

VISIBLE SPIRIT  
THE ART OF  
GIANLORENZO BERNINI

VOL. II

IRVING LAVIN



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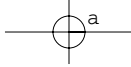
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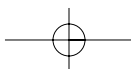


## XXVII

**The Rome of Alexander VII  
Bernini and the Reverse of the Medal\***

I FEEL I must first forewarn you that I will not today be speaking directly to the general theme of court art, at least not in the sense in which the notion of court art is generally conceived in the period called, in stylistic terms, the Age of the Baroque, in political terms the Age of Absolute Monarchy. That is, court art as quintessentially elite, magnificent, magniloquent, and extravagant in terms of form as well as cost. Instead, I want to talk about the ‘other side of the medal’, a phrase I have borrowed from the title of one of the chapters in Richard Krautheimer’s magisterial book, *The Rome of Alexander VII 1655–1667*, published in 1985. The phrase alludes, ironically, as we shall see, to the splendid series of portrait medals the pope regularly issued to advertise and commemorate on their reverses his many projects for embellishment of the city (Fig. 1). My referent derives from what might be called the inverse of the main point of Krautheimer’s book, which was to demonstrate how Alexander made the city of Rome itself into a grandiose work of international court art, masking the reality of life in the city ‘on the other side of the medal’. By reconsidering two important texts — one long well-known, the other newly discovered and published by Krautheimer himself — I want to suggest that the reverse actually had another aspect, intimately related to the obverse but positive in effect, and with a no less important legacy for the future of Europe.

\* Except for a few references given in the notes, the material on which this essay is based will be found in the following works: Krautheimer 1985, Brauer and Wittkower 1931, Lavin 1997, Lavin 2000, Lavin 2005.



The ancient metaphorical identification of Rome with the church of Saint Peter, as an institution and as a structure, began to acquire a new physical reality with the great entrepreneurial popes of the Renaissance. However, it can be said without too much exaggeration that the explicit, programmed materialisation of this metaphorical relationship culminated in the mid-seventeenth century when Fabio Chigi was crowned Pope Alexander VII. The scale and pervasiveness of his enterprises were so great that the eternal city acquired three new epithets, 'Roma Moderna' and 'Roma Alexandrina', coined by contemporaries, and 'Roma barocca' a term that was added in our own epoch (Fig. 2). The coincidence and significance of these three new visions, chronological, papal, and stylistic, constitute the fundamental theme of Krautheimer's urban history of the city.

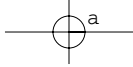
In the seventeenth century the term 'modern' was generally understood in the Petrarcan sense of 'post-medieval' and as distinct from classical antiquity. And for Krautheimer the extravagant projects of embellishment undertaken by the Chigi pope epitomised the process of transforming the chaotic and squalid medieval remnant of the antique city into the splendid new capital of the Christian world. Alexander was certainly not the first pope to be obsessed with reconstruction, nor was he the first to consider Rome as a projection of his own person and his vocation. Sixtus V, who set an important example for Alexander, certainly had a comprehensive view of the city, but conceived in broadly symbolic terms still linked to medieval tradition: the main roads connecting the patriarchal basilicas to each other formed a star that reproduced the pope's family crest and the star of Bethlehem (Fig. 3). Alexander, on the other hand, had a functional vision of the urban fabric in which the city and its monuments should respond to compelling needs both ideological and, at the same time, politically strategic.

Through his ten chapters, Krautheimer leads the reader along a sequence that begins in the career and personality of Alexander VII, his training, his culture, his *nonchalance* in relation to money, and, above all, his love for architecture, his veritable 'building mania'. Alexander was not a patron of the arts in the somewhat vulgar sense of the nouveaux riches Renaissance Maecenases, but scion of an illustrious family and a man of rare intelligence and vast culture. Krautheimer shows the pope personally following all the work, participating in the minute details of each project, and showing a passion that could have grown only from innate gifts and a cultivated taste. Krautheimer was able to focus on these characteristics because he had appreciated the importance of a private diary the pope maintained

in his own hand, publishing the many passages that deal specifically with art and artists. Alexander surely took as a model the personal but much more formal memoirs, *Commentaries on the Memorable Things that affected his Times* (*Commentarii rerum memorabilium que temporibus suis contigerunt*), of his Sienese compatriot, Pius II. The private quality of Alexander's chronicle is truly extraordinary and, as far as I am aware, contains a record of intimate thoughts, feelings and activities expressed by no previous pope. Especially significant in our context are the astonishingly numerous entries that concern Gian Lorenzo Bernini as his constant companion, consulting and planning together in weekly, sometimes even more frequent meetings. This degree of personal relationship between pope and artist was also without precedent.

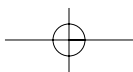
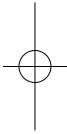
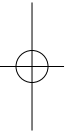
Krautheimer emphasised that not only was the pontiff mad for architecture, but also that his madness involved the whole city. His plans for improvement were not only directed at the most obvious places and monuments of Rome, but also extended to the suburbs, the so-called 'disabitato', to use Krautheimer's term, even if they were often populated by the poor, the homeless, and vagabond Gypsies. The purpose was not only to rationalise and embellish the chaotic web of medieval 'streets', but also to resolve the growing problems of traffic created by that ultramodern vehicle of transport, the horse-drawn carriage. The global aspect of this conception showed itself in many subtle ways, including the maps of *Romalessandrina*, characterised by accuracy and unprecedented completeness, or the lists of commissions that were compiled and then reproduced in collections of illustrated engravings. These lists include the projects that were not carried out, giving an idea of what Alexander would have done if he had lived longer and been able to disperse more money, and testifying at the same time to the colossal amount of work that he did realise. There is perhaps no better indication of both the dedication and comprehensiveness of Alexander's vision than the fact that he kept for study in his private chambers a model of the city. It is interesting to speculate where his miniature Rome fits in the history of city models; it was, I suppose, as complete and accurate as the maps of Alexander's Rome, and it is the first model I can recall that was made for the purpose of urban planning. Evidently, the pope not only thought about the city in a modern, comprehensive way; he also had a modern, comprehensive way of representing it — a new kind of 'three-dimensional' urban consciousness, one might say.

Krautheimer also considered Alexander's 'non-permanent' architecture,



that is, his planning of civic piazzas and public spaces of all types: markets, theatrical stages, ephemeral spectacles, gardens, streets and tree lined avenues, every element pertinent to the so-called 'built environment', to use the modern term for this comprehensive vision. In describing the pope's attitude toward antique ruins, Krautheimer shows that, even if sometimes the classical works were treated cavalierly, the principle objective was to integrate them into the modern city to the point that even these could contribute ad *maiores gloriam Dei*, in a manner that was deliberately theatrical—that is, on the model of contemporary scenography — with a view to impressing the distinguished visitor who arrived at the main entry to Rome, coming from the north, and progressed through the city to the Vatican. In the next to last chapter Krautheimer turns to 'the other side of the medal', describing the decrepit and unkempt aspects of Rome, the aspects that illustrious visitors were not supposed to see. Alexandrian Rome was beautiful for those who could appreciate it, but for many it was not a very nice place to live.

If all this sounds rather Baroque, this was the intention of Krautheimer's work. The objective appears dramatically in the last chapter when he presents the guiding principle and what he conceived to be the 'political' motivation underlying Alexander's urban ambitions. The victories of the Protestants and the rise in the industrial and mercantile power of the North, coupled with the establishment and hegemony over European affairs of the great national states, especially France, Spain and the Hapsburgs, dramatically reduced the effective power of the Catholic church. Faced with this situation, the pope adopted a policy of 'over-compensation', aggrandising and embellishing the physical power of the Holy City to make up for its loss of political power. He sought to convince the world that the papacy remained a factor to be reckoned with by transforming Rome into a great modern city, or at least a semblance of one. Implicit in Krautheimer's view is the fundamental paradox that the modern city was born, not from a fundamental transformation of mentality, but rather from a sort of deception. In art-historical terms, the effect is to 'instrumentalise' the Baroque, turning the style into an artifice of propaganda and representation, rather than the authentic expression of a new world vision. As the idea of modernity might suggest (note that I do not use the term 'modernity' in an ironic sense here), this concept of the Baroque as an artificial, bombastic and excessive reaction to the challenge thrown down by the Protestants — the Baroque as art of rhetoric, exhibitionism, and theatrics — coincides with the equal-

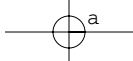


ly traditional concept of seventeenth-century politics as the arrogant self-representation of absolutism. Alexander's plan of urban renewal was conceived 'of the élite, by the élite, and for the élite'.

