## CHAPTER 8

# GIANLORENZO BERNINI
## ⟨1598–1680⟩

### INTRODUCTION

FEW data are needed to outline the life's story of the greatest genius of the Italian Baroque. Bernini was born at Naples on 7 December 1598, the son of a Neapolitan mother and a Florentine father. We have seen that his father Pietro was a sculptor of more than average talent and that he moved with his family to Rome in about 1605. Until his death seventy-five years later Gianlorenzo left the city only once for any length of time, when he followed in 1665, at the height of his reputation, Louis XIV's call to Paris. With brief interruptions his career led from success to success, and for more than fifty years, willingly or unwillingly, Roman artists had to bow to his eminence. Only Michelangelo before him was held in similar esteem by the popes, the great, and the artists of his time. Like Michelangelo he regarded sculpture as his calling and was, at the same time, architect, painter, and poet; like Michelangelo he was a born craftsman and marble was his real element; like Michelangelo he was capable of almost superhuman concentration and single-mindedness in pursuing a given task. But unlike the terrible and lonely giant of the sixteenth century, he was a man of infinite charm, a brilliant and witty talker, fond of conviviality, aristocratic in demeanour, a good husband and father, a first-rate organizer, endowed with an unparalleled talent for creating rapidly and with ease.

His father's activity in Paul V's Chapel in S. Maria Maggiore determined the beginning of his career. It was thus that the pope's and Cardinal Scipione Borghese's attention was drawn to the young prodigy and that he, a mere lad of nineteen, entered the orbit of the most lavish patron of the period. Until 1624 he remained in the service of the cardinal, creating, with brief interruptions, the statues and groups which are still in the Villa Borghese. After Urban VIII's accession to the papal throne, his pre-eminent position in the artistic life of Rome was secured. Soon the most important enterprises were concentrated in his hands, and from 1624 to the end of his days he was almost exclusively engaged on religious works. In February 1629, after Maderno's death, he was appointed 'Architect to St Peter's' and, although his activity in that church began as early as 1624 with the commission of the Baldacchino (Plate 56), the majority of his sculptural, decorative, and architectural contribution lay between 1630 and his death.

In the early 1620s he was one of the most sought-after portrait sculptors, but with the accretion of monumental tasks on an unprecedented scale, less and less time was left him for distractions of this kind. In the later 1620s and in the thirties he had to employ the help of assistants for such minor commissions, and from the last thirty-five years of his life hardly half a dozen portrait busts exist by his hand. The most extensive works –

tombs, statues, chapels, churches, fountains, monuments, and the Square of St Peter's – crowd into the three pontificates of Urban VIII, Innocent X, and Alexander VII. Although he was active to the very end, it was only during the last years that commissions thinned out. From all we can gather, this was due to the general dearth of artistic activity rather than to a decline of his creative capacity in old age. His work as a painter was mainly confined to the 1620s; later he hardly touched a brush and preferred using professional painters to express his ideas. Most of his important architectural designs, on the other hand, belong to the later years of his life, particularly to the period of Alexander VII's reign.[1]

## SCULPTURE

### Stylistic Development

It is not quite easy in Bernini's case to ascertain with precision caesuras in the development of his style. The reason is simple: for about fifty years he worked simultaneously on a number of great enterprises and many of them were carried out over long periods, while changes and alterations were incorporated as long as the progress of the work permitted. Thus he needed nine years to finish the Baldacchino, ten years for the *Longinus*, thirteen for the Cathedra, and almost twenty for the tomb of Urban VIII. Nevertheless, his approach to sculpture underwent considerable transformations which can be associated, by and large, with definite periods of his life.

To the earliest group of works, datable between 1615 and 1617, belong the *Goat Amalthea with the Infant Jupiter and a Satyr* (Borghese Gallery), the *St Lawrence* (Florence, Contini Bonacossi Collection) and the *St Sebastian* (Lugano, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection), and in addition the Santoni[2] and Vigevano busts (S. Prassede and S. Maria sopra Minerva, Rome). All these works show, in spite of their Mannerist ties, an extraordinary freedom, an energy and perfection of surface treatment which lift them far above the mass of mediocre contemporary productions. The next phase begins with the *Aeneas and Anchises* of 1618–19 (Plate 46A), the first monumental group for Cardinal Scipione Borghese. A work of this size required considerable discipline, and we see the young Bernini – probably advised by his father – returning to a composition more decidedly Mannerist than any of his previous sculptures. The screw-like build-up of the bodies has a well-established Mannerist pedigree (*figura serpentinata*), also to be found in the father's work, while the precision, vigour, and firmness of the execution clearly represent an advance beyond the earliest phase. The next statues, following in rapid succession, demonstrate an amazing process of emancipation which is hardly equalled in the whole history of sculpture. One may follow this from the *Neptune and Triton*, made to crown a fishpond in Cardinal Montalto's garden (1620, now Victoria and Albert Museum), to the *Rape of Proserpina* (1621–2), the *David* (1623; Plate 46B), and the *Apollo and Daphne* (1622–5, all for Scipione Borghese, Borghese Gallery, Rome). A new type of sculpture had emerged. Hellenistic antiquity and Annibale Carracci's Farnese ceiling were the essential guides to Bernini's revolutionary conceptions.[3] Some of the new

principles may be summarized: all these figures show a transitory moment, the climax of an action, and the beholder is drawn into their orbit by a variety of devices. Their immediacy and near-to-life quality are supported by the realism of detail and the differentiation of texture which make the dramatic incident all the more impressive. One need only compare Bernini's *David* with statues of David of previous centuries, such as Donatello's or Michelangelo's, to realize the decisive break with the past: instead of a self-contained piece of sculpture, a figure striding through space almost menacingly engages the observer.

With the *St Bibiana* (1624–6, S. Bibiana, Rome; Plate 47A) begins the long series of religious statues which required a change of spirit, if not of sculptural principles. Here for the first time Bernini expressed in sculpture the typically seventeenth-century sensibility so well known from Reni's paintings. Here also for the first time the fall of the drapery seems to support, and to participate in, the mental attitude of the figure. Later, he increasingly regarded garments and draperies as a means to sustain a spiritual concept by an abstract play of folds and crevasses, of light and shade. The next decisive step in the conquest of the body by the dramatically conceived drapery is the monumental *Longinus* (1629–38, St Peter's; Plate 47B). Three strands of folds radiate from a nodal point under the left arm towards the large vertical cataract of drapery, leading the eye in a subtle way to the stone image of the Holy Lance, a relic of which is preserved in the crypt under the statue. Thus the body of St Longinus is almost smothered under the weight of the mantle, which seems to follow its own laws.

A parallel development will be found in Bernini's busts. Those of the 1620s are pensive and calm, with a simple silhouette and plastic, firm folds of draperies. A long series of these 'static' but psychologically penetrating busts survives from the small head of Paul V (1618, Borghese Gallery; Plate 54A) to the busts of Gregory XV, of Cardinal Escoubleau de Sourdis (S. Bruno, Bordeaux), of Monsignor Pedro de Foix Montoya (S. Maria di Monserrato, Rome), to the early busts of Urban VIII and that of Francesco Barberini (Washington, National Gallery, Kress Collection), to name only the most important ones. The bust of Scipione Borghese of 1632 (Rome, Borghese Gallery; Plate 54B), by contrast, has a dynamic quality;[4] the head is shown in momentary movement, the lively eye seems to fix the beholder, and the mouth half-open, as if speaking, engages him in conversation. Similarly dynamic is the arrangement of the drapery, on which the lights play and flicker and which therefore seems in permanent movement.

Thus, with this bust and the statue of Longinus a new phase begins in Bernini's work. If one wants to attach to them a terminological label, they may be called 'High Baroque'. The new importance conferred upon the drapery as a prominent factor in supporting the emotional impact of the work will be found during the same years in paintings by Cortona or Lanfranco, and even in those of an artist like Reni. One may compare the Virgin in Reni's *Assumption* in Genoa of 1616–17 (Plate 16B) with that of his *Madonna of the Rosary* of 1630–1 (Bologna, Pinacoteca); only the latter shows passages of heavy self-contained drapery similar to the vertical fall of Longinus's mantle.

But Bernini did not immediately pursue the newly opened path. On the contrary, during the 1630s there was a brief pause, a classical recession, probably not uninfluenced

by the increasing pressure from the camp of the more emphatic upholders of the classical doctrine. To this phase belong, among others, the tomb of the Countess Matilda in St Peter's (1633–7) and the large relief of the *Pasce Oves Meas* inside the portico over the central door of the basilica (1633–46); in addition, the head of the *Medusa* (1636?, Rome, Palazzo dei Conservatori) and some portrait busts, above all those of Paolo Giordano II Orsini, Duke of Bracciano (Castle, Bracciano), and of Thomas Baker (1638, Victoria and Albert Museum); finally, some of Bernini's weakest works, such as the Memorial Inscription for Urban VIII in S. Maria in Araceli (1634) and the Memorial Statue of Urban VIII in the Palazzo dei Conservatori (1635–40). The contribution of assistants in the execution of all these works varies, and none can lay claim to complete authenticity.

What may be called Bernini's middle period, the years from about 1640 to the mid fifties, must be regarded as the most important and most creative of his whole career. It was during these years that the final design of the tomb of Urban VIII took shape (begun 1628, but carried out mainly between 1639 and 1647, St Peter's; Plate 52A), that he developed a revolutionary type of funeral monument (Maria Raggi, 1643, S. Maria sopra Minerva), and – most decisive – conceived the idea of unifying all the arts to one overwhelming effect while at the same time discovering the potentialities of concealed and directed light (Raimondi Chapel, S. Pietro in Montorio, *c.* 1642–6, and Cornaro Chapel, S. Maria della Vittoria, 1645–52; Plate 50). During these years, too, he placed for the first time a monumentalized rustic fountain into the centre of a square (Four Rivers Fountain, Piazza Navona, 1648–51; Plate 53B), radically revised the classical concept of beauty (*Truth Unveiled*, 1646–52, Borghese Gallery), found a new solution for the old problem of the truncated chest in busts (*Francis I d'Este*, 1650–1, Estense Gallery, Modena), and designed the new type of the Baroque equestrian monument (*Constantine*, begun 1654, but not finished until 1668, Scala Regia, Vatican; Plate 59B). It is impossible to overestimate the significance of the ideas incorporated in these works, not only for the Roman setting but for the next hundred years of Italian and, indeed, European art.

The transition to his latest manner may be observed in the works from the early sixties onwards. With the one exception of the *Habakkuk* (1655–61, S. Maria del Popolo; Plate 48A), all his later figures show the over-long and slender limbs which he first gave to the *Truth Unveiled*. One may follow the development towards the conception of more and more attenuated bodies from the *Daniel* (1655–7, Chigi Chapel, S. Maria del Popolo) to the *Mary Magdalen* in Siena Cathedral (1661–3; Plate 48B), further to the Angels at the sides of the Chair of the Cathedra (cast in 1665) and the Angels for the Ponte S. Angelo (1668–71, S. Andrea delle Fratte [Plate 49, A and B] and Ponte S. Angelo) [5] with their ethereal bodies and extremely elongated extremities. And parallel with this 'gothicizing' tendency the treatment of garments becomes increasingly impetuous, turbulent, and sophisticated. They lose more and more the character of real material and must be viewed as abstract patterns capable of conveying to the beholder a feeling of passionate spirituality. In the case of the *Mary Magdalen*, for instance, the sweep and counter-sweep of two ropes of tightly twisted folds cutting right across the body sublimely express the saint's agony and suspense. Similarly, the grief of the Ponte

S. Angelo Angels over Christ's Passion is reflected in different ways in their wind-blown draperies. The Crown of Thorns held by one of them is echoed by the powerful, wavy arc of the drapery which defies all attempts at rational explanation. By contrast, the more delicate and tender mood of the Angel with the Superscription is expressed and sustained by the drapery crumpled into nervous folds which roll up restlessly at the lower end.

