is briefly brought to bear, with no indication of where that object was in Alexander VII's day or what conduits rendered its imagery accessible. Bramante did work in Milan, so to cite the *fastigium* visible, both then and now, at S. Lorenzo Maggiore may perhaps make the case better than any eastern Roman Imperial building, but I failed to understand how a seventeenth-century patron or designer would have known about such remote structures, some of which stood unexcavated in the seventeenth century. *The Antiquities of Constantinople* by Peter Gilles, published posthumously in Lyon in 1561, is later quickly adduced as an authority on the splendors of that renowned second Rome. Yet no evidence supports Habel's claim that the book enjoyed a "breadth of circulation" (302), which in any case

would need to be linked specifically to seventeenth-century Rome to be meaningful. Is an impression of Gilles's work to be found in the Vatican Library among the erstwhile Chigi books?

And even though an inscription whose text Alexander VII drafted (218, fig. 159) referred to the Corso as a "hippodrome," Habel stretches too far in writing that the Roman street resembles "in form and function an ancient hippodrome" (248). The thoroughfare's long and narrow dimensions offered no space for running laps or for siting turning posts (*metae*) and barriers (*carceres*), so any direct formal association to ancient hippodromes is ruled out. Alexander VII's "hippodrome" metaphorically corresponds to fact, for the Corso *was* used for those one-way races of riderless horses later immortalized by painters such as Théodore Géricault and Horace Vernet. The pope saw to the dismantling of a Roman arch, effected some small-scale interventions, and planned others that never took effect, all with the goal of widening and straightening the street; those activities, however, did not "establish the Corso as a hippodrome" (251).

Habel reminds us that Alexander VII had "a large wooden model of the city with buildings made to be movable pieces" (9). He gazed at Rome as it spread, majestic, beneath the Quirinal, and would have seen from its windows some buildings had they been realized. Documents also record the pope's brisk walks through Rome. Interactive and interconnected, his focused studies and expansive experiences found complex parallels in the creative means—financial, legal, quid pro quo, and mildly coercive—devised to push forward building projects. That some remained on paper speaks not necessarily to failed ambitions but to an active intellectual engagement with architecture, which takes its first form on paper. The often engrossing details of Habel's narrative turn on the scrutiny of workaday drawings that were not produced to captivate the eye, yet nonetheless arrest one's attention.

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Giovanna Curcio, editor

## **Il Tempio Vaticano 1694. Carlo Fontana**

Milan: Electa, 2003, CCXXXI (incl. 25 text pp. reproduced in facsimile) + 321 pp., 309 b/w illus. €99, ISBN 8-837-02205-0

Students of Italian architecture generally and of St. Peter's specifically have an important new tool with the republication of Carlo Fontana's magisterial *Tempio Vaticano* of 1694. Overseen by Giovanna Curcio, this edition—the first in three centuries—presents Fontana's entire Italian text and seventy-nine original plates, prefaced by a substantial set of essays by leading scholars that doubles the book's usefulness, solidity, and certainly its beauty. In a sense it is two or even three volumes in one, providing an important historical treatise, an extensive interpretive commentary, and an overview of current thinking about the topographic and architectural features Fontana examines.

*Il Tempio Vaticano* is among the most important architectural texts of its generation, highlighting a triumph of the Renaissance and Baroque but presaging the new concerns and perspectives of the eighteenth century. As the preeminent teacher and practitioner of late-seicento Rome, Fontana (1638–1714) was instrumental in transmitting the legacy of Gianlorenzo Bernini, Pietro da Cortona, and Carlo Rainaldi—each of whom he collaborated with—to students including Fischer von Erlach, James Gibbs, Filippo Juvarra, and Alessandro Specchi, who engraved the plates for the current treatise. Fontana's star was rising in 1694, when he was elected *principe* of the Accademia di S. Luca; on the death of Mattia de Rossi three years later he would finally become head architect of St. Peter's. Although his project was first conceived to counter rumors about the building's instability, it soon became, as Curcio puts it, "the first conscious systematization of architectural knowledge based on the great experiments of the seventeenth century" (xv). The resulting folio, with its parallel Latin and Italian texts, was intended for wide diffusion

among Europe's literati, and its republication offers the chance to reassess its methods, ambitions, and impact.

While not quite a misnomer, Fontana's title (roughly, *The Vatican Temple and Its Origin, with the Most Conspicuous Ancient and Modern Structures Inside and Outside of It*) is at best an approximation of his volume's scope. Ever the educator, Fontana approached St. Peter's as a glorious case study through which to present his vision of architecture and the architectural profession. He divided his text into seven books plus a preface on comparative measurements, a clue to the nuts-and-bolts perspective that pervades his study. The first book surveys the historical topography of the Vatican zone, with emphasis on the circus of Caligula and Nero and other features that would determine the basilica's location and form. The second offers an overview of the Constantinian church, leaning heavily on annotated plates inspired by earlier scholars, from Tiberio Alfarano to Martino Ferrabosco to Giovanni Falda. This provides the occasion for a brief study of secular basilicas in the ancient world, leading Fontana to claim, in a rare incursion into architectural symbolism and ecclesiastical politics, that Constantine chose this form to signal Peter's status as the "most sovereign prince of the apostles." Book three discusses the relocation of the Vatican obelisk by Carlo's antecedent Domenico Fontana, whose famous machinery was newly and amply engraved based on the latter's 1590 treatise. Curcio's essay in this section is particularly helpful in showing how Fontana used the obelisk episode ("this glorious and singular deed by a truly great man") not just to bolster family pride but as a better model for modern professional practice than more recent, and often less successful, interventions.

Books four and five, the enterprise's ostensible core, offer a comprehensive description of the basilica complex as Fontana knew it, beginning with the piazza, façade, and *scala regia* before proceeding to the narthex, naves, drum, dome, windows, *confessio*, and other inter-