### Lorenzo Pizzati's Critique

I submit that there is another way of understanding Alexander's great new urban development program, an ulterior motive not alternative but complementary and I would say almost subversive to the traditional view — which might explain why, although clearly defined and publicly announced, it has been virtually ignored in this context. After all, the *popolo minuto* of Rome represented a huge moral, economic and political force, and in this sense Rome was no different from all the other cities in Europe, where awareness of and attention to existing social problems had long been on the increase. In a measure, Krautheimer grasped these developments, at least to the extent that his chapter on the reverse of the medal was based on a document to which he was the first to call attention and whose revelatory value he fully appreciated. The document in question was what we would call a white paper, written between 1656 and 1659 by a certain Lorenzo Pizzati from Pontremoli, a minor administrative functionary otherwise quite without historical significance. Pizzati describes the execrable conditions under which day-to-day life in the city was lived, outlining the piteous state of the less privileged strata of the population, and proposing drastic and utopian measures for alleviating their misery. His call to reform is the first text I would like to submit as testimony in my appeal for reconsideration of the significance of modern Baroque Alexandrine Rome. Here are a few of Pizzati's often awkward and ungrammatical complaints and recommendations:

'they should avoid evicting from small rooms, garrets and holes carved into walls, without due notice . . . cultivated and correctly behaved people' ('like the undersigned'). 'No one should be obliged to sleep in damp or malodorous lodgings, in unsuitable company, on a butcher's counter or nude on the floor of a church or shop. And no decent man, particularly if he has been presented at Court [aulicus], should be given a damp ground floor room, right next to the road, or in an absurd hole under exposed roof beams, full of cracks and overrun by spiders, mice, scorpions and lizards . . . All of this happens because buildings that have been



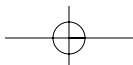
begun are not finished, while there are houses, palaces and pious institutions that are left empty'.<sup>1</sup> In order to help those who cannot find lodgings, Pizzati suggests that ' . . . poor bishops and priests and other . . . educated men' should be housed in the uninhabited rooms of the Oratorio and the Sapienza (Rome's oratory and university). Even the Lateran palace 'where your Holiness does not reside', could be turned into a sort of residential hostel with a communal kitchen and pantry for 'bishops and other needy and deserving people'; the uninhabited parts of the Quirinale and the Vatican buildings could be used in the same way. Consequently, these huge 'factories' [*istae machinae*] 'would be better preserved, instead of gradually falling into ruin through disuse, and above all your Benevolence would procure better air and better living conditions for us'. Poor widows and abandoned wives could also be sheltered in disused palaces and church buildings, where they may find refuge from corruption; formally, hospices and hospitals for beggars and lodgings for penitent prostitutes should be set up and provided'.

For Krautheimer, this document simply revealed a substratum of the reality which Alexander VII's urban renewal program addressed as a sort of cosmetic panacea for the benefit of visiting dignitaries. The improvements, however, were far more than merely decorative, they were conceived also to have equally important practical and beneficial effects, no less for the lowly inhabitants than for the exalted visitors to the city.

#### **Bernini's Piazza and Porticoes** (Fig. 4)

A primary testimonial to this fact, the second of the texts I would like to submit, is, by contrast, one of the most important documents in all of art history, well-known to anyone interested in Baroque Rome, but still not well enough appreciated in my view. I refer to the famous memorial concerning Alexander's nascent project for the vast piazza in front of St. Peter's, written by Bernini in 1657–59 — at the same time that Pizzati composed his diatribe. Here the artist defines his concept — or rather philosophy, or theology, or so-

<sup>1</sup> Aronberg Lavin 1994. Merz thinks that the report of the Genoese ambassador in Rome, 1663–69, "Il papa ha tutta Roma di legname in Camera distintissima e curiosissima, come quello che non ha maggior sfera che di abbillire la Città," otherwise undocumented, is a metaphor rather than a real model (very unlikely, given the wording): Jörg Martin Merz, review of Habel, in *Kunstchronik*, March 2004, 139–41, esp. 141, col. b.



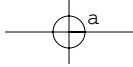


cology — of the form and substance of the largest, most difficult and most conspicuous of all Alexander VII's undertakings. It was a crucial juncture in the process that brought to completion the new centrepiece of Rome and the church, begun a century and a half before. Bernini presented this brief in response to the many criticisms of his project for reasons of function, form and finances. I quote some passages relevant to my theme.

'In the year 1655, when Cardinal Fabio Chigi was preoccupied with the succession to the Throne of Peter, the incessant prayers of the Church and his applause of the people gave birth to an Alexander. From this exalted position, the pious prince did not lose sight of the needs of the creatures subject to his greatness, nor was he attracted by that majesty, which being near to heaven and to the angels, distances him from the earth and men. Indeed, with a benevolent eye, he saw and contemplated the general miseries of the poor and determined to alleviate them, remembering that as Fabio Chigi he had illustrated by example, now, as Alexander he must kindle with actions, the prince being in this similar to the sun whose rays not only illuminate but also give warmth.<sup>2</sup> He immediately applied to the ill-opportune remedies, and com-

<sup>2</sup> Bibl. Vat., Cod. Chig. H II 22, fols. 105–9v. The text was first published by Brauer and Wittkower 1931, 70 n. 1, who date the statement 1659–60, whereas Krautheimer 1985, 174, gives 1657–8. It is indicative of the attitude the present essay is intended to counter-balance Brauer and Wittkower's omission of Bernini's opening passage to this point, which articulates the underlying motive for the project. The opening sentences were included in a transcription published by Del Pesco 1988, 63–5, but without including other passages omitted by Brauer and Wittkower. What follows here is the complete text, with passages omitted by Brauer and Wittkower indicated by italics.

*Preoccupava con il merito il Cardinal Fabio Chigi il Trono di Pietro, quando nell'anno 1655 le Orationi incessanti della Chiesa, e gl'applausi del Popolo partorirono un 'Alessandro. Dall'Altezza di questo posta non perdè di uista il pietosissimo Prencipe le Creature soggette alla sua grandezza, ne s'invaghi di quella Maestà, che per essere uicina al Cielo, et agli Angeli, lo rende lontano dalla Terra e dagli huomini, mà con una occhiata benefica nell'istesso tempo e vidde e contemplò le Comuni miserie e s'accinse à sollevarle, riccordevole che se come Fabio Chigi haueua illustrato coll'esempio, hora come Alessandro doueua riscaldare con le operationi, essendo il Prencipe per questo assimigliato ai sole che con i raggi non solamente illumina, mà riscalda. Applicò subito ai mali gl'opportuni remedii, e compassionando la povertà, che non solo priva d'impiego errava vagabonda per la Citta, ma languiva oppressa da una carestia, che quanta più affligeva il Popolo, tanto maggiormente doveva far spiccare la sua pietà, si volse a distribuire grand<sup>ma</sup> quantità d'oro, benche la scarsezz dell'erario fosse un' argine opposto al torrente di questa devota munificenza. Portato il nostro liberalissimo Prencipe dalla piena Carità ben previde, che l'aprire semplicemente a beneficia commune i Tesori era un fomentare l'otio, et un nudrire i vitii. Onde quell'istesso antidoto che s'applicava per la salute*



passionate with the poor who, not only wandered unemployed about the city like vagabonds, but languished in oppression by a famine which the more it afflicted the people the more it brought forth his pity, he turned to distributing large amounts of gold, although the scarcity of grain placed a levee against this torrent of pious munificence.

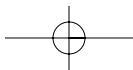
poteva essere un tossico più potente per avvelenarla. Così dunque represses quella fiamma di Carità, non per estinguerla, ma acciò maggiormente à pro de suoi sudditi si dilatasse, quindi pensò dar principia ad una gran fabrica, mediante la quale s'eccitasse l'impiego nei vagabondi, e si sovvenisse con il giro di grossa somma di denaro alle correnti necessità. Aggiunse stimoli al pio desiderio di S. Santita l'inclinazione al fabricare, e l'intelligenza, che al pari di qualsivoglia Architetto teneva in questa professione, perchè sin da fanciullo era solita quelle hore, nelle quali per lo più si nausea ogni fatica, impiegarle in questi, et in altri virtuosi trattenimenti, quasi sin d'allora Iddio che lo destinava all' Imperio supremo l'andasse habitando in tutte quelle attioni, che possono rendere un Principe glorioso.

Determinata dunque per sollievo commune la fabrica, l'animo di N. Signore *imbeuuto sin dalle fascie di pietà e totalmente disinteressato verso se stesso*, non seppe rivolgersi ad innalzare sù le mine di molte habitazioni magnifici Palazzi, ne à restringere in un Giardino solo le delitie hereditarie di più famiglie, ma risolse di principiare una mole, che ridondasse ad honore di Dio, e de suoi Santi, et à beneficio commune.

Frà la fertilissima miniera di machine heroiche che Alessandro racchiudeva nella mente, la Pietà, e la magnificenza quasi che irresolute non sapevano scieglerne la più grande al fine giudicarono, che il fare un Portico alla Chiesa di S. Pietro fosse un' opera conveniente alla Pietà d'un Pontefice, e propria alla grandezza d'un' Alessandro. Queste à gara gli suggerivano l'impresa esser stata stimata così degna, che molti suoi Antecessori s'erano impegnati sino à fame i disegni, mà che atteriti dalla sua grandezza, e disperando di sopravvivere all' opera, che poteva assorbire più Pontificati ne trascurarono l'effettuazione, e con permissione particolare d'Iddio che haveva eletto un' animo maggiore di quest' opera per più gloriosamente terminarla.