In the early seventies Bernini drew the last consequences. One may study the change from Constantine's horse to the similar horse of the equestrian monument of Louis XIV (1669–77, Versailles), or even from the authentic bozzetto, to be dated 1670 (Borghese Gallery), to the execution of the actual work, which was nearing completion in 1673, and it will be found that between the model and the marble there was a further and last advance in the dynamic ornamentalization of form. The garments of the bronze angels on the altar of the Cappella del Sacramento (St Peter's, 1673–4) show this tendency developed to its utmost limit. Parallel with this went an inclination to replace the diagonals, so prominent during the middle period, by horizontals and verticals, to play with meandering curves or to break angular folds abruptly, and to deepen crevices and furrows. Nobody can overlook the change from the *Ecstasy of St Teresa* (1645–52; Plate 51) to the *Blessed Lodovica Albertoni* (1674, S. Francesco a Ripa; Plate 59A) or from the portrait bust of Francis I (1650–1) to that of Louis XIV (1665, Versailles; Plate 55B). In his latest bust – that of Gabriele Fonseca (c. 1668–75, S. Lorenzo in Lucina; Plate 117B) – it is evident how strongly these compositional devices support the emotional tension expressed in the head.

Bernini's turn, in his later years, to an austere and, one is tempted to say, classical framework for his compositions shows that he was not independent of the prevalent tendencies of the period. But in his case it is just the contrast between violently strained plastic masses and axial control which gives his late work an unequalled dramatic and ecstatic quality.

## Sculpture with One and Many Views

It is one of the strange and ineradicable misapprehensions, due, it seems, to Heinrich Woelfflin's magnetic influence, that Baroque sculpture presents many points of view.[6] The contrary is the case, and nobody has made this clearer than the greatest Baroque artist – Bernini himself. Many readers may, however, immediately recall the Borghese Gallery statues and groups which, standing free in the centre of the rooms, invite the beholder to go round them and inspect them from every side. It is usually forgotten that their present position is of fairly recent date and that each of these works was originally placed against a wall. Right from the beginning Bernini 'anchored' his statues firmly to their surroundings and with advancing years found new and characteristic devices to assure that they would be viewed from pre-selected points.

It is, of course, Renaissance statuary that comes to mind when we think of sculpture conceived for one main aspect. Most Renaissance figures leave not a shadow of doubt about the principal view, since by and large they are worked like reliefs with bodies and

extremities extending without overlappings in an ideal forward plane. Quite different are Bernini's figures: they extend in depth and often display complex arrangements of contrasting spatial planes and movements. The difference may be studied in the Chigi Chapel in S. Maria del Popolo, where Bernini designed his *Habakkuk* (Plate 48A) as a counterpart to Lorenzetti's Raffaelesque *Jonah*. In contradistinction to the latter's relief-like character, Bernini's figure, or rather group, does not offer a coherent 'relief-plane', but emphatically projects and recedes in the third dimension. In addition to the contrap-postal arrangement of Habakkuk's legs, torso, and head and the pointing arm cutting across the body, there is the angel turned into the niche. And it is just when we see Habakkuk in the frontal view that the angel appears most foreshortened. But viewing the group as a whole, we note that the angel's action (his gripping the prophet by a lock of hair and pointing across the room, in the direction of Daniel's niche) is fully defined from the exact central position facing the niche, and it is only from this stand-point that all the parts, such as the combined play of the legs and arms of the two figures, can be seen as a meaningful pattern.[7] In order to perceive the body and arms of the angel fully extended, the beholder has to step far to the right; but then Habakkuk's pose and movement are no longer co-ordinated, nor does the whole group present an integrated, coherent view. Thus, once the beholder relinquishes the principal aspect, new views may appear in his field of vision, yet they are always partial ones which reveal details otherwise hidden, without, however, contributing to a clarification of the overall design.

The result of this analysis may safely be generalized; we are, in fact, concerned with an essential problem in Baroque sculpture. It appears then that Bernini's statues are con-ceived in depth and that the sensation of their spatial organization should and will al-ways be realized, but that they are nevertheless composed as images for a single princi-pal viewpoint. One must even go a step further in order to get this problem into proper focus. Bernini's figures not only move freely in depth but seem to belong to the same space in which the beholder lives. Differing from Renaissance statuary, his figures need the continuum of space surrounding them and without it they would lose their *raison d'être*. Thus the *David* aims his stone at an imaginary Goliath who must be assumed to be somewhere in space near the beholder; the *Bibiana* is shown in mute communication with God the Father, who, painted on the vault above her, spreads his arms as if to re-ceive her into the empyrean of saints; *Longinus* looks up to the heavenly light falling in from the dome of St Peter's; *Habakkuk* points to the imaginary labourers in the field while the angel of God is about to remove him to Daniel's den across the space in which the spectator stands. The new conceptual position may now be stated more pointedly: Bernini's statues breathe, as it were, the same air as the beholder, are so 'real' that they even share the space continuum with him, and yet remain picture-like works of art in a specific and limited sense; for although they stimulate the beholder to circulate, they require the correct viewpoint not only to reveal their space-absorbing and space-pene-trating qualities, but also to grasp fully the meaning of the action or theme represented. To be sure, it is Bernini's persistent rendering of a transitory moment that makes the one-view aspect unavoidable: the climax of an action can be wholly revealed from one viewpoint alone.

While Bernini accepts on a new sophisticated level the Renaissance principle of sculpture with one view, he also incorporates in his work essential features of Mannerist statuary, namely complex axial relationships, broken contours, and protruding extremities. He takes advantage, in other words, of the Mannerist freedom from the limitations imposed by the stone. Many of his figures and groups consist of more than one block, his *Longinus* for instance of no less than five. Mannerist practitioners and theorists, in the first place Benvenuto Cellini, discussed whether a piece of sculpture should have one or many views. Their verdict was a foregone conclusion. Giovanni Bologna in his *Rape of the Sabines* (1579–83) showed how to translate theory into practice and gave a group of several figures an infinite number of equally valid viewpoints. The propagation of multiple viewpoints in sculpture came in the wake of a deep spiritual change, for the socially elevated sculptor of the sixteenth century, refusing to be a mere craftsman, thought in terms of small models of wax or clay. Thus he created, unimpeded by the material restrictions of the block. The Renaissance conception of sculpture as the art of working in stone ('the art of subtracting') began to be turned into the art of working in clay and wax ('modelling', which is done by adding – for Michelangelo a painterly occupation), and this sixteenth-century revolution ultimately led to the decay of sculpture in the nineteenth century. Although Bernini could not accept the many views of Mannerist statuary because they would interfere with his carefully planned subject–object (beholder–work) relationship and, moreover, would prevent the perception at a glance of one centre of energy and one climax of action, he did not return to the Renaissance limitations dictated by the block-form, since he wanted to wed his statues to the surrounding space. By combining the single viewpoint of Renaissance statues with the freedom achieved by the Mannerists, Bernini laid the foundation for his new, Baroque, conception of sculpture.

Only on rare occasions did he conceive works for multiple viewpoints. This happened when the conditions under which his works were to be seen were beyond his control. Such is the case of the angels for the Ponte S. Angelo, which had to have a variety of viewpoints for the people crossing the bridge. These angels clearly present three equally favourable views – from the left, the right, and the centre; but they do not offer coherent views either in pure profile or from the back, for these aspects are invisible to the passers-by.

During his middle period Bernini brought new and most important ideas to bear upon the problem of defined viewpoints. He placed the group of *St Teresa and the Angel* in a deep niche under a protective architectural canopy (Plates 50 and 51), and this makes it virtually impossible to see the work unless the beholder stands in the nave of the church exactly on the central axis of the Cornaro Chapel. Enshrined by the framing lines of the architecture, the group has an essentially pictorial character; one may liken it to a *tableau vivant*. The same is true of later designs whenever circumstances permitted. The Cathedra was conceived like an enormous colourful picture framed by the columns of the Baldacchino (Plate 56). Similarly, the pictorial concepts of the *Constantine* and the *Blessed Lodovica Albertoni* are revealed only when they are looked at from inside the portico of St Peter's and from the nave of S. Francesco a Ripa respectively (Plate 59, A and B).

Indeed, the carefully contrived framing devices almost force upon the spectator the correct viewing position.

In spite of their *tableau vivant* character, all these works are still vigorously three-dimensional and vigorously 'alive'; they are neither reliefs nor relegated to a limited space. They act on a stage of potentially unlimited extension. They still share, therefore, our space continuum, but at the same time they are far removed from us: they are strange, visionary, unapproachable – like apparitions from another world.

## Colour and Light

It is evident that Bernini's pictorial approach to sculpture cannot be dissociated from two other aspects, colour and light, which require special attention.

Polychrome marble sculpture is rather exceptional in the history of European art. The link with the uncoloured marbles of ancient Rome was never entirely broken, and it is characteristic that in Florence, for instance, polychromy was almost exclusively reserved for popular works made of cheap materials. But during the late sixteenth century it became fashionable in Rome and elsewhere to combine white marble heads with coloured busts, in imitation of a trend in late antique sculpture. The naturalistic element implicit in such works never had any attraction for Bernini. The use of composite or polychrome materials would have interfered with his unified conception of bust or figure. In his Diary the Sieur de Chantelou informs us that Bernini regarded it as the sculptor's most difficult task to produce the impression and effect of colour by means of the white marble alone. But in a different sense polychromy was extremely important to him. He needed polychrome settings and the alliance of bronze and marble figures as much for the articulation, emphasis, and differentiation of meaning as for the unrealistic pictorial impression of his large compositions. It may be argued that he followed an established vogue.[8] To a certain extent this is true. Yet in his hands polychromy became a device of subtlety hitherto unknown.

Bernini's tomb of Urban VIII (Plate 52A) certainly follows the polychrome pattern of the older counterpart, Guglielmo della Porta's tomb of Paul III. But in Bernini's work the white and dark areas are much more carefully balanced and communicate a distinct meaning. The whole central portion is of dark, partly gilded bronze: the sarcophagus, the life-like figure of Death, and the papal statue, i.e. all the parts directly concerned with the deceased. Unlike these with their magic colour and light effects, the white marble allegories of Charity and Justice have manifestly a this-worldly quality. It is these figures with their human reactions and their sensual and appealing surface texture that form a transition between the beholder and the papal statue, which by virtue of its sombre colour alone seems far removed from our sphere of life.

More complex are the colour relationships in Bernini's later work. The Cornaro Chapel is, of course, the most perfect example. In the lowest, the human zone, the beholder is faced with a colour harmony of warm and glowing tones in red, green, and yellow. St Teresa's vision, the focal point of the whole composition, is dramatically accentuated by the contrast between the dark framing columns and the highly polished

whiteness of the group. Other stimuli are brought into play to emphasize the unusual character of the event which shows a seraph piercing her heart with the fiery arrow of divine love, symbol of the saint's mystical union with Christ. The vision takes place in an imaginary realm on a large cloud, magically suspended in mid-air before an iridescent alabaster background. Moreover, concealed and directed light is used in support of the dramatic climax to which the beholder becomes a witness. The light falls through a window of yellow glass hidden behind the pediment and is materialized, as it were, in the golden rays encompassing the group.[9]

It is often observed that Bernini drew here on his experience as stage designer. Although this is probably correct, it distracts from the real problem. For this art is no less and no more 'theatrical' than a Late Gothic altarpiece repeating a scene from a mystery play, frozen into permanence. In another chapter the symbolic religious connotations of light have been discussed (p. 28). Bernini's approach to the problem of light is in a clearly defined pictorial tradition of which the examples in Baroque painting are legion. The directed heavenly light, as used by Bernini, sanctifies the objects and persons struck by it and singles them out as recipients of divine Grace. The golden rays along which the light seems to travel have yet another meaning. By contrast to the calm, diffused light of the Renaissance, this directed light seems fleeting, transient, impermanent. Impermanence is its very essence. Directed light, therefore, supports the beholder's sensation of the transience of the scene represented: we realize that the moment of divine 'illumination' passes as it comes. With his directed light Bernini had found a way of bringing home to the faithful an intensified experience of the supra-natural.

