CHAPTER 9

FRANCESCO BORROMINI

⟨1599–1667⟩

AMONG the great figures of the Roman High Baroque the name of Francesco Borromini stands in a category of its own. His architecture inaugurates a new departure. Whatever their innovations, Bernini, Cortona, Rainaldi, Longhi and the rest never challenged the essence of the Renaissance tradition. Not so Borromini, in spite of the many ways in which his work is linked to ancient and sixteenth-century architecture. It was clearly felt by his contemporaries that he introduced a new and disturbing approach to old problems. When Bernini talked in Paris about Borromini, all agreed, according to the Sieur de Chantelou, that his architecture was extravagant and in striking contrast to normal procedure; whereas the design of a building, it was argued, usually depended on the proportions of the human body, Borromini had broken with this tradition and erected fantastic ('chimerical') structures. In other words, these critics maintained that Borromini had thrown overboard the classical anthropomorphic conception of architecture which since Brunelleschi's days had been implicitly accepted.

This extraordinary man, who from all reports was mentally unbalanced and voluntarily ended his life in a fit of despair, came into his own remarkably late. The son of the architect Giovanni Domenico Castelli, he was born in 1599 at Bissone on the Lake of Lugano near the birthplace of his kinsman Maderno.[1] After a brief stay in Milan, he seems to have arrived in Rome in about 1620. Much as the artisans who for hundreds of years had travelled south from that part of Italy, he began as a stone-carver, and in this capacity spent more than a decade of his life working mainly in St Peter's on coats of arms, decorative putti, festoons, and balustrades. His name is also connected with some of the finest wrought-iron railings in the basilica.[2] Moreover, the aged Maderno, who recognized the talent of his young relation, used him as an architectural draughtsman for St Peter's, the Palazzo Barberini, and the church and dome of S. Andrea della Valle.[3] Borromini willingly submitted to the older man, and the lasting veneration in which he held him is revealed by the fact that in his will he expressed the wish to be buried in Maderno's tomb.

After Maderno's death in January 1629 a new situation arose. Bernini took over as Architect to St Peter's and the Palazzo Barberini, and Borromini had to work under him. Documents permit Borromini's position to be defined: between 1631 and 1633 he received substantial payments for full-scale drawings of the scrolls of the Baldacchino and for the supervision of their execution, and in 1631 he was also officially functioning as 'assistant to the architect' of the Palazzo Barberini. The Borrominesque character of the scrolls as well as certain details in the palazzo indicate that Bernini conceded a notable freedom of action to his subordinate, and it would therefore appear that Bernini rather than Maderno paved the way for Borromini's imminent emergence as an architect

in his own right. But their relationship had the making of a long-lasting conflict. Fate brought two giants together whose characters were as different as were their approaches to architecture; Bernini – man of the world, expansive and brilliant – like his Renaissance peers regarded painting and sculpture as adequate preparation for architecture; Borromini – neurotic and recluse – came to architecture as a trained specialist, a builder and first-rate technician. Almost exact contemporaries, the one was already immensely successful, the first artist in Rome, entrusted with most enviable commissions, while the other still lacked official recognition at the age of thirty. Bernini, of course, used Borromini's expert knowledge to the full. He had no reason for professional jealousy, from which, incidentally, he always remained free. For Borromini, however, these years must have been a degrading experience which always rankled with him, and when in 1645 the affair of Bernini's towers of St Peter's led to a crisis, it was he who came forward as Bernini's most dangerous critic and adversary. His guns were directed against technical inefficiency, the very point where – he knew – Bernini was most vulnerable.

At present it does not seem possible to separate with any degree of finality Borromini's active contribution to the Palazzo Barberini. His personal manner is evident, above all, in the top-floor window of the recessed bay adjoining the arcaded centre (Plate 68A). The derivation from Maderno's windows in the attic of the façade of St Peter's is obvious, but the undulating 'ears' with festoons fastened to them as well as the segmental capping with endings turned outward at an angle of 45 degrees are characteristic of Borromini's dynamic interpretation of detail. Here that Promethean force which imparts an unaccountable tension to every shape and form is already noticeable.

Original drawings for the doors of the great hall help to assess the relationship between Borromini and Bernini.[4] There was certainly a give and take on both sides, but on the whole it would appear that Borromini's new interpretation of architectural detail made a strong impression on Bernini who, at this phase and for a short while later, tried to reconcile his own anthropomorphic with Borromini's 'bizarre' interpretation of architecture. Although the work on the Palazzo Barberini dragged on until 1638, the major part was finished in 1633. From then on the two men parted for good. It was then that Borromini set out on his own.