E perche i due fini principali delle fabriche sono l'utilità, e l'ornamento, nello stabilito disegno queste unitamente concorrevano. Imperciò che si vedeva situata la Chiesa di S. Pietro in una Piazza così grande esposta continuamente à i raggi del sole, e senza alcun riparo dall'impeto delle piogge, sicche quel Tempio dove *per adorare il Sepolcro de' SS. Apostoli* concorrono schiere numerose de' devoti era poco menD che abbandonato per essemme impraticabile l'accesso, oltre che le continue funzioni Pontificie si rendevano agl' assistenti scommodissime per non haver le Carrozze, et i pedoni il necessario ricovero. Secondariamente pareva essere inconveniente, che stasse quasi che sepolto in una Piazza fuor d'ogni regola d'Architettura il Tempio di S. Pietro, che per la sua mole, e bellezza è stimato un prodigio dell' arte, *per la cui perfettione hanno stimato tanti popoli vera ricchezza l'impoverire per adornarlo, non invidiando all pietà della primitiva Chiesa in offerire al suo Sepolcro già che non gl' era permesso à i suoi piedi inuolontario tributo i patrimoni.*

S' aggiungeua che il formare un Portico, non solo apportava maggior bellezza e decoro al Tempio ma veniva a coprire molte imperfettioni di quello, essendo che la facciata che per se stessa è di forma quatta haverebbe spiccata, et in certo modo si sarebbe sollevata sopra se stessa.



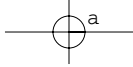
Our most liberal Prince, inclined to complete charity, saw clearly that simply to open the treasuries for the common good was a fomentation to idleness and a nourishment of vice. He was thus limited in his charity but also realised that by giving money to the needy, he was inadvertently encouraging them in idleness and vice. Whence the very antidote that was applied for health, could be a more powerful toxin to poison it. He thus suppressed the flame of charity, not to extinguish it, but to insure that it be spent to the greater benefit of his subjects, whence he thought to begin a great structure, through which the home-

Impressionato, e capacissimo di questa verità il Papa, commandò al Cav<sup>r</sup> Bernino Architetto suo, e della Chiesa di S. Pietro, che ne facesse il disegno. Considerò subito il Bernino la grandezza dell' opera la vastità della Piazza, e la vicinanza della gran mole di S. Pietro, e per questo giudicò molto fallace chiudersi in una camera e restringere in un foglio una machina così grande, mà scelse la maggior Casa che fosse in d<sup>a</sup> Piazza, et in grande vi segnò due archi con i suoi pilastri, cornice, et balaustrata, acciò S. Santita dalla grandezza del sito ne giudicasse la proportionione ricordevole che il Buonarroti prima di principiare il Cornicione del Palazzo Farnese ne fece il modello di legno e messolo nell' altezza del suo sito riuscì così piccolo, che lo accrebbe quasi la metà, il che diede occasione à quel suo bellissimo detto che la lontananza era un' inimico, con il quale bisogna va combattere a campo aperto.

Fù stimato assai prudente il Bernini à far' il disegno in grande nell' istesso sito, dove doveva farsi l'opera, ma molto più avanti passò il giuditio di S. Santità, poiche conoscendo che non si può accertatamente dar giuditio dell' altezza, se prima non si vede la sua lunghezza, ordino all' Architetto che sopra molti travi dritti facesse ricorrere una traversa tanto longa quanta fosse la lunghezza del Portico non comportando ne il tempo ne la spesa il farne un' intiero modello.

Si portò N. Sig<sup>re</sup> a vedere questa dimostratione, e con ingegno pili che humano, non solamente determinò l'altezza dell' opera, ma ne giudicò la forma, cosa che fece stupire l'istesso Architetto invecchiato in questa professione, imperciòche poco si fermò à vedere se voleva essete più bassa, ò più alta ma al solita di quell' ingegni, che non hanno confine, e terminano con le stelle andò ad antivedere con una sola occhiata case grandi, e penetrò in un momento tutte le difficoltà che più suggerire una gran lunghezza di tempo, et una perretta esperienza della professione, peròche seppe (che e quello che in queste materie importa il tutto) arrivate à vedere l'effetto che haverebbe ratio la fabrica prima che fosse perfettionata.

Antivedde subito gl' inconvenienti che s'incontravano in fare il Portico in forma quadrata, imperciòche la sua altezza in quella forma haverebbe impedito al Popolo la veduta del Palazzo, et al Palazzo il prospetto della Piazza, accresciendosi l'inconveniente mercè che solendo il Papa dalle fenestre dare la Benedittione a' Pellegrini, e processioni che l'anno Santo vengono per riceverla in questo modo non poteva benedirli se non in grandissima lontananza, oltre che si veniva ad impiccolire, e dividere la Piazza, lasciando fra il Palazzo, et il Portico un sito marta, quale facilmente riempito d'immonditie haverebbe trasmessi al Palazzo vapori assai dannosi.



less would be encouraged to work, and large sums of money would be spent to meet current needs. His Holiness's inclination to build added stimulus to his pious wishes, and the intelligence that he possessed in this profession beyond that of any architect, because from his childhood he was wont to spend the hours when most are sick with fatigue, he devoted to these and other virtuous diversions, almost as if even from then God who had destined him for the supreme empire, was giving him training in all those occupations that can render a prince glorious.

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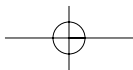
And because the two principal goals of building were understood to be usefulness and ornament, these aspects were both present within the design chosen.

\* \* \*

He immediately foresaw the disadvantages of making the portico square, inasmuch as its height in this shape would have impeded the populace's view of the palace, and palace's view of the piazza; there was also the added disadvantage that the pope would not be able, as was his custom, to bestow his blessing from the windows to the pilgrims and the Holy Year processions that come to receive it, except from a very great distance. It would also reduce in size and divide the piazza, leaving a dead area between the palace and the portico that would easily fill up with rubbish, giving off unhealthy fumes in the direction of the Palace.

Having therefore instantly foreseen the difficulties that would incur if the portico were built as a square, with formidable judgement His

Havendo dunque in un' istante antiveduto S. Santita gl' inconvenienti che s'incorrevano nel far d' Portico in forma quadra con giuditio più che humano risolse farlo in forma ovata. Certo chi non sapesse l'inconvenienti sopradetti penserebbe che a questa forma ovata si fosse S. Santita solamente appresa in riguardo del bello, essendo questa la maraviglia, che seppe unire con il bello, il proprio, et il necessaria. Il bello essendo questa forma circolare più grata all' occhio più perretta in se stessa, e più maravigliosa à farli massime con Architravi piani sopra colonne isolate. Il proprio perche essendo la Chiesa di S. Pietro quasi matrice di tutte le altre doveva haver' un Portico che per l'appunto dimostrasse di ricevere à braccia aperte maternamente i Cattolici per confermarli nella credenza, gl' Hererici per riunirli alla Chiesa, e gl' Infedeli per illuminarli alla vera fede; et il necessaria essendosi superate le sopradette difficoltà.



Holiness resolved to make it oval. Certainly, whoever was not aware of the aforementioned disadvantages might suppose that His Holiness was concerned only with beauty, the marvel being that he was able to unite beauty with the proper and the necessary: beauty, in that this circular form is more pleasing to the eye, more perfect in itself, and more marvellous especially to make them with flat architraves set over freestanding columns; proper, because the church of St. Peter, being as it were the matrix of all others, ought to have a portico that expressly appears to receive maternally with open arms Catholics to confirm them in belief, heretics to reunite them with the Church, and unbelievers to illuminate them to the true faith; and necessary, in overcoming the aforesaid difficulties'.

The projects submitted before and in competition with Bernini's recalled the most conspicuous example of this kind of dual functionality on a colossal scale, Saint Mark's Square in Venice: a rectilinear courtyard or piazza surrounded by porticos surmounted and flanked by accessible spaces that served practical uses. (Figs. 5, 6) Bernini's project succeeded in uniting ecclesiastical and urban traditions in a different way, through a radically new architectural formula specific to Saint Peter's: an oval colonnade, free-standing and surmounted by statues, without functional structures either above or behind (Fig. 7). Generally speaking, attention has been focused on Bernini's text mainly from the point of view of the formal and iconographic elements of design, in particular the famous metaphor of the curving portico as expressing the universal embrace of Mother Church (Fig. 8). But two other factors were important and specific to Saint Peter's, and to my mind interdependent: the special role of the Corpus Domini procession traditionally led by a bishop, in this case Christ's own vicar on earth; and the more conspicuous manifestation of the personal relationship between the Pope and the people, that is, his communications and benedictions from his private apartments in the Vatican palace, which determined the height of the porticoes. These considerations motivated Alexander's absolute conviction that the colonnades should not have any 'practical' function, except to provide shelter from bad weather during the Corpus Domini procession (Fig. 9), and to enhance the 'private' view of the pope at his window (Fig. 10). The porticos were thus purely representational, and what they represented was purely devotional, corresponding to a profound need whose practicality was not material but spiritual. The

other factor that stands out is the project's practical value in another sense, not as a source for financial benefit nor for the administrative use of the clergy, but rather as a work of charity aimed at benefiting poor and unemployed Roman citizens. The Piazza San Pietro project served as a cornerstone in the construction campaign that aimed at solving the same problems mentioned by Pizzati; the response, in an entirely modern spirit of social welfare, was to provide work for the poor as the most efficient use of public charity funds at the service of the public welfare.