No sculptor before Bernini had attempted to use real light in this way. Here in the ambient air of a chapel he did what painters tried to do in their pictures. If it is accepted that he translated back into the three dimensions of real life the illusion of reality rendered by painters in two dimensions, an important insight into the specific character of his pictorial approach to sculpture has been won. His love for chromatic settings now becomes fully intelligible. A work like the Cornaro Chapel was conceived in terms of an enormous picture.

This is true of the chapel as a whole. Higher up the colour scheme lightens and on the vaulting the painted sky opens. Angels have pushed aside the clouds so that the heavenly light issuing from the Holy Dove can reach the zone in which the mortals live. The figure of the seraph, brother of the angels painted in the clouds, has descended on the beams of light.

Along the side walls of the chapel, above the doors, appear the members of the Cornaro family kneeling behind prie-dieus and discussing the miracle that takes place on the altar. They live in an illusionist architecture which looks like an extension of the space in which the beholder moves.

In spite of the pictorial character of the design as a whole, Bernini differentiated here as in other cases between various degrees of reality. The members of the Cornaro family seem to be alive like ourselves. They belong to our space and our world. The supra-natural event of Teresa's vision is raised to a sphere of its own, removed from that of the beholder mainly by virtue of the isolating canopy and the heavenly light.[10] Finally, much

less tangible is the unfathomable infinity of the luminous empyrean. The beholder is drawn into this web of relationships and becomes a witness to the mysterious hierarchy ascending from man to saint and Godhead.

In all the large works from the middle period on, directed and often concealed light plays an overwhelmingly important part in producing a convincing impression of miracle and vision. Bernini solved the problem first in the Raimondi Chapel in S. Pietro in Montorio (c. 1642–6). Standing in the dim light of the chapel, the spectator looks into the altar-recess and sees, brightly lit as if by magic, the *Ecstasy of St Francis*, Francesco Baratta's relief. Later, Bernini used essentially similar devices not only for the Cornaro Chapel and for the Cathedra, but also for the *Constantine*, the *Blessed Lodovica Albertoni*, and, on a much larger scale, in the church of S. Andrea al Quirinale (Plate 61B).

At the same time, colour symphonies become increasingly opulent and impressive. Witness the tomb of Maria Raggi (1643, S. Maria sopra Minerva) with its sombre harmony of black, yellow, and gold; or the wind-swept colourful stucco curtain behind the *Constantine*, a motif that has not one but four different functions: as a forcible support of the Emperor's movement, as a device to relate the monument to the size of the niche, as the traditional 'emblem' of royalty, and as a fantastic pictorial element. Witness the jasper palls which he used only in such late works as the *Lodovica Albertoni* and the tomb of Alexander VII; or the altar in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in St Peter's (1673–4), where coloured marbles, gilt bronze, and lapis lazuli combine into a picture of sublime beauty which expresses symbolically the immaterial perfection of the angelic world and the radiance of God.

With his revolutionary approach to colour and light, Bernini opened a development of immeasurable consequences. It is not sufficiently realized that the pictorial concepts of the mature Bernini furnish the basis not only for many later Roman and North Italian works, but above all for the Austrian and German Baroque. Even the colour and light orgies of the Asam brothers add nothing essentially new to the repertory created by Bernini.

## The Transcending of Traditional Modes

Bernini's way of conceiving his large works in pictorial terms had a further revolutionary result: the traditional separation of the arts into clearly defined species or categories became obsolete and even nonsensical. What is the group of *St Teresa and the Angel*? Is it sculpture in the round or is it a relief? Neither term is applicable. On the one hand, the group cannot be dissociated from the aedicule, the background, and the rays of light; on the other, it has no relief-ground in the proper sense of the word, nor is it framed as a relief should be. In other words, Bernini created a species for which no term exists in our vocabulary.

Moreover, even the borderline between painting, sculpture, and architecture becomes fluid. Whenever given the opportunity, Bernini let his imagery flow from a unified concept which makes any dissection impossible. His own time was fully aware of this. In the words of Bernini's biographer, Filippo Baldinucci, it was 'common knowledge that he

was the first who undertook to unite architecture, sculpture and painting in such a way that they together make a beautiful whole'. The Cornaro Chapel is the supreme example. We have seen how the painted sky, the sculptured group, and the real and feigned architecture are firmly interlocked. Thus, only if we view the whole are the parts fully intelligible. This is also true of Bernini's primarily architectural works, as will be shown later in this chapter. The creation of new species and the fusion of all the arts enhance the beholder's emotional participation: when all the barriers are down, life and art, real existence and apparition, melt into one.

In the Cathedra of St Peter in the apse of the basilica (1656–66; Plates 56 and 57), Bernini's most complex and, due to its place and symbolic import, most significant work, the various points here made may be fully studied. We noted before how the whole was conceived like a picturesque *fata morgana* to be seen from a distance through the columns of the Baldacchino. Only from a near standpoint is it possible to discern the subtle interplay of multicoloured marble, gilt bronze, and stucco, all bathed in the yellow light spreading from the centre of the angelic Glory. No differentiation into species is possible: the window as well as the transitions from flat to full relief and then to free-standing figures penetrating far into space make up an indivisible whole. The beholder finds himself in a world which he shares with saints and angels, and he feels magically drawn into the orbit of the work. What is image, what is reality? The very borderline between the one and the other seems to be obliterated. And yet, in spite of the vast scale and spatial extension, the composition is most carefully arranged and balanced. The colour scheme lightens progressively from the marble pedestals to the bronze throne with gilt decorations and the golden angels of the Glory.[11] The gilded rays spread their protecting fingers over the whole width of the work and enhance, at the same time, the visual concentration on the symbolic focus, the area of the throne. Movements and gestures, even in different spatial layers, are intimately related. Thus the nervous and eloquent hands of St Ambrose and St Athanasius, shown on Plate 58A, appear like contrapuntal expressions of the same theme.

Bernini's new and unorthodox way of stepping across traditional boundaries and harnessing all the arts into one overwhelming effect baffles many spectators. Even those who rise in defence of similar phenomena in the case of modern art cannot forgive Bernini for having transgressed the established modes of artistic expression.[12] It is clear that his imagery will capture our imagination only if we are prepared to break down intellectual fences and concede to him what we willingly do before a Gonzalez or a Giacometti or a Moore.

## New Iconographical Types

No less important and influential than Bernini's new artistic principles and, naturally, inseparable from them were the changes he brought about over a wide choice of subjects. Only detailed studies would reveal the full range of his innovations. Although deeply conscious of, and indebted to, tradition, he approached every new task with a fresh and independent mind and developed it in a new direction. He became the greatest creator of

iconographical types of the Italian Baroque and his conception of the saint, of tombs, the equestrian statue, of portraiture and fountains remained unchallenged for a hundred years.

The tomb of Urban VIII (Plate 52A) established the new type of the papal monument. Looking back via Guglielmo della Porta's tomb of Paul III to Michelangelo's Medici Tombs, Bernini achieved an ideal balance between a commemorative and a ceremonial monument,[13] and it is this concept that many later sculptors endeavoured to follow with more or less success (p. 292). In the late tomb of Alexander VII (1671-8; Plate 52B), Bernini stressed the contrast between the impermanence of life (Death with hour-glass) and the unperturbed faith of the praying pope. But this idea, which corresponded so well with Bernini's own convictions on the threshold of death, was too personal to find much following. When it was taken up during the eighteenth century, the concept had changed: Death was no longer checked by the certainty of salvation through faith and held nothing but terror for those whom he threatens with permanent extinction.[14]

At the beginning of the 1640s Bernini brought a completely new approach to the problem of smaller funeral monuments with his designs of the Valtrini and Merenda memorials, both executed by studio hands,[15] and the tomb of Maria Raggi, a work of the highest quality. He rejected the isolating architectural framework; and in the Valtrini and Raggi tombs a relief-portrait of the deceased is carried by Death and by putti respectively. It was three generations later, in the Age of Enlightenment, that this type finally supplanted that with the deceased in an attitude of devotion (p. 294).

Equally momentous is his contribution to the history of portraiture. The *Scipione Borghese* of 1632 (p. 98) may safely be regarded as the first High Baroque portrait bust. From the mid thirties dates one of the most remarkable portrait busts of the whole history of art, that of *Costanza Buonarelli* (Florence, Bargello; Plate 55A). It is Bernini's only private portrait bust and is therefore done without the deliberate stylization of the other works of this period. One may well believe that the stormy love affair Bernini had with this fierce and sensual woman was the talk of the town. What is historically so important about this work is that it opens the history of modern portraiture in sculpture. All the barriers have fallen: here is a woman of the people, neither beautified nor heroized, and 'contact' with her is direct and instantaneous. In his busts of King Charles I (destroyed),[16] Francis I of Este, and Louis XIV (Plate 55B), by contrast, Bernini created the official Baroque type of the absolute sovereign. His intentions and procedure can be fully derived from the diary entries of the Sieur de Chantelou.[17] He approached such busts with the idea of conveying nobility, pride, heroism, and majesty. In this he was so successful that no Baroque sculptor could ever forget Bernini's visual rendering of these abstract notions. Similarly, he gave the Baroque equestrian statue with the rearing horse a heroic quality and invested it with drama and dynamic movement not only in his *Constantine* but also in the ill-starred monument of Louis XIV which stands now, transformed into a Marcus Curtius, near the 'Bassin des Suisses' in the gardens of Versailles.

Even more radical than all these innovations was Bernini's contribution to the history of the Baroque fountain. A tradition of fountains with figures existed in Florence rather

than Rome, and it was this tradition that Bernini took up and revolutionized. His early *Neptune and Triton* for the Villa Montalto (1620, now Victoria and Albert Museum) is evidence of the link with Florentine fountains.[18] With his Triton Fountain in the Piazza Barberini (1642–3;[19] Plate 53A) he broke entirely with the older formal treatment. Far removed from the decorative elegance of Florentine fountains, this massive structure confronts the beholder with a sculptural entity as integral as a natural growth. Sea-god, shell, and fish are welded into an organic whole, and nobody can fail to be captivated by the fairy-tale atmosphere of such a creation.

All recollection of symmetry and architectural structure has disappeared in the Fontana del Moro in Piazza Navona (1653–5), where Bernini used the same constituent elements: maritime divinity, shell, and dolphin. But these elements are now animated by dramatic action; we witness a transitory moment in the contest between the 'Moro' and his prey. Entirely different considerations had to be taken into account for the design of the large fountain in the centre of the same Piazza (Plate 53B). Bernini had to erect a monument sufficiently large to emphasize effectively the centre of the long square without disturbing its unity. At the same time the fountain had to be related to the façade of S. Agnese without competing with it. A 'natural' rock,[20] washed by ample springs, pierced by openings in the long and short axes and crowned by the huge Egyptian needle: barrier and link, accompaniment to the towers and contrast; expansive and varied near the ground and soaring upwards hard, uniform, and thin; fountain and monument; improvisation and symbol of superhuman permanency – these seeming contradictions point to the ingenious answer Bernini found to his problem.

The number of fountains created by Bernini is comparatively small. But their effect was all the greater. Contemporaries were fascinated not only by his new, truly poetical use of realistic motives like rock, shell, and natural growth, but also by his revolutionary handling of the water itself. For he replaced the traditional thin jets of water by an exuberant and powerful harnessing of the elements. It was the continuous movement of the rushing and murmuring water that helped to fulfil one of Bernini's most cherished dreams: to create real movement and pulsating life.

## The Role of the 'Concetto'

After the foregoing pages it hardly needs stressing that an impressionist and aesthetic appreciation or stylistic approach cannot do justice to Bernini's real intentions. It must never be forgotten that Bernini's ideas of what constitutes a satisfactory solution of a given task were dependent on humanist art theory. According to this theory, which allied painting and sculpture to poetry, a work of art must be informed by a literary theme, a characteristic and ingenious *concetto* which is applicable only to the particular case in hand. For Bernini the *concetto* was really synonymous with a grasp of the essential meaning of his subject; it was never, as so often in seventeenth-century art, a cleverly contrived embroidery. Moreover the concept he chooses for representation is always the moment of dramatic climax. This is true already for his early mythological and religious works created in the service of Cardinal Scipione Borghese.

Thus David is shown at the split-second of the fateful shot and Daphne at the instant of transformation. He represented both Bibiana and Longinus at the moment of their supreme tests, the former devoutly accepting her martyrdom and the latter in the emotional act of conversion, exclaiming while looking up at the Cross: 'Truly this was the Son of God.'[21] Similarly, the *Vision of St Teresa* strictly adheres to the saint's meticulous description of the event which must be regarded as the acme of her life; for it was this particular vision that played a decisive part in the acts of her canonization. Even from the story of Daniel and Habakkuk, told in 'Bel and the Dragon' (which forms part of the Greek Book of Daniel), Bernini selected the culminating moment to which reference has already been made (p. 101). In all these cases Bernini gave a visual interpretation of the most fertile dramatic moment. The same is true of the *Constantine*, for this is not simply an equestrian monument representing the first Christian emperor, but a dramatic history-piece illustrating a precise event of his life: the historically and emotionally decisive moment of conversion in face of the miraculous appearance of the Cross.[22]

But the *concetto* was not necessarily tied to factual historical events. A 'poetical' *concetto* contained no less intrinsic historical truth if chosen with proper discrimination. This applies to such works as the fountains, the equestrian statue of Louis XIV, and the Cathedra. It is a fatal error to believe that Louis XIV on horseback was devised as a purely dynastic monument. He was to appear on top of a high rock, a second Hercules who has reached the summit of the steep mountain of Virtue (Plate 58B).[23] Thus this work too is a dynamic history-piece. It is an allegorical equestrian statue, but as usual with Bernini, allegory is implied, not made explicit. The naturalistic rock, the fiery horse, and the heroic rider together express in dramatic visual terms the poetic allegorical content. In a similar way, a complex *concetto* is woven into the design of the Four Rivers Fountain. The personifications of the Four Rivers, symbolizing the four parts of the world, and the dove, Innocent X's emblem which crowns the obelisk, the traditional symbol of divine light and eternity, proclaim the all-embracing power of the Church under the leadership of the reigning Pamphili pope. A further layer of meaning is hinted at by the reference, manifest in the whole arrangement, to the Rivers of Paradise at the foot of the mountain on which the Cross stands.[24] This monument of Catholic triumph and victory, therefore, also contains the idea of the salvation of mankind under the sign of the Cross.

A monument like the Elephant carrying the Obelisk, erected in the Piazza S. Maria sopra Minerva between 1666 and 1667, must also be understood as a glorification of the reigning pope, Alexander VII. Its typically Baroque conceit is well expressed in a contemporary poem: 'The Egyptian obelisk, symbol of the rays of *Sol*, is brought by the elephant to the Seventh Alexander as a gift. Is not the animal wise? Wisdom hath given to the World *solely* thee, O Seventh Alexander, consequently thou hast the gifts of *Sol*.'[25] In this case, the inscriptions, pregnant with involved emblematical meaning, are prominently displayed on the pedestal and form an integral part of the composition.

Finally the Cathedra Petri, which confirms by its arrangement and design in dramatic visual terms the fundamental dogma of the primacy of papacy. The venerable wooden

stool of St Peter is encased in the gorgeous bronze throne which hovers on clouds high above the ground. At its sides, on a lower level, appear the greatest Latin and Greek Fathers who supported Rome's claim to universality. On the chair-back is a relief of Christ handing the Keys to St Peter; and above the chair putti carry the papal symbols, tiara and keys. Lastly, high up in the centre of the angelic Glory is the transparent image of the Holy Dove.[26] Thus one above the other there appear symbols of Christ's entrusting the office of Vicar to St Peter; of papal power; and of divine guidance, protection, and inspiration – the whole, with the precious relic at its centre, a materialized vision, which exhibits the eternal truth of Catholic dogma for all to see.[27]

## Working Procedure

Enough has been said to discard the idea, all too often voiced, that Bernini's magical transmutations of reality are the result of a creative fantasy run amok. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, in addition to Bernini's own statements and a wealth of documents, sufficient drawings and bozzetti are preserved to allow more than a glimpse of his mind at work. His procedure cannot be dissociated from his convictions, his belief in the time-honoured tenets of decorum and historical truth, in the classical doctrine that nature was imperfect, and in the unchallengeable authority of ancient art.

While preparing a work he closely attended to the requirements of decorum and historical truth. He would also be relentlessly critical when he found a breach of these basic demands. He expressed astonishment, for instance, that in his *Adoration of the Magi* the learned Poussin, for whom he had almost unreserved admiration, had given to the Kings the appearance of ordinary people. Chantelou and Lebrun defended Poussin, but Bernini insisted that one must follow the text of the Gospels where it was written that they *were* Kings. In the case of the *Constantine* one can check how far he went in pursuance of historical truth. An excerpt in his own hand, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris,[28] shows that he consulted the source which contained a description of Constantine's physiognomy, namely Nicephorus's much-used thirteenth-century *Historia ecclesiastica*, of which modern printed editions existed. The relevant passage describes Constantine as having had an aquiline nose and a rather insignificant thin beard. In an extant preparatory drawing[29] Bernini made what may be called a portrait study of the emperor's features which served as basis for the execution.

Often historical truth and decorum, the appropriate and the becoming, merge into one. Such is the case when he makes St Bibiana and the Countess Matilda wear sandals, while the Discalced Carmelite Teresa appears barefoot; or when he is meticulous about the correct dress of historical and contemporary personages and reserves idealized attires for biblical and mythological figures and personifications. In certain cases, however, the demands of decorum have to supersede those of historical fact. Louis XIV never walked about in classical armour and sandals. But the dignity and nobility – in a word, the decorum – of the imperial theme required that Constantine as well as the Louis of the equestrian monument should be dressed *all'antica* and partly covered by idealized mantles, wildly fluttering in the wind.

Concern with such problems never barred him from taking classical and preferably Hellenistic works as his guide in developing a theme. Early in his career the finished work often remained close to the antique model. The Apollo of the Apollo and Daphne group does not depart far from the Belvedere Apollo nor the David from the Borghese warrior. Even the head of the Longinus is obviously styled after a Hellenistic model, the Borghese Centaur, now in the Louvre. In late works too the classical model is sometimes discernible. The face of Louis XIV's bust is manifestly similar to that of Alexander the Great on coins; and Bernini himself supplied the information that Alexander portraits, the accepted prototype of royalty, were before his mind's eye when working on the king's bust. But as he advanced in age, Bernini transformed his classical models to an ever greater degree. Nobody looking at his figure of Daniel can possibly guess that his point of departure was the father from the Laocoon group. In this case, however, the development can be followed from the copy after that figure through a number of preparatory drawings to the final realization in marble.[30] While working from the life-model, Bernini had in the beginning the classical figure at the back of his mind, but was carried farther away from its spirit step by step. In accordance with his theoretical views, he began rationally and objectively, using a venerated antique work; not until his idea developed did he give way to imaginative and subjective impulses. When he worked himself into that state of frenzy in which he regarded himself as the tool of God's grace, he created in rapid succession numberless sketches and clay models, twenty-two in all in the case of the *Longinus*.[31]

In front of a very late work such as the ecstatic Angel holding the Superscription the conclusion seems unavoidable that he had ceased to use classical antiquity as a cathartic agent. And yet the body under the agitated folds of the drapery derives from the so-called Antinous in the Vatican, a figure that was studied with devotion in the classical circle of Algardi, Duquesnoy, and Poussin. Bernini referred to it in his address to the Paris Academy in these words: 'In my early youth I drew a great deal from classical figures; and when I was in difficulties with my first statue, I turned to the Antinous as to the oracle.' His reliance on this figure, even for the late Angel, is strikingly evident in a preparatory drawing showing the Angel in the nude.[32] But the proportions of the figure, like those of the finished marble, differ considerably from the classical model. Slim, with extremely long legs and a head small in comparison with the rest of the body, the nude recalls Gothic figures. The process of ecstatic spiritualization began during an early stage of the preparatory work.

It is, of course, necessary to differentiate between Bernini's authentic works and those executed by studio hands. This is, however, no easy task. From the early 1620s onwards the increase of commissions in size and numbers forced him to rely more and more on the help of assistants. For that reason a precise division between his own works and those of the studio is hardly possible. There is, indeed, an indeterminable area between wholly authentic works and those for which Bernini is hardly responsible. Stylistic integration depended less on Bernini's handling the hammer and chisel himself than on the degree of his preparatory work and the subsequent control exercised by his master mind. His personal contribution to the execution of works like the Baldacchino or the tomb of

Urban VIII was still considerable. Later, he often made only the sketches and small models. The tomb of Alexander VII, for instance, is the work of many hands and the division of labour, revealed by the documents, anticipates that of the industrial age. Yet the work presents an unbroken stylistic unity and the assistants were no more than so many hands multiplying his own. It was only when the control slackened that dissonant elements crept in.

It would appear logical, therefore, to divide his production into works designed by him and executed by his hand; [33] those to a greater or lesser degree carried out by him; [34] others where he firmly held the reins but actively contributed little or nothing to the execution; [35] and finally those from which he dissociated himself after a few preliminary sketches. [36] The decision as to which of these categories a work belongs has to be made from case to case, more often than not on the basis of documents. But in the present context the problem had to be stated rather than solved.

## PAINTING

Bernini's activity as a painter has attracted much attention in recent years, [37] but in spite of considerable efforts the problem still baffles the critics. A large measure of agreement exists about the part painting played in his life's work, although the riddle has not been solved as to what happened to the more than 150 pictures mentioned in Baldinucci's Life of Bernini, a figure which Domenico Bernini, in the biography of his father, raised to over two hundred. Whatever the correct number, a bare dozen pictures of this large *œuvre* have so far come to light. It is impossible to assume that most of these works have been lost for ever, and the discovery a short while ago of two indubitable originals in English collections [38] indicates that many more are probably hidden under wrong names. But their present anonymity conclusively proves one thing, namely that painting for Bernini was a sideline, an occupation, as Baldinucci expressed it, to which he attended for pleasure only. He never accepted any commissions of importance, he never signed any of his paintings, and to all appearances treated the whole matter lightly – hence the anonymity. It seems therefore not chance that half the number of pictures now known are self-portraits, intimate studies of his own person undertaken in leisure hours and not destined for a patron.

Covering a period of almost thirty years, these self-portraits give a reliable insight into his stylistic idiosyncrasies and development as a painter. They are all done with short, vigorous brush-strokes which model the forms and reveal the hand of the born sculptor. This characteristic dash of handling goes with a neglect of detail, sketchy impromptu treatment of accessories such as dress, and spontaneity of expression. Most of his portraits, sculptured, painted, and drawn, show a similar turn of the head, the alert look and the mouth half-open as if about to speak. In his early paintings dating from the 1620s he seems to have been subject to the sobering influence of Andrea Sacchi. [39] Later, about 1630, he turned towards a blond, luminous palette, probably under the impression of Poussin's *St Erasmus* of 1629 (painted for St Peter's, now Vatican Gallery) – thus falling

in with the strong wave of Venetian colourism which surged over Rome in those years.[40] Later again, paintings like the self-portraits in the Prado and the Borghese Gallery [41] show darker colours and more unified tone values, and this must have been due to Velasquez's influence.[42] In fact some of Bernini's pictures of the 1640s are superficially so similar to those of the great Spaniard that they were attributed to him.