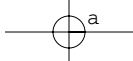
I believe that this last consideration, which we can call the social 'responsibility' of the project, could have directly affected the design of the colonnades. Besides the oval plan, perhaps the most conspicuous and frequently noted aspect falls completely within the stylistic paradox implicit in the subtitle of this series of lectures, 'Baroque art and the classical ideal'. I refer to the exceptional simplicity and sobriety of the colonnade that has impressed many observers who expected from Bernini, indeed above all from Bernini, a more elaborate style, i.e., a more Baroque style. In fact, the most renowned and perspicacious of Bernini scholars, Rudolph Wittkower, said of the Piazza San Pietro: 'No other Italian structure of the post-Renaissance era shows an equally deep affinity with Greece'. The observation was more apt than Wittkower may have thought. In a very careful study, Daniela Del Pesco revealed the painstaking scholarly research carried out for the project in order to recreate the fabled porticos with three corridors, described in the sources, built by the ancient Greeks to organise and embellish their cities (Fig. 11). The Greek colonnades, however, flanked public thoroughfares and the central passage was open to the sky, while Bernini closed it with a long, curving barrel vault reminiscent of the corridors of the Colosseum (Figs. 12, 13). In fact, it can be said that in this sense Bernini seems to be more Greek than the Greeks, because his order, based on the Doric — the quintessentially Greek architectural mode — is missing its most distinctive features, the decorative frieze of metopes and triglyphs. Here too, Augusto Roca de Amiciis has noted the relationship with the lower order of the Colosseum (Fig. 14).<sup>3</sup> Reference to the ancient amphitheatre was amply justified on formal grounds, given the oval shape of the Piazza. But the Colosseum was appropriate also from the ideological point of view, as a place sanctified by the martyrdom of a great many saints. These Christian gladiators were, so to speak, brought to life again at

<sup>3</sup> Roca de Amiciis 2000, 294 f.

St. Peter's by the legion of saintly statues placed on top of the portico, making up the triumphal guard of the piazza itself. It is obvious that the relatively low single storey and the simplicity of the porticos served by contrast (Bernini preferred the word 'contrapposto' to describe these visual subtleties), to augment the imposing stature and opulence of the Maderno façade (Fig. 15). The juxtaposition also reiterates the traditional increase in elaboration with the superimposition of the orders, most famously exemplified by the Colosseum. But finally, the visual severity and austerity of the porticos' design also matches the solemnity of the Corpus Domini procession, an event that, from the beginning of his reign, Alexander had made far more solemn and rigorous than in earlier times: rejecting the Pope's traditional sedan chair, he insisted on appearing on his knees and absolutely immobile for the entire, hours-long, exhausting devotion. (Fig. 16). Finally, the Doric order corresponded to the request — also on the part of Pizzati — for keeping the work simple in the interests of the public utility. Bernini used a sort of visual-architectural rhetoric of moral austerity, equivalent to and perhaps even inspired by the unadorned *modus orandi* the ancient rhetors called Attic.<sup>4</sup>

What was true of the Piazza San Pietro was true of Pope Alexander's entire urban project which, it was rightly said, had almost emptied the papal coffers. The pope was not motivated simply by extravagant and spendthrift vanity on the pope's part. The enterprises arose in part from a nascent form of what we would call today a program of public works for social welfare and rehabilitation (the cost of which — then, as frequently today — climbed far beyond what the economic system upon which it was based could bear). Consonant with this attitude is the fact that Alexander strongly opposed direct donations to the poor, not only because the practice encouraged dependence on charity but also because it was humiliating. He preferred instead to help those in need by offering them work, for which they would be paid and thus maintain their Christian dignity. In Alexander's eyes, this concept of charity as an ennobling means to improvement, instead of simple 'handouts', was a genuine policy of

<sup>4</sup> Indicative of Bernini's attitude toward the Colosseum is his insistence that it be preserved intact, in a project to construct within it a temple honoring the martyrs, for the jubilee of 1675 (Di Macco 1971, 82–4, Hager 1973, 323–5). I suspect that this project may have been related to the one for the Lateran hospice, discussed below. The Colosseum was closely related to the Lateran, even to the extent of serving as a hospital under the confraternity of the Sanctum Sanctorum.



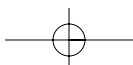
government, thus defined by his friend and biographer, the Jesuit Sforza Pallavicino, who repeated almost word-for-word what Bernini said on the relationship between beauty and utility: ‘workers must be paid for their industry, so that by their labours the subsidies can contribute to civil life they can join in civil life . . . and not be used for the arrogant delight of capricious luxury and sterility. . . Indeed, the works ordered by the prince be like those of nature, the government of which is the idea of all governments, and which in clothing the hills and fields with trees and fruit unites ornament with usefulness’.<sup>5</sup>

I do not want to exaggerate. Alexander was the product of his time, not of ours. He had his defects, many of his projects were left unfinished, while many of those he did carry out failed to achieve their purposes. But just as the splendid projects of papal aggrandisement represent the ‘obverse’ of the medal, bearing fruit in the future of architecture and city planning, so the social ideas pertaining to the ‘reverse’ left their imprint on the succeeding period. In fact, Alexander was the first pope of the modern era to work seriously to end the long-standing tradition of nepotism; and toward the end of the century his effort inspired the great reformer Innocent XII (1691–1700), who completely abolished the practice.

### The Lateran Hospice

Two decades later, the kinds of socio-ethical policy that motivated Alexander VII came to fruition in another great project of urban unification and consolidation in a different sphere, where Bernini was again deeply involved. This development, which created the basis for a new principle upon which a state-sponsored social welfare system would be built, began with the *huomo piccolo* himself, Lorenzo Pizzati. It is not known whether Alexander ever received or read Pizzati’s first appeal, but if nothing else, he was persistent. He submitted the project again at the beginning of the reign of Clement IX (1670–1676). The outcome of this attempt is unknown, but coincidentally, in 1670, the cause was taken up in an almost official capacity by the Order of the Oratorio, founded by St. Filippo Neri with the

<sup>5</sup> ‘. . . dovendosi stipendiar l’industria degli operarj, affinchè co’suoi lavori s’aggiunga alla vita civile que’sussidj . . . e non perchè s’impieghi per superba delizia della ricchezza capricciosa a sterilità . . . : anzi le opere ordinate dal principe conv[iene]nenir, che siena come quelle della natura, il cui governo e l’idea di tutti i governi, la quale in vestire i colli ed i campi d’alberi e di frutti congiunge l’ornamento col giovamento’. Sforza Pallavicino 1839–40, II, 177 f.





specific mission to represent the Roman people. The principle promoter of the Oratorio cause was Mariano Sozzini, who wrote an urgent appeal for the reform of the clergy and the ecclesiastical administration of the city, calling it 'The Present Miseries of the Papacy'. In September 1676, after the election of Innocent XI (1676–1689), Sozzini offered a new, much longer and more ambitious reform proposal. In November of the same year, Bernini was appointed to restructure the Lateran Palace to make it usable as a hospice for the poor — the same idea that had been put forward twenty years earlier by Lorenzo Pizzati, when Bernini was planning the layout of Piazza San Pietro with Alexander VII.

Sozzini's proposal remained confined to paper, but the theme of socio-religious reform stayed close to the heart of the Oratorians until it was actually carried out, still under their auspices. This event took place in the autumn of 1692 when Innocent XII (1691–1700), elected with the support of the so-called *Zelanti* party, declared a new great war on poverty. This pope issued a dramatic edict requiring all the indigent people of Rome, with their families, to present themselves at a central meeting point where they would be interviewed and provided with clothes before being directed to their new home. There, each would take part in a structured program of daily activities, including apprenticeships and employment in useful tasks, with instruction and religious devotions of all sorts. Those family members who were not physically able to present themselves at the hospice were authorised to remain in their own houses, if any, where they would receive suitable care, and perform services and devotions, within the limits of their capacities. The edict took effect on Saturday, November 30, 1692, with a great procession of the poor to their new lodgings, in the palace of the popes at the Lateran (Fig. 17).

For better or for worse, Innocent XII's great social adventure was a sad and almost immediate failure. The charity foundation was instituted in 1692 and only four years later, in 1696, recruiting was interrupted. The hospice continued to function for a little while longer, at a slower and slower rate, until the original experiment ended with the abandonment of a key provision, namely the forced internment of the poor. Residence at the hospice was no longer compulsory, and the homeless returned to their previous vagabond state. From the point of view of the benefactors, the project was too expensive to maintain. Income from gifts and investments never came close to meeting costs; the concept of self-sufficiency proved to be unrealistic, and the State was unable to cover the enormous deficit. Although the

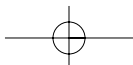


hopes in this experiment ended sadly, the Lateran project nevertheless had an important and lasting effect, setting in train a series of similarly intended government measures, beginning with the hospice's immediate successor, the huge *Albergo dei Poveri San Michele* along the bank of the Tiber (Fig. 18).<sup>6</sup>

Along with these institutional survivors, there was also an important residue for the history of art. This legacy comes in the form of a series of sculptures, seven monumental reliefs with the bust of the Saviour, that once served as emblems of this welfare movement (Fig. 19). The reliefs were gathered together, probably for the first time since their creation, in an extraordinary exhibition (1988) organised by my sorely missed colleague and friend, Bruno Contardi, together with Elena di Gioia (then at the Rome Museum, now curator at the Musei Capitolini) at the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome. The important studies carried out by Contardi and Di Gioia not only brought these statues to light and demonstrated their consanguinity but also revealed their common provenance from various buildings around the city, some of considerable importance. All the buildings and their sculptures were connected, either through documentation or inscriptions, to the Lateran hospice enterprise. Contardi and Di Gioia also clarified how this extraordinary gallery of divine simulacra (or better, icons) created by a team of more or less well-known sculptors in late-Baroque Rome, was created during a single campaign from 1694 to 1695. The reliefs were mounted on exterior facades, as ensigns to declare that the income from the buildings to which they were affixed served to support the hospice, along with major contributions from the papal treasury and private donations — all other charities were prohibited. In effect, the reliefs dedicated the buildings to the mission of Charity, in imitation of Christ.