Most of the surviving pictures date from the twenties and thirties. And this for good reasons. The more the commissions accumulated, the less time he had for such recreations as painting. No picture is known from the last decades of his life. But at this period he enjoyed producing pictorial compositions, which he created rapidly with pen and ink.[43]

Thus while Bernini's own work as a painter remains somewhat mysterious, his conceptual approach to painting from the middle period onwards can be fully gauged. From that time on he employed painters, mainly of minor stature, as willing tools of his ideas. The first whom he drew into his orbit was Carlo Pellegrini (1605–49), a native of Carrara.[44] He may have started under Sacchi and was certainly influenced by him. But in 1635 he painted the *Conversion of St Paul* (Church of the Propaganda Fide) and between 1636 and 1640 the *Martyrdom of St Maurice* (for St Peter's, later Museo Petriano), certainly both from Bernini's sketches. These works show borrowings from Pietro da Cortona and Poussin, to whose light and luminous colour scale they are also clearly indebted. Moreover, the composition of the *Conversion* owes not a little both to Sacchi and, unexpectedly, to Lodovico Carracci. The *Martyrdom of St Maurice* is the more Berninesque of the two works. The master's mind is revealed as much by the highly dramatic composition, which shows three stages of martyrdom succinctly rendered on a narrow foreground stage, as by certain devices such as showing a truncated martyr's head next to that of St Maurice who is still alive or the parallel arrangement of arms which act in opposite directions.[45]

Even before Pellegrini's death Bernini availed himself of the services of Guido Ubaldo Abbatini (1600/5–56) from Città di Castello, who began under the Cavaliere d'Arpino, but later, according to Passeri, submitted to his new master like a slave. His principal works for Bernini are the frescoes on the vault of the Cappella Raimondi, executed in collaboration with the classicizing Giovanni Francesco Romanelli (p. 213), the badly preserved frescoes on the vault of the Cappella Pio in S. Agostino, dating from *c.* 1644, and lastly those on the vault of the Cornaro Chapel.[46] In spite of his rather weak decorative talent, he perfectly suited Bernini's purpose. And as a participant in the execution of some of Bernini's grand schemes he was certainly more important than Pellegrini.

It was on the vault of the Cappella Pio that Bernini first mixed fresco and stucco: the painted angels rest on stucco clouds. Passeri was aware of the importance of this new departure and described it in the following words: 'he employed a new deceptive artifice and by means of certain parts in relief actually made true what was supposed to be mere illusion'.[47] In the Cappella Cornaro he carried the principle a step further. Not only did he use the mixture of fresco and stucco once again, now on a more lavish scale, but here the paintings of the vault penetrate far into the architecture. After what I have said about the elimination of traditional 'modes' (p. 105), it is only to be expected that

Bernini would also transgress the established limitations of painting. Seeking a conceptual explanation of this phenomenon, it might be argued that, as sculpture for him was a kind of pictorial art in three dimensions, painting was a sculptural art projected on to a surface; and transitions from sculpture into painting and vice versa were therefore equally justified.

It is important to realize that this approach is as far removed from Pietro da Cortona's superimpositions and overlappings as from the illusionism of the *quadraturisti* (p. 36). In spite of the dazzling richness of the former's designs, his definition of sculptured and painted areas always remains clear and decisive and no mixing of realities is ever intended. The *quadratura* painters, on the other hand, aimed at an illusionist expansion of real space; but the borderline between illusion and reality is not objectively abolished, it is only masked by the subjective skill of the painter.

Never again did Bernini have an opportunity to hand over fresco work to a painter in any of his large enterprises.[48] Yet his new ideas were absorbed by Giovan Battista Gaulli, called Baciccio, an artist of much greater calibre than his previous collaborators. He came from Genoa to Rome before 1660 and was soon taken up by Bernini and deeply influenced by his ideas.[49] His greatest work, the frescoes in the Gesù (1672–83; Plate 125), must be regarded as the fullest exposition of Bernini's revolutionary conception of painting. Here the principle of combining fresco and painted stucco and of superimposing painted parts on the architecture has been given its monumental form. In addition, the sculptural interpretation of his figures, their movements and draperies, and the urgency and intensity of their activities reveal the spirit of the late Bernini.

The Gesù frescoes are also the major Roman monument for a new departure in the organization of large ceiling decorations. The effect of these frescoes relies on the juxtaposition of extensive dark and light areas rather than on the compositional arrangement of single figures. In the frescoes of the nave the eye is led stepwise from the darkest to the lightest area, the unfathomable depth of the sky, where the Name of Christ appears amid shining rays. Bernini recommended the method of working with large coherent units[50] and employed it himself in works like the Cathedra. The method did not only satisfy his desire to create overwhelming effects and dramatic emphasis, but also appeared most conducive to communicating his mystic conception of divine light and his intense spiritualization of religious themes. Bernini's two important ideas, developed from his middle period onwards, of breaking through the retaining frame of the painting and of embedding masses of figures in unified areas of colour found an enthusiastic following in the northern Baroque.

## ARCHITECTURE

### Ecclesiastical Buildings

The year 1624 is of particular importance in the history of Baroque architecture; it was then that Bernini's career as an architect began with the commissions for the façade of S. Bibiana and the Baldacchino in St Peter's. It can hardly be denied that the little

church of S. Bibiana opens a new chapter of the Baroque in all three arts: it harbours Bernini's first official religious statue and Cortona's first important fresco cycle. The design of the façade [51] is not divorced from tradition. But instead of developing further the type of Roman church façade which had led to Maderno's S. Susanna, Bernini placed a palace-like storey over an open loggia (Plate 60A) – essentially the principle of the façade of St Peter's. In some modest early seventeenth-century façades of this type such as S. Sebastiano (Plate 5A) the palace character is almost scrupulously preserved. By comparison S. Bibiana shows an important new feature: the central bay of the ground-floor arcades projects slightly, and above it, framing a deep niche, is an impressive aedicule motif which breaks through the skyline of the adjoining bays. In this way the centre of the façade has been given forceful emphasis. It should be noticed that the cornice of the side-bays seems to run on under the pilasters of the aedicule and then to turn into the depth of the niche. Thus the aedicule is superimposed over a smaller system, the continuity of which appears to be unbroken. The interpenetration of small and large orders was a Mannerist device, familiar to Bernini not only from such buildings as Michelangelo's Capitoline palaces, but also from the church façades of Palladio, an architect whose work he never ceased to study. All the same, Bernini's first essay in architectural design constitutes a new, bold, and individualist departure which none of the architects who later used the palace type of church façade dared to imitate.

The Baldacchino in St Peter's (1624–33; Plate 56) gave Bernini his first and at once greatest opportunity of displaying his unparalleled genius for combining an architectural structure with monumental sculpture.[52] It was a brilliant idea to repeat in the giant columns of the Baldacchino the shape of the late antique twisted columns which – sanctified by age and their use in the old Basilica of St Peter's – were now to serve as aedicules above the balconies of the pillars of the dome.[53] Thus the twisted bronze columns of the Baldacchino find a fourfold echo, and not only give proof of the continuity of tradition, but by their giant size also express symbolically the change from the simplicity of the early Christians to the splendour of the counter-reformatory Church, implying the victory of Christianity over the pagan world. Moreover, their shape helped to solve the formal problem inherent in the gigantic Baldacchino. Its size is carefully related to the architecture of the church; but instead of creating a dangerous rivalry, the dark bronze corkscrew columns establish a dramatic contrast to the straight fluted pilasters of the piers as well as to the other white marble structural members of the building. Finally, and above all, only giant columns of this peculiar shape could be placed free into space without carrying a 'normal' superstructure. The columns are topped by four large angels behind which rise the huge scrolls of the crowning motif. Their S-shaped lines appear like a buoyant continuation of the screw-like upward tendencies of the columns. The scrolls meet under a vigorously curved entablature which is surmounted by the Cross above the golden orb.[54]

Every part of this dynamic structure is accompanied and supported by sculpture, and it may be noticed that with increasing distance from the ground the sculptural element is given ever greater freedom: starting from the Barberini coat of arms contained by the panels of the pedestals; on to the laurel branches, creeping up the columns, with putti

nestling in them; [55] and further to the angels who hold garlands like ropes, with which to keep – so it seems – the scrolls in position without effort. In this area, high above the ground, sculpture in the round plays a vital part. Here, in the open spaces between the scrolls, are the putti with the symbols of papal power, here are the energetically curved palm branches which give tension to the movement of the scrolls and, finally, the realistic Barberini bees, fittingly the uppermost sculptural feature, which look as if they carry the orb. Critics have often disapproved of the realistic hangings which join the columns instead of the traditional entablature. But it is precisely this unorthodox element which gives the Baldacchino its particular meaning as a monumental canopy raised in all eternity over the tomb of St Peter, reminiscent of the real canopy held over the living pope when he is carried in state through the basilica.

Bernini's bold departure from the traditional form of baldacchinos – in the past often temple-like architectural structures [56] – had an immediate and lasting effect. Among the many repetitions and imitations [57] may be mentioned those in S. Lorenzo at Spello, erected as early as 1632, in the cathedrals at Atri, Foligno, and Trent and, much later, those in the abbey church at San Benigno, Piedmont (1770–6) and in S. Angelo at Perugia (1773, recently removed). Moreover, the derivations in Austria and Germany are legion; and even in France the type was widely accepted after the well-known lighter version with six columns on a circular plan had been built over the high altar of the Val-de-Grâce in Paris.[58]

Not until he was almost sixty years old had Bernini a chance of showing his skill as a designer of churches. His three churches at Castelgandolfo and Ariccia and S. Andrea al Quirinale in Rome rose almost simultaneously. In spite of their small size, they are of great importance not only for their intrinsic qualities but also because of their extraordinary influence. Modern critics tend to misinterpret them by stressing their traditional rather than their revolutionary aspect. Arguing from a purely aesthetic or pragmatic point of view, they tacitly imply that the same set of forms and motifs always expresses the same meaning. It is too often overlooked that the architecture of the past was a language of visual signs and symbols which architects used in a specific context, and the same grammar of architectural forms may therefore serve entirely different purposes and convey vastly different ideas. This should be remembered during the following discussion.

Bernini erected his three churches over the three most familiar centralized plans, the Greek cross, the circle, and the oval. The earliest of them, the church at Castelgandolfo, built between 1658 and 1661,[59] is a simple Greek cross (Figure 6), reminiscent of such perfect Renaissance churches as Giuliano da Sangallo's Madonna delle Carceri at Prato. And as in this latter church, the ratios are of utmost simplicity, the depth of the arms of the cross, for instance, being half their width. But compared with
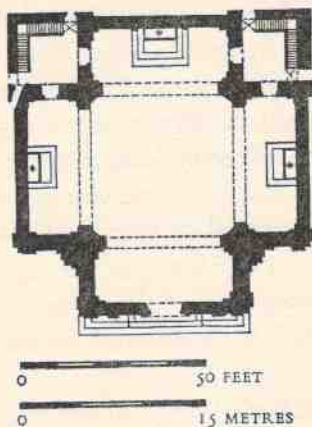


Figure 6. Gianlorenzo Bernini:
Castelgandolfo, S. Tomaso di
Villanova, 1658–61. Plan

50 FEET

15 METRES

116

Renaissance churches the height has been considerably increased [60] and the dome has been given absolute predominance. The exterior is very restrained, in keeping with the modest character of the papal summer retreat to which the church belongs. Flat Tuscan double pilasters decorate the façade, and only minor features reveal the late date, such as the heavy door pediment and, in the zone of the capitals, the uninterrupted moulding which links the front and the arms of the church. Above the crossing rises the elegant ribbed dome which is evidently derived from that of St Peter's. But in contrast to the great model, the drum here consists of a low and unadorned cylinder, not unlike that of Raphael's S. Eligio degli Orefici in Rome, and is moreover set off against the dome by the prominent ring of the cornice. Every part of this building is clearly defined, absolutely lucid, and submitted to a classical discipline.

The same spirit of austerity prevails in the interior up to the sharply chiselled ring above the arches. But in the zone of the vaulting Bernini abandoned his self-imposed moderation (Plate 61A). Spirited putti, supporting large medallions, are seated on the broken pediments over the windows of the drum. These pediments, breaking into the dome, soften the division between drum and vault. Realistic garlands form links between the putti, and the lively and flexible girdle thus created appears like a pointed reversal of the pure geometry of the ring under the drum. This formal contrast between rigidity and freedom is paralleled by the antithesis between the monumental Roman lettering of the inscription, praising the virtues of St Thomas of Villanova to whom the church is dedicated, and the eloquent reliefs which render eight important events of his life.[61] Since the coffers seem to continue behind the reliefs, the latter appear to hover in the wide expanse of the dome.

Whenever Bernini had previously decorated niches or semi-domes, he had followed the tradition, sanctioned by Michelangelo, of using ribs and, in the neutral areas between them, decorative roundels.[62] In Castelgandolfo Bernini retained the ribs and combined them with coffers. The classical element of the coffers seems to indicate an evenly distributed thrust (Pantheon), while the 'medieval', buttress-like system of ribs divides the dome into active carriers and passive panels. The union of these contrasting types of domical organization was not Bernini's own invention. He took up an idea first developed by Pietro da Cortona (p. 156) and, after thoroughly classicizing it, employed it from Castelgandolfo onwards for all his later vaultings and domes.[63] It was this Berninesque type of dome with ribs and coffers *all'antica* that was followed on countless occasions after 1660 by architects in Italy as well as the rest of Europe.[64]

S. Tomaso at Castelgandolfo is perhaps the least distinguished of Bernini's three churches in so far as the two others exhibit his specific approach to architecture more fully. The story of the new Ariccia dates back to 20 July 1661, when Cardinal Flavio, Don Mario, and Don Agostino Chigi acquired the little township near Castelgandolfo from Giulio Savelli, Prince of Albano. Here stood the old palace of the Savelli. Soon it was decided not only to modernize the palace,[65] but also to erect a church opposite its entrance. Bernini was commissioned in 1662, and two years later the church was finished (Plates 62A and 64, A and B, and Figure 7).[66] Its basic form consists of a cylinder crowned by a hemispherical dome with a broad lantern. An arched portico of pure,

classical design is placed in front of the rotunda, counterbalanced at the far end by the sacristy which juts out from the circle but is not perceived by the approaching visitor. Here also are the two bell-towers of which only the tops are visible from the square. In order to understand Bernini's guiding idea, reference must be made to another project.

From 1657 onwards Bernini was engaged on plans for ridding the Pantheon of later disfiguring additions; he also intended to systematize the square in front of the ancient building, but most of his ideas remained on paper.[67] Surviving sketches show that he interpreted the exterior of the 'original' Pantheon as the union of the two basic forms of vaulted cylinder and portico, and it is this combination of two simple geometric
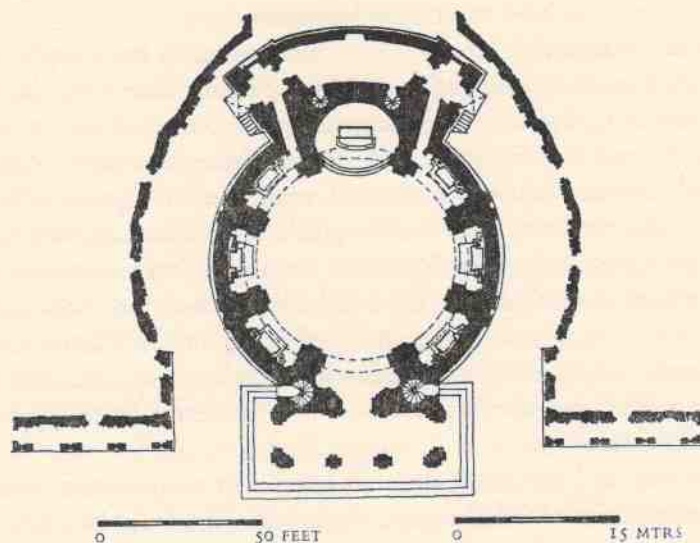


Figure 7. Gianlorenzo Bernini: Ariccia, S. Maria dell'Assunzione, 1662–4. Plan

shapes, stripped of all accessories, that he realized in the church at Ariccia. Straight colonnades flank the church, and these, together with the portico and the walls, which grip like arms around the body of the church, enhance the cylindrical and monolithic quality of the rotunda.

The interior too shows unexpected relations to the Pantheon. There are three chapels of equal size on each side, while the entrance and the altar niche are a fraction larger, so that an almost unnoticeable axial direction exists. But the impression prevails of eight consecutive niches separated by tall Corinthian pilasters, which carry the unbroken circle of the entablature. As Andrea Palladio had done before in the little church at Maser, so here Bernini reduced the design to the two fundamental forms of the cylinder and hemisphere, and, as in Maser, the Corinthian order is as high as the cylinder itself. In contrast, however, to Palladio's rhythmic alternation of open and closed bays, Bernini gave an uninterrupted sequence of openings. The structural chastity of Ariccia was due to an attempt at recreating an imaginary Pantheon of the venerable Republican era. Bernini believed that the ancient building had originally been one of heroic simplicity and

grandeur. Much later, Carlo Fontana, who in about 1660 worked as Bernini's assistant, published a reconstruction of the supposedly original Pantheon which is remarkably close to the interior of Ariccia.[68]

But in the zone of the dome, which again shows the combination of coffers and ribs, we find a realistic decoration similar to that at Castelgandolfo: stucco putti and angels sit on scrolls, holding free-hanging garlands which swing from rib to rib. What do these life-like figures signify? The church is dedicated to the Virgin (S. Maria dell'Assunzione) and, according to the legend, rejoicing angels strew flowers on the day of her Assumption. The celestial messengers are seated under the 'dome of heaven' into which the ascending Virgin will be received; the mystery is adumbrated in the *Assumption* painted on the wall behind the altar.[69] Since the jubilant angels, superior beings who dwell in a zone inaccessible to the faithful, are treated with extreme realism, they conjure up full and breathing life. Thus whenever he enters the church the worshipper participates in the 'mystery in action'. As in Castelgandolfo, the dedication of the church gives rise to a dramatic-historical interpretation; the entire church is submitted to, and dominated by, this particular event, and the whole interior has become its stage.

By and large, the Renaissance church had been conceived as a monumental shrine, where man, separated from everyday life, was able to communicate with God. In Bernini's churches, by contrast, the architecture is no more and no less than the setting for a stirring mystery revealed to the faithful by sculptural decoration. In spite of their close formal links with Renaissance and ancient architecture, these churches have been given an entirely non-classical meaning. Obviously, Bernini saw no contradiction between classical architecture and Baroque sculpture – a contradiction usually emphasized by modern critics who fail to understand the subjective and particular quality with which seemingly objective and timeless classical forms have been endowed.

By far the most important of the three churches is S. Andrea al Quirinale, commissioned by Cardinal Camillo Pamphili for the novices of the Jesuit Order (Plates 60B, 61B, and 62B, and Figure 8). Building began simultaneously with the church at Castelgandolfo – the foundation stone was laid on 3 November 1658 – but it took much longer to complete this richly decorated church.[70] Antonio Raggi's stuccoes were carried out between 1662 and 1665, while other parts of the decoration dragged on until 1670. The particular character of the site on which most of the convent was standing induced Bernini to choose an oval ground-plan with the transverse axis longer than the main axis between entrance and altar. This in itself was not without precedent. There was Fornovo's S. Maria dell' Annunziata at Parma (1566),[71] and Bernini himself had used the type much earlier in the little church in the old Palazzo di Propaganda Fide (1634, later replaced by Borromini's structure).
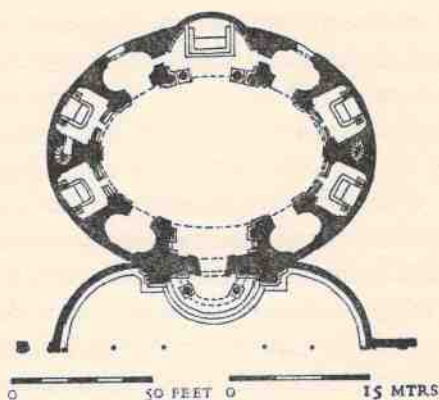


Figure 8. Gianlorenzo Bernini: Rome, S. Andrea al Quirinale, 1658–70. Plan

What is new in S. Andrea, however, is that pilasters instead of open chapels stand at both ends of the transverse axis. As a result, the oval is closed at the most critical points where otherwise, from a viewpoint near the entrance, the eye would wander off from the main room into undefined subsidiary spaces. Bernini's novel solution permits, indeed compels, the spectator's glance to sweep round the uninterrupted sequence of giant pilasters, crowned by the massive ring of the entablature, until it meets the columned aedicule in front of the altar recess. And here, in the concave opening of the pediment, St Andrew soars up to heaven on a cloud. All the lines of the architecture culminate in, and converge upon, this piece of sculpture. More arrestingly than in the other churches the beholder's attention is absorbed by the dramatic event, which owes its suggestive power to the way in which it dominates the severe lines of the architecture.

Colour and light assist the miraculous ascension. Below, in the human sphere, the church glows with precious, multicoloured dark marble. Above, in the heavenly sphere of the dome, the colours are white and gold. The oval space is evenly lit by windows between the ribs which cut deep into the coffered parts of the dome. Bright light streams in from the lantern, in which sculptured cherubs' heads and the Dove of the Holy Ghost seem to await the ascending saint. All the chapels are considerably darker than the congregational room, so that its uniformity is doubly assured. In addition, there is a subtle differentiation in the lighting of the chapels: the large ones flanking the transverse axis have a diffused light, while the four subsidiary ones in the diagonal axes are cast in deep shadow. Thus the aedicule is adjoined by dark areas which dramatically enhance the radiance of light in the altar chapel.

In S. Andrea Bernini solved the intractable problem of directions inherent in centralized planning in a manner which only Palladio had attempted before the Baroque age.[72] By means of the aedicule, which is an ingenious adaptation of the Palladian device of the columned screen – a unique occurrence in Rome – he created a barrier against, as well as a vital link with, the altar chapel. He thus preserved and even emphasized the homogeneity of the oval form and, at the same time, succeeded in giving predominance to the altar. Translated into psychological terms, the church has two spiritual centres: the oval space, where the congregation participates in the miracle of the saint's salvation; and the carefully separated altar-recess, inaccessible to the laity, where the mystery is consummated. Here the beholder sees like an apparition the band of angelic messengers bathed in visionary golden light bearing aloft the picture of the martyred saint,[73] assured of his heavenly reward for faith unbroken by suffering.

It hardly seems necessary to reaffirm observations made in the first part of this chapter: here the whole church is subject to a coherent literary theme which informs every part of it, including the ring of figures above the windows which consists of putti carrying garlands and martyrs' palms, and nude fishermen who handle nets, oars, shells, and reeds – symbolic companions of the fisherman Andrew. Through its specific connexion with sculpture, the architecture itself serves to make the dramatic *concetto* a vital experience.