The recuperation of the group of sculptures and the identification of its relationship to the Apostolic Hospice for the poor made it possible to reconstruct one of the most remarkable episodes in the modern artistic and social history of Rome, and, I venture to say, of Europe generally. For it became immediately apparent that all these works were intended to recall one model in particular, Bernini's last work, the famous *Bust of the Saviour*, an over-life size white marble sculpture with a base of Sicilian jasper, originally supported by a wooden pedestal consisting of two kneeling angels. This

<sup>6</sup> On San Michele, see Sisinni 1990, Bevilacqua Melasecchi 2001.

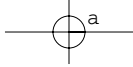


huge, quasi-iconic image, long known from preparatory studies and replicas, was thought to be lost (Fig. 20). Bernini's biographers report that he left the sculpture as a token of their mutual esteem to his friend Queen Christina of Sweden, in whose palace it was noted by Nicodemus Tessin, Jr., on his visit to Rome in 1687–88. When Christina died in 1689 she in turn left the work to Pope Innocent XI Odescalchi (1676–89), and it is last recorded in a 1713 inventory of the Palazzo Odescalchi. The sculpture, including the jasper base recorded in the inventory but not the pedestal, came to light recently in the sacristy of the chapel of Pope Clement XI Albani (1700–21), in San Sebastiano fuori le mura (Fig. 21).<sup>7</sup>

The man who formulated the concept of the Hospice adopted by Innocent XII, the person who contributed to the organisation and administration of the Hospice and was charged with its management, was none other than Bernini's well-loved nephew, the priest Francesco Marchese, a leading member of the Oratorians. After the death of the artist (1680), Marchese became an increasingly influential figure in the intellectual and religious life of the city, with a marked interest in its social problems. He was appointed *Predicatore Apostolico* (preacher to the pope) in 1689, and in 1691 wrote a treatise to describe his proposal, which comprised only part of a much broader programme of reform. It was obviously Padre Marchese who suggested that Bernini's *Bust of the Christ* should serve as the Hospice's emblem. His purpose was not simply to promote his uncle's work, which was hardly necessary. He had understood that Bernini's image and the Apostolic Hospice were profoundly linked, both having been motivated by the same new ideal of genuinely universal charity.

I am not, however, totally convinced that the idea originally came from Marchese. Perceived as a superhuman vision, a miraculous apparition offered to the spectator by a pair of divine messengers, it cannot be coincidental that the *concetto* is most closely comparable to Bernini's own design for the display of the Sacred Eucharist in St. Peter's (Fig. 22). Moreover, Bernini's bust is related to two representations of Christ, among the most important in Rome, both closely connected to San Giovanni in Laterano. The church was originally dedicated to the Saviour in memory of the bust-length image in the centre of the apse, which was reputed to have appeared in heaven reciting the *Pax Vobis* benediction to the people on November 9, 324, the day Pope Sylvester I consecrated the basilica on the

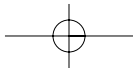
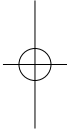
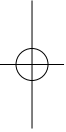
<sup>7</sup> On the bust in San Sebastiano, see Lavin 2003.



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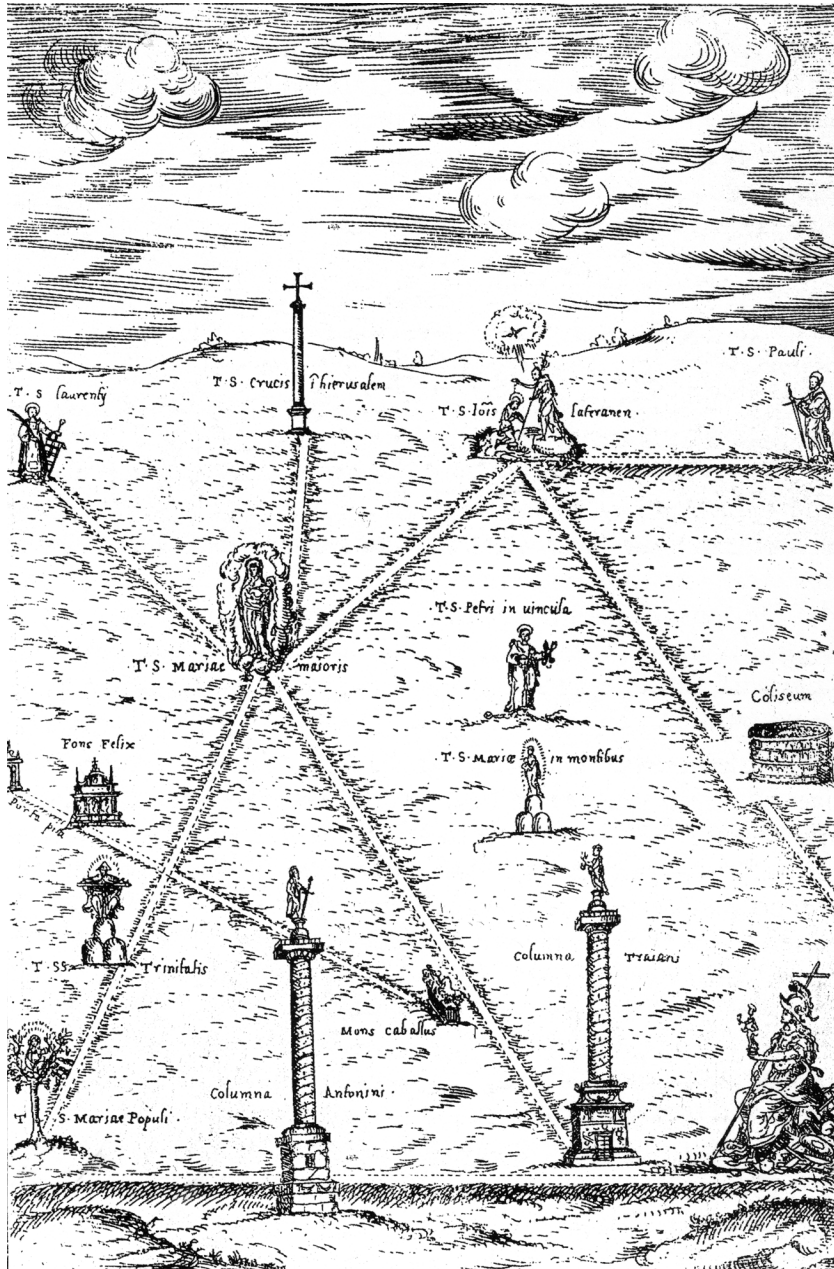
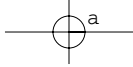
1.a-b-c. Commemorative medals of Piazza S. Pietro, 1657, 1661, 1666.  
Biblioteca Vaticana, Rome.