For the exterior of S. Andrea, Bernini made use of the lesson he had learned from Francesco da Volterra's S. Giacomo degli Incurabili.[74] In both churches the dome is enclosed in a cylindrical shell, and in both cases the thrust is taken up by large scrolls which

fulfil the function of Gothic buttresses. But this is as far as the influence of S. Giacomo goes. In the case of S. Andrea, the scrolls rest upon the strong oval ring which encases the chapels. Its cornice seems to run on under the giant Corinthian pilasters of the façade and sweeps forward into the semicircular portico where it is supported by two Ionic columns. The portico, surmounted between scrolls by the free-standing Pamphili coat of arms of exuberant decorative design, is the only relieving note in an otherwise extremely austere façade. Yet this airy porch must not simply be regarded as an exhilarating feature inviting the passers-by to enter; it is also a dynamic element of vital importance in the complex organization of the building. The aedicule motif framing the portico is taken up inside, on the same axis, by the aedicule framing the altar recess. But there is a reversal in the direction of movement: while in the exterior the cornice over the oval body of the church seems to move towards the approaching visitor and to come to rest in the portico, the point nearest to him, in the interior the movement is in the opposite direction and is halted at the point farthest away from the entrance. In addition, the isolated altar-room answers in reverse to the projecting portico, and this is expressive of their different functions, the latter inviting, the former excluding the faithful. Thus outside and inside appear like 'positive' and 'negative' realizations of the same theme. A word must be added about the two quadrant walls forming the piazza.[75] They focus attention on the façade. But more than this: since they grip firmly into the 'joints' where the oval body of the church and the aedicule meet, their concave sweep reverses the convex ring of the oval and reinforces the dynamic quality of the whole structure.

Genetically speaking, the façade of S. Andrea is related to that of S. Bibiana. It might almost be said that what Bernini did was to isolate and monumentalize the revolutionary central feature of S. Bibiana and to connect it with the motif of the portico with free-standing columns which Pietro da Cortona had first introduced in S. Maria della Pace (Plate 83). And yet this façade is highly original. In order to assess its novel character I may refer to the Early Baroque façade of S. Giacomo degli Incurabili.[76] Here the façade is orthodox, deriving from Roman Latin-cross churches, so that on entering this oval church one is aware that the exterior and the interior are not coordinated. In the case of S. Andrea al Quirinale nobody would expect to enter a Latin-cross church. Bernini succeeded in expressing in the façade the specific character of the church behind it: exterior and interior form an entirely homogeneous entity.

## Secular Buildings

Bernini's activity in the field of domestic architecture was neither extensive nor without adversity. In the Palazzo Barberini, his earliest work, his contribution was confined to adjustments of Carlo Maderno's design and to decorative features of the interior such as the design of door surrounds.[77] The façade of the Collegio di Propaganda Fide facing the Piazza di Spagna was an able modernization of an old palace front (1642–4), but he acted only as consulting architect.[78] His share in the design of the Palazzo Ducale at Modena and the execution of the Palazzo del Quirinale – a work of many brains and hands – is relatively small.[79] A number of designs remained on paper,[80] while some minor

works survive: the decoration of the Porta del Popolo on the side of the Piazza, occasioned by the entry into Rome of Queen Christina of Sweden (1655); additions to the hospital of S. Spirito (1664–6) of which at least a gateway in the Via Penitenzieri close to the Square of St Peter's survives;[81] the renovation of the papal palace at Castelgandolfo (1660); and finally an 'industrial' work, the arsenal in the harbour of Civitavecchia (1658–63), consisting of three large halls of impressive austerity.[82] Setting all this aside, only three works of major importance remain to claim our attention, each with an ill-starred history of its own, namely the Palazzo Ludovisi in Piazza Montecitorio, the Palazzo Chigi in Piazza SS. Apostoli, and the projects for the Louvre.

Bernini designed the Palazzo Ludovisi, now Palazzo di Montecitorio (Plate 67A), in 1650 for the family of Pope Innocent X.[83] In 1655, at the Pope's death, little was standing of the vast palace, and it was not until forty years later, in 1694, that Carlo Fontana resumed construction for Innocent XII. Although Fontana introduced some rather pedantic academic features, Bernini's façade was sufficiently advanced to prevent any flagrant distortion of his intentions.[84] The entire length of twenty-five windows is subdivided into separate units of 3–6–7–6–3 bays which meet at obtuse angles so that the whole front looks as if it were erected over a convex plan. Slight projections of the units at either end and the centre are important vehicles of organization. Each unit is framed by giant pilasters comprising the two principal storeys, to which the ground floor with the naturalistic rock formations under the farthest pilasters and window sills serves as a base. Apart from these attempts at articulation, the palace is essentially tied to the Roman tradition deriving from the Palazzo Farnese.

In the summer of 1664, not long before his journey to Paris, Bernini designed the palace which Cardinal Flavio Chigi had purchased in 1661 from the Colonna family (Plate 67B).[85] The volte-face here is hardly foreshadowed in the façade of the Palazzo Ludovisi. Bernini placed a richly articulated central part of seven bays between simple rusticated receding wings of three bays each. More decidedly than in the Palazzo Ludovisi, the ground floor functions as a base for the two upper storeys with their giant composite pilasters which stand so close that the window tabernacles of the *piano nobile* take up the entire open space. This finely balanced façade was disturbed in 1745 when the palace was acquired by the Odescalchi. Nicola Salvi and his assistant Luigi Vanvitelli doubled the central part, which now has sixteen pilasters instead of eight and two entrance doors instead of one. The present front is much too long in relation to its height and, standing between asymmetrical wings, no longer bears witness to Bernini's immaculate sense of proportion and scale. This, however, does not prejudice the revolutionary importance of Bernini's design, which constitutes a decisive break with the traditional Roman palace front. The older type, with no vertical articulation, has long rows of windows horizontally united by means of continuous string courses. Precedents for the use of the colossal order in palace façades existed. In Michelangelo's Capitoline Palaces and Palladio's Palazzo Valmarana at Vicenza the colossal order rises from the ground. On the other hand, a few buildings in Rome before Bernini have a colossal order over the ground floor, and in Northern Italy the type is not rare.[86] But when all is said and done, such comparisons throw into relief rather than diminish Bernini's achievement. The relation

of the ground floor to the two upper tiers; the fine gradation from simple window-frames to elaborate, heavy tabernacle frames in the *piano nobile* – deriving from the Palazzo Farnese – to the light and playful window surrounds of the second storey; the rich composite order of the pilasters; the powerful cornice with rhythmically arranged brackets crowned by an open balustrade which was meant to carry statuary; the juxtaposition of the highly organized central part with the rustic wings; and, lastly, the strong accentuation of the entrance with its free-standing Tuscan columns, balcony and window above it, the whole unit being again dependent on the Palazzo Farnese – all this was here combined in a design of authentic nobility and grandeur. Bernini had found the formula for the aristocratic Baroque palace. And its immense influence extends far beyond the borders of Italy.[87]

Bernini's third great enterprise, the Louvre, turned out to be his saddest disappointment. In the spring of 1665 Louis XIV invited him to come to Paris and suggest on the spot how to complete the great Louvre *carré* of which the west and south wings and half of the north wing were standing.[88] The east wing with the main front was still to be built. Great were the expectations on all sides when Bernini arrived in Paris on 2 June of that year. But his five months' stay there ended in dismal failure. The reasons for it were many, personal as well as national. And yet his projects might possibly have been accepted had they answered the purpose for which they were made. Before he travelled to France, he had already sent two different projects to Colbert, in whose hands as 'Surintendant des Bâtiments' rested all proceedings connected with the Louvre.

Although Bernini always worked on the whole area of the *carré*, the focus of his design was, of course, the east façade. The first project of June 1664, contemporary with the design of the Palazzo Chigi-Odescalchi, is unexpected by any standards (Figure 9).[89] He created an open rectangle with two projecting wings of four bays each, between which he placed a long colonnade consisting of a convex centre between two concave arms. The convex part of the colonnade follows the shape of the oval vestibule, above which is a grand oval hall going through two storeys. Its second storey with circular windows, articulated by double pilasters and decorated with French lilies standing out against the sky-line, rises above the uniform cornice of the whole front. In this façade Bernini followed up the theme of the Palazzo Barberini, an arcaded centre framed by serene wings, and applied to it the theme of Roman church façades with a convex centre between concave arms (S. Maria della Pace, S. Andrea al Quirinale). But for the details of the colonnade he turned to the festive architecture of northern Italy and combined the colossal order of Palladio's Loggia del Capitano at Vicenza with the two-storeyed arcade of Sansovino's Library at Venice.[90] The result was a palace design which has an entirely un-Roman airy quality, and though it remained on paper it seems to have had considerable influence on the development of eighteenth-century structures.

The second project, dispatched from Rome in February 1665 and preserved in a drawing at Stockholm,[91] has a giant order applied to the wall above a rusticated ground floor. One may regard this as a novel application of the Palazzo Chigi-Odescalchi design, but for the wide sweep of the concave centre part Bernini was probably indebted to an unexecuted project by Pietro da Cortona for the Piazza Colonna in Rome.[92]

The third project designed in Paris survives in the engravings by Marot which were carried out under Bernini's watchful eyes. He now returned to the more conventional Roman palazzo type, and in the process of re-designing the east front he lost in originality what he gained in monumental appearance.[93] He was still faced with the typically Italian problem of harmonizing length and height in this front of prodigious extension; he therefore subdivided the traditional block shape into five distinct units, thus developing the scheme first evolved in the Palazzo Montecitorio. The central projection showing
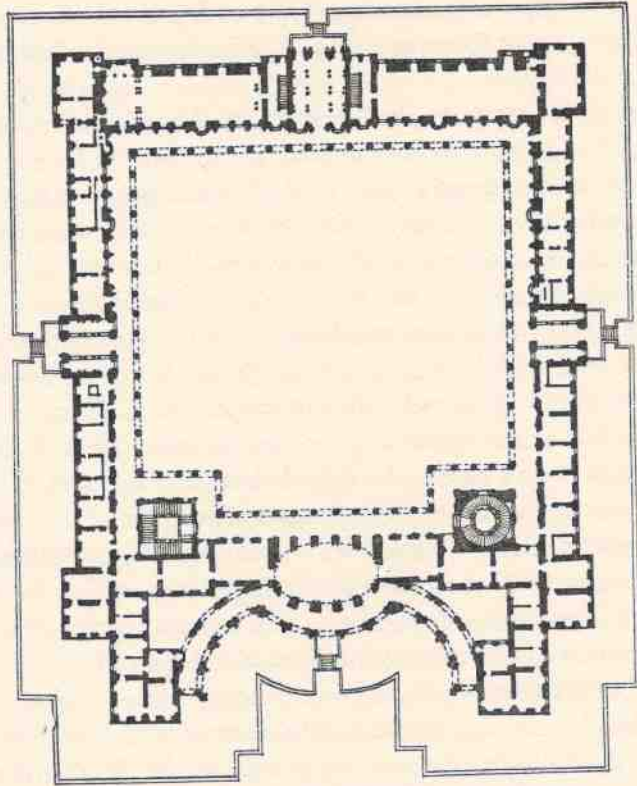


Figure 9. Gianlorenzo Bernini: First project for the
Louvre, 1664. Plan

the ideal ratio of 1 : 2 (height to length, without the basement which was to disappear behind the moat) is emphasized not only by its size of eleven bays but also by virtue of its decoration with giant half-columns. This motif is taken up in the giant pilasters of the wings, while the receding sections have no orders at all. Following the example of the Palazzo Farnese, Bernini retained much plain wall-space above the windows of the *piano nobile* as well as the traditional string course under the windows of the top storey. Instead of arranging the order as a simple consecutive sequence, he concentrated four half-columns in the central area, a device which was meant to emphasize the entrance.[94] This palace was to rise like a powerful fortress from the 'natural' rock,[95] and this concept too was anticipated in a modest way in the Palazzo di Montecitorio.