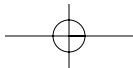


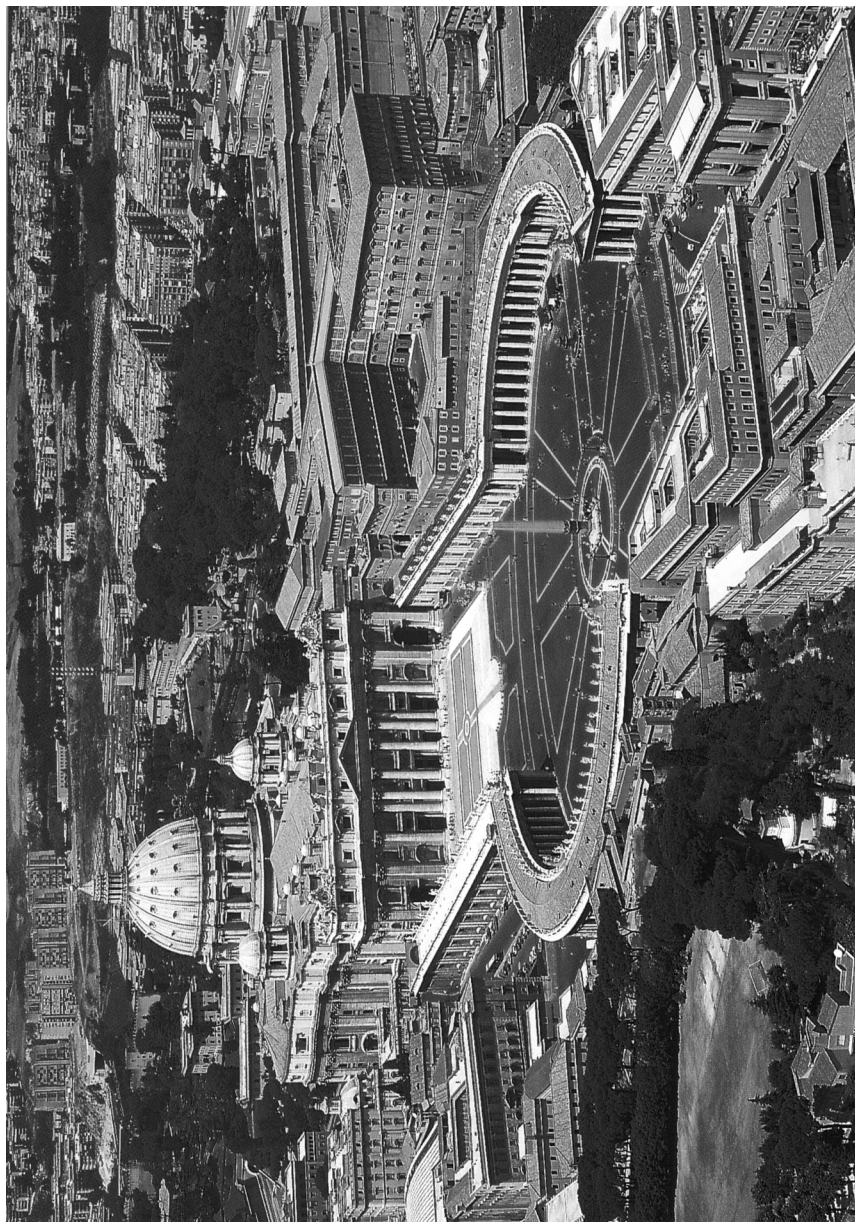
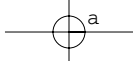
2. Map of Rome showing Alexander's street corrections, piazzas and buildings. (after Krauthheimer 1985, 18f., fig.7).

- 1 Piazza del Popolo.
- 2 S. Carlo al Corso.
- 3 Via del Corso.
- 4 Piazza Colonna.
- 5 S. Maria in Via Lata.
- 6 Piazza del Collegio Romano.
- 7 Piazza Venezia and Via del Gesù (Plebiscito).
- 8 Palazzo Chigi (Odescalchi) on Piazza SS. Apostoli.
- 9 Piazza del Gesù.
- 10 S. Andrea della Valle.
- 11 Avenue leading to S. Andrea della Valle (project).
- 12 Piazza di Monte Giordano.
- 13 Ponte S. Angelo.
- 14 Avenue leading to Piazza S. Pietro (project).
- 15 Piazza S. Pietro.
- 16 Scala Regia.
- 17 Cathedral Petri.
- 18 Access to Trinità dei Monti (project).
- 19 Via Babuino-Due Macelli continued to foot of Quirinal Gardens (project).
- 20 Stairs and gate to Quirinal Gardens (project).
- 21 New wing of Quirinal Palace ("manica lunga").
- 22 S. Andrea al Quirinale.
- 23 Approach from Piazza Magnanapoli to Quirinal Palace
- 24 S. Rita di Cascia, foot of Capitol.
- 25 Piazza Campitelli and church.
- 26 S. Carlo at Catinan and convent of Barnabites.
- 27 Forum Romanum with trees.
- 28 Pantheon.
- 29 Piazza di Pietra.
- 30 Piazza della Minerva.
- 31 Piazza S. Agostino and projected shopping center.
- 32 Piazza della Pace and church.
- 33 Piazza S. Maria in Trastevere.
- 34 Ripa Grande.
- 35 S. Ivo della Sapienza and Sapienza rear façade.
- 36 Via S. Dorotea.

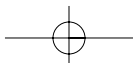
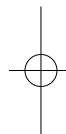
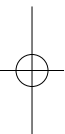


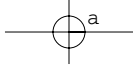
3. Plan of Rome under Sixtus V in the form of a star (after Bordini 1588, 44).





4. St. Peter's  
and Piazza.  
Rome.

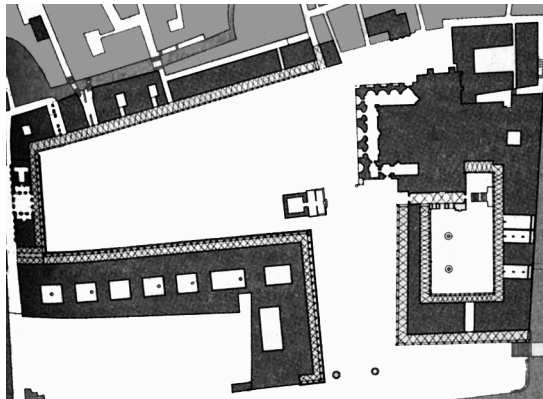
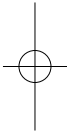
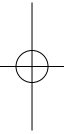




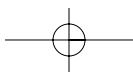
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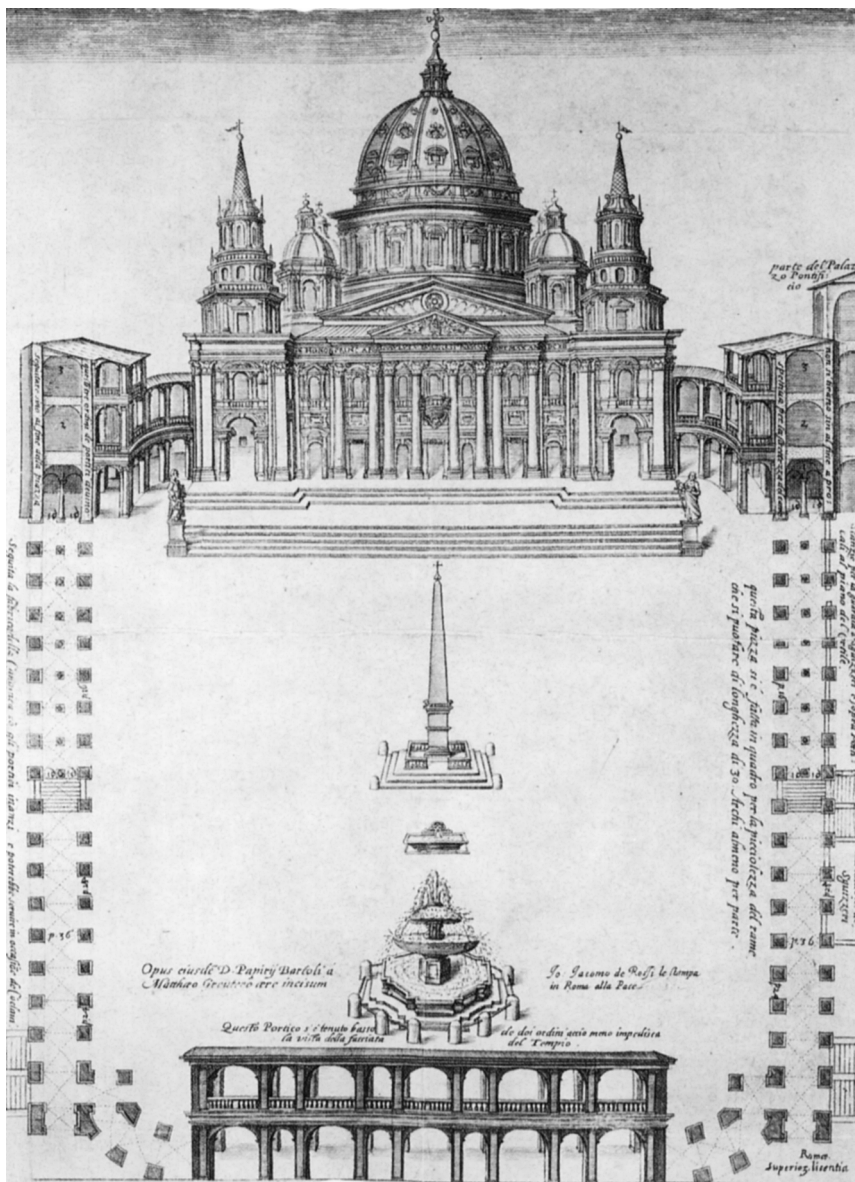
5a. Canaletto, view of Piazza San Marco. Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge MA.



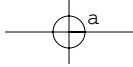
5b. Plan of Piazza San Marco.







6. Papirio Bartoli, Project for Piazza San Pietro, engraving. Biblioteca Vaticana, Rome.

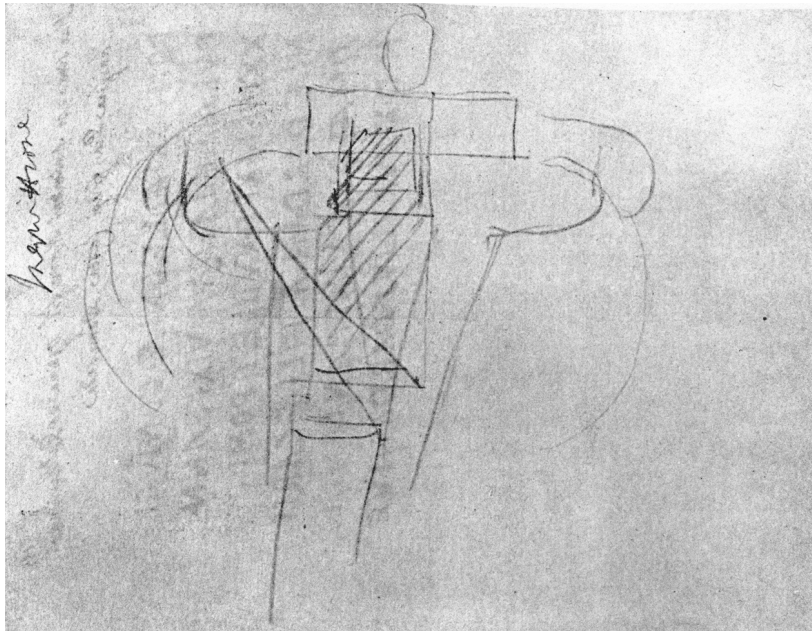


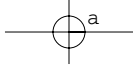
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7. Colonnade of Piazza San Pietro.

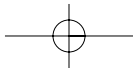
8. Gianlorenzo Bernini, St. Peter's and the colonnades as the pope with embracing arms, drawing. Biblioteca Vaticana, Rome.

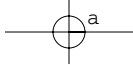




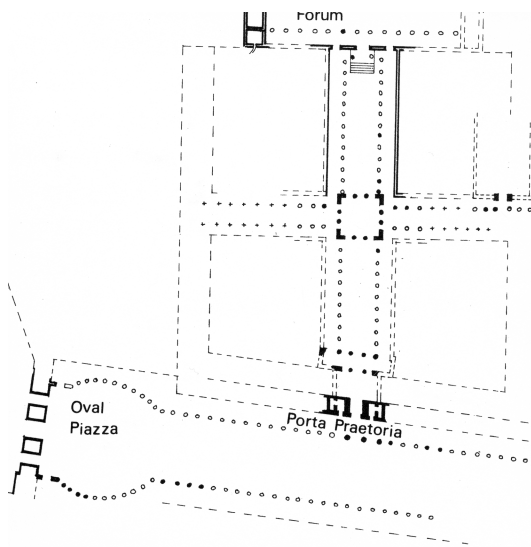
9. Anonymous, Corpus Domini procession, ca. 1640.  
Museo di Palazzo Venezia, Rome.

10. Pope at Window of Vatican Palace seen from Piazza San Pietro.

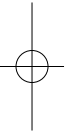




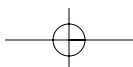
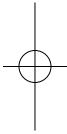
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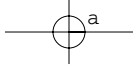


11. Plan of Oval Piazza and  
colonnaded thoroughfares.  
Palmyra, Syria  
(after Browning 1979, 125).

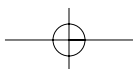


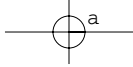
12. Colonnade of Piazza  
San Pietro, annular vault.





13. Jean Grandjean, Annular vault of the Colosseum, 1781, watercolor  
(after Luciani 1993, 24).

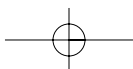




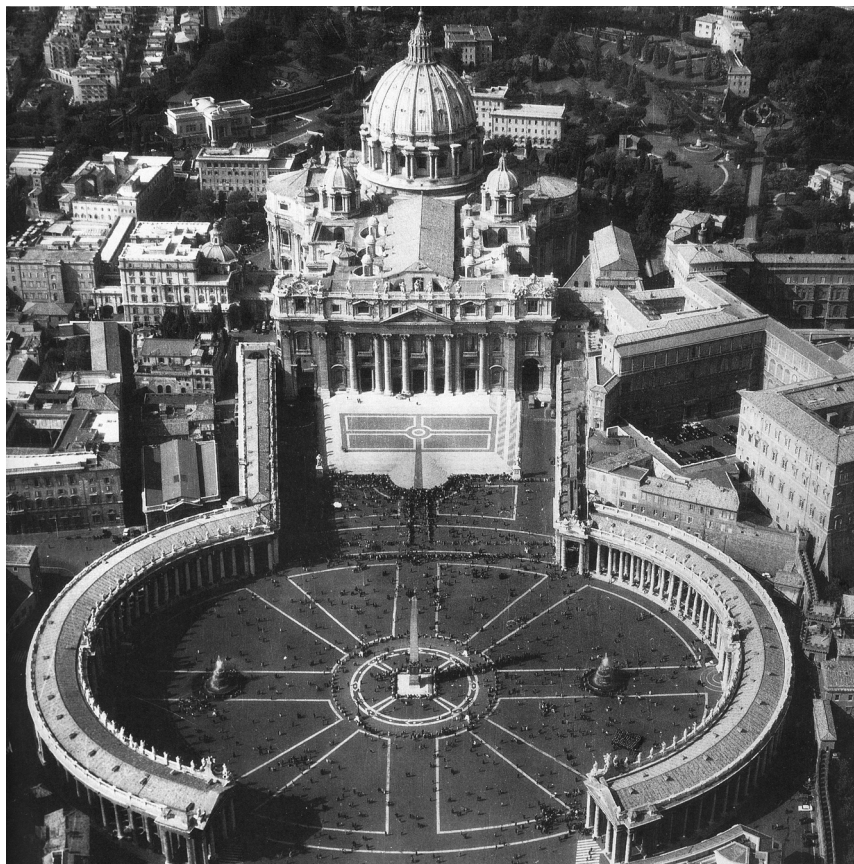
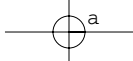
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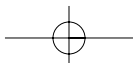
14. Colosseum. Rome.





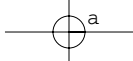


15. St. Peter's façade and flanking porticoes.

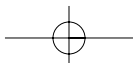


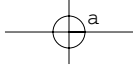




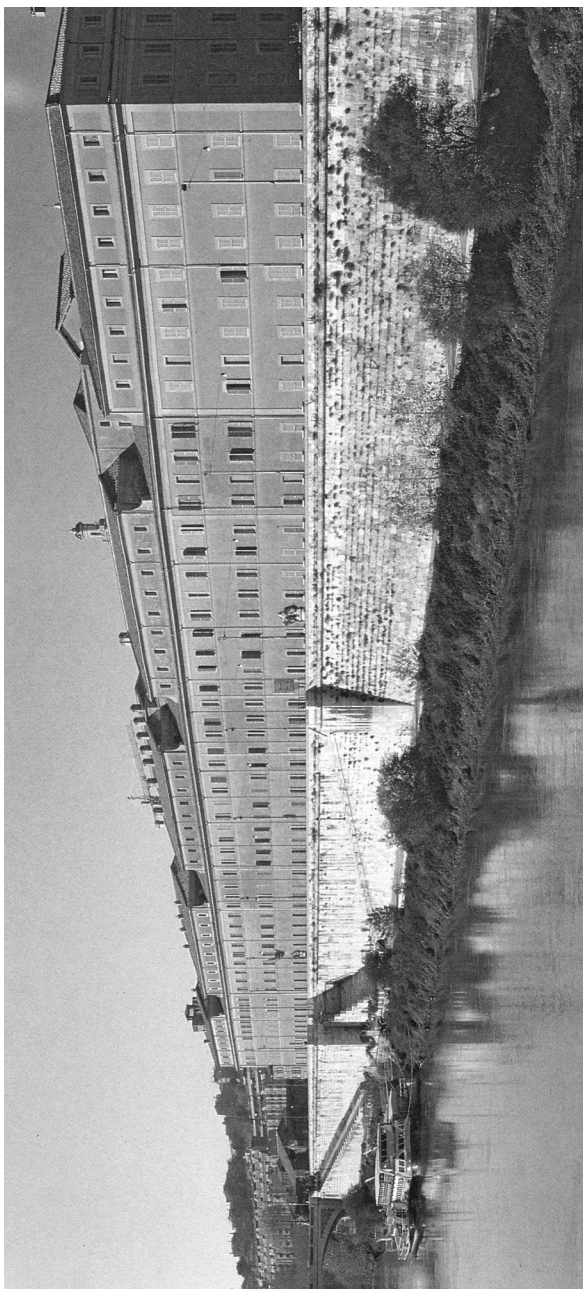


17. The Lateran palace as hospice for the poor, engraving (after Piazza, 1693, frontispiece).

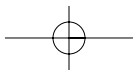
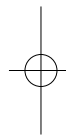
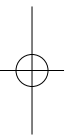




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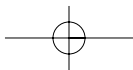
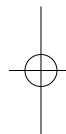
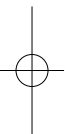


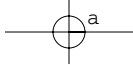
18. San Michele a Ripa Grande. Rome.





19a-b. Reliefs of the Savior. Rome, Palazzo di Montecitorio, Rome.