Bernini's third east façade was the answer to previous criticism voiced by Colbert. But in spite of vital changes from one project to the next, Bernini clung with the stubbornness only to be found in a genius averse to any compromise to all the features which he regarded as essential for a royal residence although they were contrary to French taste and traditions. He retained the unifying cornice, the unbroken skyline, and the flat roof; to him a façade was a whole to which the parts were subordinated; it could never be the agglomeration of different structural units to which the French were accustomed. Moreover, in compliance with southern conceptions of decorum he insisted, in spite of Colbert's repeated protests, on transferring the King's suite from the quiet south front, facing the river, to the east wing, the most stately but also the most noisy part of the building.[96] Among his other unacceptable proposals was the idea of surrounding the *carré* with arcades after the fashion of Italian courtyards; such arcades were not only unsuitable in that they excluded the light from the rooms behind, but they also seemed aesthetically repulsive to the French.[97] Finally, he never abandoned the typically Italian staircases in the four corners of the *carré*, placed there in order not to interrupt the alignment of rooms, and their disposition as well as their enclosure by badly lit wells appeared contrary to common sense to the French, who had solved the problem of easy communication between vestibule, staircase hall, and living rooms.[98]

When Bernini returned to Italy he had not given up hope that his plans would be carried out. The French architects were bitterly antagonistic. Colbert was irresolute, but the king had taken a liking to the great Italian and supported him. Actually, the foundation stone of Bernini's Louvre was laid three days before his departure from Paris. Back in Rome, he worked out a new project, the fourth, in which he made the one concession of reducing the much-criticized height of the *piano nobile*.[99] In May 1666 he sent his assistant, Mattia de' Rossi, to Paris to supervise the execution. But meanwhile the king's interest had shifted to Versailles, and that was the signal for Colbert to abandon Bernini's plans.

By this decision Paris was saved the doubtful honour of having within its walls the most monumental Roman palazzo ever designed. Splendid though Bernini's project was, the enormous, austere pile would forever have stood out as an alien growth in the serene atmosphere of Paris. In Rome, the cube of the Palazzo Farnese, the ancestor of Bernini's design, may be likened to the solo in a choir. In Paris, Bernini's overpowering Louvre would have had no resonance: it would have cast an almost sombre spell over the gaiety of the city.[100]

## The Piazza of St Peter's

While he was in Paris, Bernini's greatest work, the Square of St Peter's, was still rising. But by that time all the hurdles had been taken and, moreover, Bernini had a reliable studio with a long and firmly established tradition to look after his interests. His 'office' supplied, of course, no more than physical help towards the accomplishment of one of the most complex enterprises in the history of Italian architecture.[101] Bernini alone was responsible for this work which has always been universally admired, he alone had the

genius and resourcefulness to find a way through a tangle of topographical and liturgical problems, and only his supreme authority in artistic matters backed by the unfailing support of Pope Alexander VII could overcome intrigues and envious opposition [102] and bring this task to a successful conclusion (Plates 1 and 65, A and B, and Figure 23). Among a vast number of issues to be considered, particular importance was attached to two ritual ones right from the start. At Easter and on a few other occasions the pope blesses the people of Rome from the Benediction Loggia above the central entrance to the church. It is a blessing symbolically extended to the whole world: it is given *urbi et orbi*. The piazza, therefore, had not only to hold the maximum number of people, while the Loggia had to be visible to as many as possible, but the form of the square itself had to suggest the all-embracing character of the function. Another ceremony to be taken into account was the papal blessing given to pilgrims from a window of the private papal apartment situated in Domenico Fontana's palace on the north side of the piazza. Other hardly less vital considerations pertained to the papal palace. Its old entrance in the north-west corner of the piazza could not be shifted and yet it had to be integrated into the architecture of the whole.[103] The basilica itself required an approach on the grandest scale in keeping with its prominence among the churches of the Catholic world. In addition, covered passage-ways of some kind were needed for processions and in particular for the solemn ceremonies on the day of Corpus Domini; they were also necessary as protection against sun and rain, for pedestrians as well as for coaches.

Bernini began in the summer of 1656 with the design of a trapezoid piazza enclosed by the traditional type of palace fronts over round-headed arcades. This scheme was soon abandoned for a variety of reasons, not the least because it was of paramount importance to achieve greatest monumentality with as little height as possible. A palazzo front with arcades would have been higher than the present colonnades without attaining equal grandeur. So by March 1657 the first project was superseded by one with arcades of free-standing columns forming a large oval piazza; soon after, in the summer of the same year, Bernini replaced the arcades by colonnades of free-standing columns with a straight entablature above the columns. Only such a colonnade was devoid of any associations with palace fronts and therefore complied with the ceremonial character of the square more fully than an arcaded scheme with its reminiscences of domestic architecture. On ritualistic as well as artistic grounds the enclosure of the piazza had to be kept as low as possible. A high enclosure would have interfered with the visibility of the papal blessing given from the palace window. Moreover, a comparatively low one was also needed in order to 'correct' the unsatisfactory impression made by the proportions of the façade of St Peter's.

This requires a word of explanation. The substructures of Maderno's towers, standing without the intended superstructures,[104] look now as if they were parts of the façade, and this accounts for its excessive length (cf. Plates 1 and 63A). A number of attempts were made in the post-Maderno period to remedy this fault,[105] before Urban VIII took the fateful decision in 1636 of accepting Bernini's grand design of high towers of three tiers.[106] Of these only the southern one was built, but owing to technical difficulties and personal intrigues construction was interrupted in 1641, and finally in 1646 the tower

was altogether dismantled. Since the idea of erecting towers ever again over the present substructures had to be abandoned, Bernini submitted during Innocent X's pontificate new schemes for a radical solution of the old problem.[107] By entirely separating the towers from the façade (Plate 63B), he made them structurally safe, at the same time created a rich and varied grouping, and gave the façade itself carefully balanced proportions. His proposals would have involved considerable structural changes and had therefore little chance of success. When engaged on the designs for the piazza, Bernini was once again faced with the intractable problem of the façade. Although he also made an unsuccessful attempt at reviving Michelangelo's tetrastyle portico,[108] which would have broken up the uniform 'wall' of the façade, he now had to use optical devices rather than structural changes as a means to rectify the appearance of the building. He evoked the impression of greater height in the façade by joining to it his long and relatively low corridors which continue the order and skyline of the colonnades.[109] The heavy and massive Doric columns of the colonnades and the high and by comparison slender Corinthian columns of the façade form a deliberate contrast. And Bernini chose the unorthodox combination of Doric columns with Ionic entablature [110] not only in order to unify the piazza horizontally but also to accentuate the vertical tendencies in the façade.

For topographical and other reasons Bernini was forced to design the so-called *piazza retta* in front of the church. The length and slant of the northern corridor, and implicitly the form of the *piazza retta*, were determined by the position of the old and venerable entrance to the palace. Continuing the corridor, the new ceremonial staircase, the Scala Regia (Plate 66), begins at the level of the portico of the church. Here the problems seemed overwhelming. For his new staircase he had to make use of the existing north wall and the old upper landing and return flight.[111] By placing a columnar order within the 'tunnel' of the main flight and by ingeniously manipulating it, he counteracted the convergence of the walls towards the upper landing and created the impression of an ample and festive staircase.

There was no alternative to the *piazza retta*, and only beyond it was it possible to widen the square. The choice of the oval for the main piazza suggested itself by a variety of considerations. Above all the majestic repose of the widely embracing arms of the colonnades was for Bernini expressive of the dignity and grandeur here required. Moreover, this form contained a specific *concetto*. Bernini himself compared the colonnades to the motherly arms of the Church 'which embrace Catholics to reinforce their belief, heretics to re-unite them with the Church, and agnostics to enlighten them with the true faith'.

Until the beginning of 1667 Bernini intended to close the piazza at the far end opposite the basilica by a short arm continuing exactly the architecture of the long arms. This proves conclusively that for him the square was a kind of forecourt to the church, comparable to an immensely extended atrium. The 'third arm' which was never built would have stressed a problem that cannot escape visitors to the piazza. From a near viewpoint the drum of Michelangelo's dome, designed for a centralized building, disappears behind Maderno's long nave and even the visibility of the dome is affected. Like

Maderno before him,[112] Bernini was well aware of the fact that no remedy to this problem could possibly be found. In developing his scheme for the piazza, he therefore chose to disregard this matter altogether rather than to attempt an unsatisfactory compromise solution. Early in 1667 construction of the piazza was far enough advanced to begin the 'third arm'. It was then that Bernini decided to move the 'third arm' from the perimeter of the oval back into the Piazza Rusticucci,[113] the square at one time existing at the west end of the Borghi (that is, the two streets leading from the Tiber towards the church). He was led to this last-minute change of plan certainly less by any consideration for the visibility of the dome than by the idea of creating a modest ante-piazza to the oval. By thus forming a kind of counterpart to the *piazza retta*, the whole design would have approached symmetry. In addition, the visitor who entered the piazza under the 'third arm' would have been able to embrace the entire perimeter of the oval. It may be recalled that in centralized buildings Bernini demanded a deep entrance because experience shows – so he told the Sieur de Chantelou – that people, on entering a room, take a few steps forward and unless he made allowance for this they would not be able to embrace the shape in its entirety. In S. Andrea al Quirinale he had given a practical exposition of this idea and he now intended to apply it once again to the design of the Piazza of St Peter's. In both cases the beholder was to be enabled to let his glance sweep round the full oval of the enclosure, in the church to come to rest at the aedicule before the altar and in the piazza at the façade of St Peter's. Small or large, interior or exterior, a comprehensive and unimpaired view of the whole structure belongs to Bernini's dynamic conception of architecture, which is equally far removed from the static approach of the Renaissance as from the scenic pursuits of northern Italy and the Late Baroque.

The 'third arm', this important link between the two long colonnades, remained on paper for ever, owing to the death of Alexander VII in 1667. The recent pulling down of the *spina* (the houses between the Borgo Nuovo and Borgo Vecchio), already contemplated by Bernini's pupil Carlo Fontana and, in his wake, by other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architects,[114] has created a wide roadway from the river to the piazza. This has solved one problem, and only one, namely that of a full view of the drum and dome from the distance; may it be recalled that they were always visible in all their glory from the Ponte S. Angelo, in olden days the only access to the precincts of St Peter's. To this fictitious gain has been sacrificed Bernini's idea of the enclosed piazza and, with no hope of redress, the scale between the access to the square and the square itself has been reversed. Formerly the narrow Borgo streets opened into the wide expanse of the piazza, a dramatic contrast which intensified the beholder's surprise and feeling of elation.

The most ingenious, most revolutionary, and at the same time most influential feature of Bernini's piazza is the self-contained, free-standing colonnade.[115] Arcades with orders of the type familiar from the Colosseum, used on innumerable occasions from the fifteenth century onwards, always contain a suggestion of a pierced wall and consequently of flatness. Bernini's isolated columns with straight entablature, by contrast, are immensely sculptural elements. When crossing the piazza, our ever-changing view of the columns standing four deep [116] seems to reveal a forest of individual units; and the

unison of all these clearly defined statuesque shapes produces a sensation of irresistible mass and power. One experiences almost physically that each column displaces or absorbs some of the infinitude of space, and this impression is strengthened by the glimpses of sky between the columns. No other Italian structure of the post-Renaissance period shows an equally deep affinity with Greece. It is our preconceived ideas about Bernini that dim our vision and prevent us from seeing that this Hellenic quality of the piazza could only be produced by the greatest Baroque artist, who was a sculptor at heart.

As happens with most new and vital ideas, after initial sharp attacks the colonnades became of immense consequence for the further history of architecture. Examples of their influence from Naples to Greenwich and Leningrad need not be enumerated. The aftermath can be followed up for more than two and a half centuries.