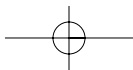
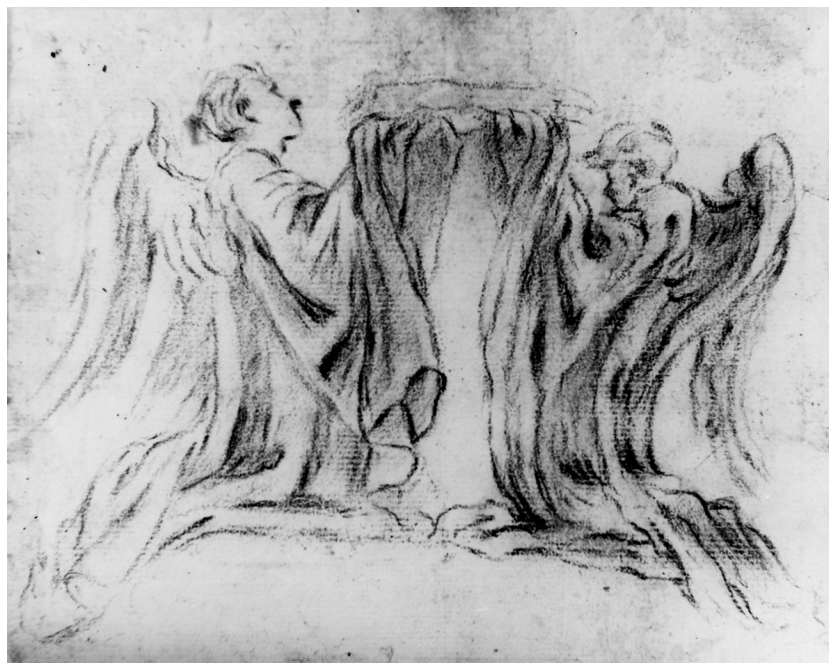
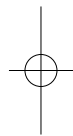
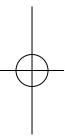


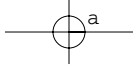


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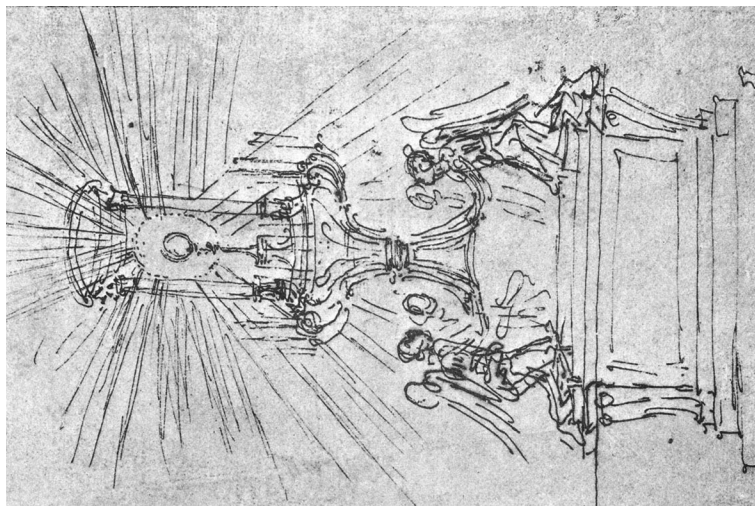
- 20a–b a. Gianlorenzo Bernini, study for the bust of the Savior, drawing. Gabinetto nazionale dell stampe, Rome.  
b. Gianlorenzo Bernini, Study for the upper part of the pedestal of the bust of the Savior, drawing. Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig.





THE ROME OF ALEXANDER VII

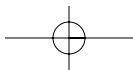
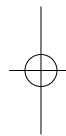
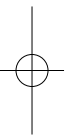
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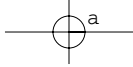


22. Gianlorenzo Bernini, study for a Monstrance, drawing, Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig.

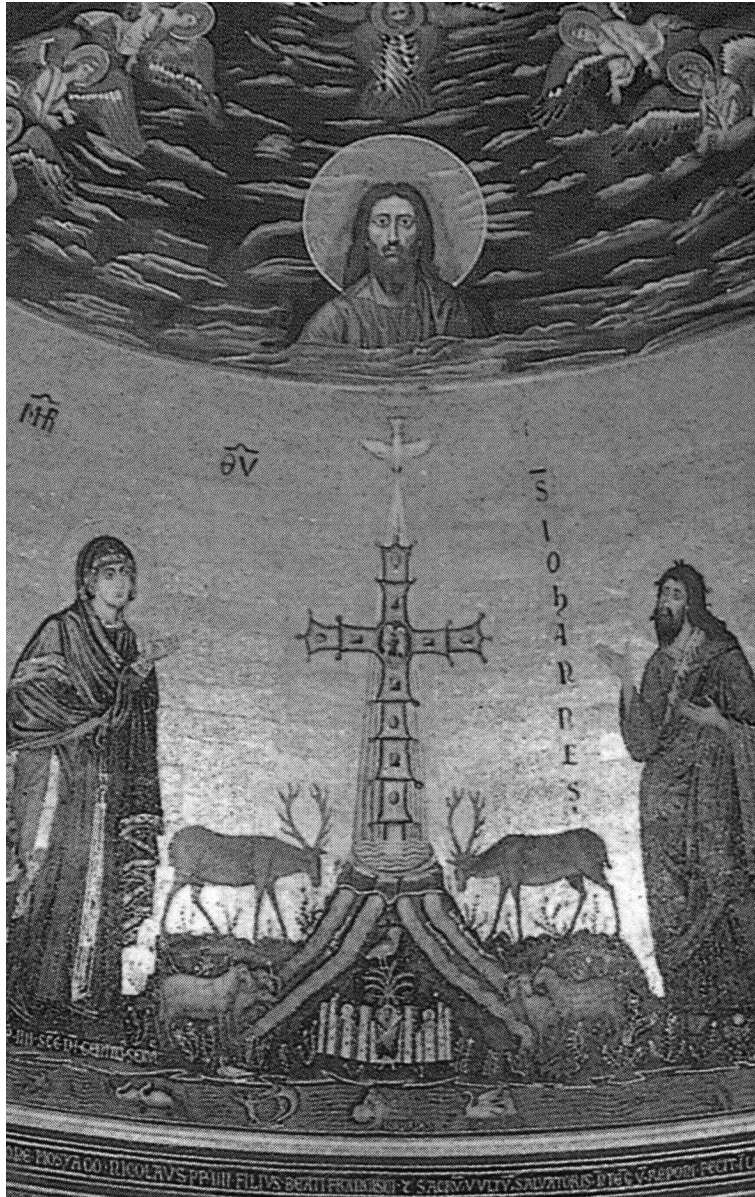


21. Gianlorenzo Bernini, bust of the Savior, S. Sebastiano fuori le mura, Rome.

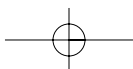




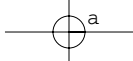
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23. Apse mosaic, detail. S. Giovanni in Laterano.



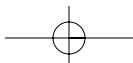




24. Emblem of the  
Archconfraternity of the SS.  
Salvatore ad Sancta Sanctorum.  
Hospital of S. Giovanni in  
Laterano, Rome.



25. Gianlorenzo Bernini, caricature of Innocent XI, drawing.  
Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig.

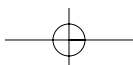
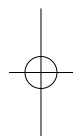
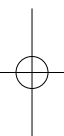




authority of the Emperor Constantine the Great (Fig. 23). The second image was linked to the *Venerabile Compagnia dell'Imagine più Sacra del Santissimo Salvatore nel Sancta Sanctorum*. This noble confraternity, one of the oldest in Rome, was given the task of protecting the icon of Christ housed in the Sancta Sanctorum. It was also responsible for overseeing the administration of the great hospital for the poor and sick that was annexed to the Lateran church in the late Middle Ages. The emblem of this confraternity was a bust of Christ, reminiscent of the mosaic image in the apse, with the addition of a base decorated as a parapet (Fig. 24). The emblem was printed on the confraternity's documents and, in the form of sculptured reliefs, were affixed to the buildings serving the hospital. These likenesses and their associations surely inspired Innocent XII to use Bernini's image for the Hospice.

I suspect, however, that Bernini himself had been inspired to make his bust of the Saviour in allusion first and foremost to the images of Christ at the Lateran, as the project for the new Hospice was being discussed; and that he conceived of his own image being used exactly as it was used twenty years later, the model for the other ensigns representing the Hospice's Charity. This hypothesis, in turn, throws light on a problem connected to the biographers' account of the history of Bernini's sculpture. They report that he executed the bust when he was 80 years old (1678), and that he left it in a legacy to Queen Christina. Considering the heroic scale of the work, standing overall some ten feet (300 cm) high, it was better suited to a public monument than to a private devotional image, even for the use of a Queen. It is tempting to suppose that Bernini had already thought of the bust in 1676, with the idea of placing it in the new Hospice to be set up in the Lateran Palace, according to Sozzini's restructuring project. The inability, or rather the refusal of Innocent XI Odescalchi to bring the project to a conclusion could have been one of the reasons why Bernini made the devastating caricature of Innocent as a shrewish hypochondriac, the 'No-Pope', 'Papa-Minga' in his popular Lombard dialect nickname (Fig. 25).

It is astonishing in retrospect to grasp a common thread running through this almost fifty-year period of Roman social reform. One figure may be traced through the long history of the idea of housing in the Lateran palace of the popes a hospice for the poor, from its inception under Alexander VII to its realisation by Francesco Marchese, that of Gianlorenzo Bernini himself. Perhaps it is far-fetched to suggest that a 'mere' artist might have contributed to the invention as well as the definition and realisation of





this great venture in the development of the modern city. In any case, in the Piazza San Pietro Bernini certainly approached the burgeoning problems of unemployment with a new vision, and in the bust of the Saviour created a new image of the model of charity that inspired it.

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