S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane

His opportunity came in 1634, when the Procurator General of the Spanish Discalced Trinitarians commissioned him to build the monastery of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, a couple of hundred yards from the Palazzo Barberini. Borromini first built the dormitory, the refectory (now sacristy), and the cloisters,[5] and the layout proved him a master in the rational exploitation of the scanty potentialities of the small and irregularly cut site (Figure 10). In 1638 the foundation stone of the little church itself was laid. Except for the façade, it was finished in May 1641 and consecrated in 1646 (Plate 69A). Next to Cortona's SS. Martina e Luca, which went up during the very same years, it must be regarded as one of the 'incunabula' of the Roman High Baroque and deserves the closest attention.

The cloisters, a structure of admirable simplicity, contain features which anticipate the basic 'orchestration' in the church, such as the ring of rhythmically arranged, immensely effective columns forming an elongated octagon, the uniform cornice binding together the columns, and the replacement of corners by convex curvatures which prevent caesuras in the continuity of movement.

A number of projects in the Albertina, Vienna, have always been – as we now know incorrectly – referred to the planning of the church ever since E. Hempel published them in 1924.[6] The geometric conception of the final project is a diamond pattern of two equilateral triangles with a common base along the transverse axis of the building; the undulating perimeter of the plan follows this rhomboid geometry with great precision.

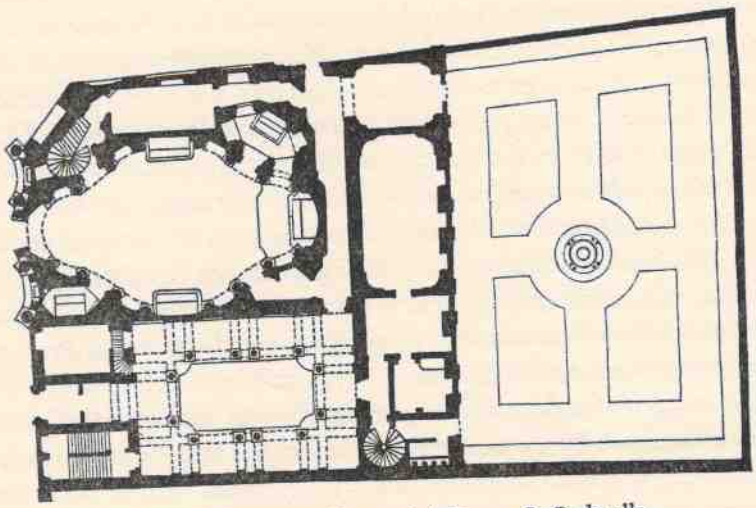

Figure 10. Francesco Borromini: Rome, S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, 1638–41. Plan

It is of the greatest importance to realize that in S. Carlo and in later buildings Borromini founded his designs on geometric units. By abnegating the classical principle of planning in terms of modules, i.e. in terms of the multiplication and division of a basic arithmetical unit (usually the diameter of the column), Borromini renounced, indeed, a central position of anthropomorphic architecture. In order to make clearer the difference of procedure, one might state, perhaps too pointedly, that in the one case the overall plan and its divisions are evolved by adding module to module, and in the other by dividing a coherent geometric configuration into geometric sub-units. Borromini's geometric approach to planning was essentially medieval, and one wonders how much of the old mason's tradition had reached him before he went to Rome. For hundreds of years Lombardy had been the cradle of Italian masons, and it is quite possible that in the masons' yards medieval building practices were handed on from generation to generation. Borromini's stubborn adherence to the rule of triangulation seems to support the point.[7]

In Borromini's plan of S. Carlo extraordinary importance is given to the sculptural

element of the columns. They are grouped in fours with larger intervals on the longitudinal and transverse axes. While the triads of undulating bays in the diagonals are unified by the wall treatment – niches and continuous mouldings – the dark gilt-framed pictures in the main axes seem to create effective caesuras. Thus, starting from the entrance bay, a rhythm of the following order exists: A|b c b|A′|b c b|A|etc. But this is clearly not the whole truth. A different rhythm is created by the high arches and the segmental pediments above the pictures. These elements seem to tie together each group of three

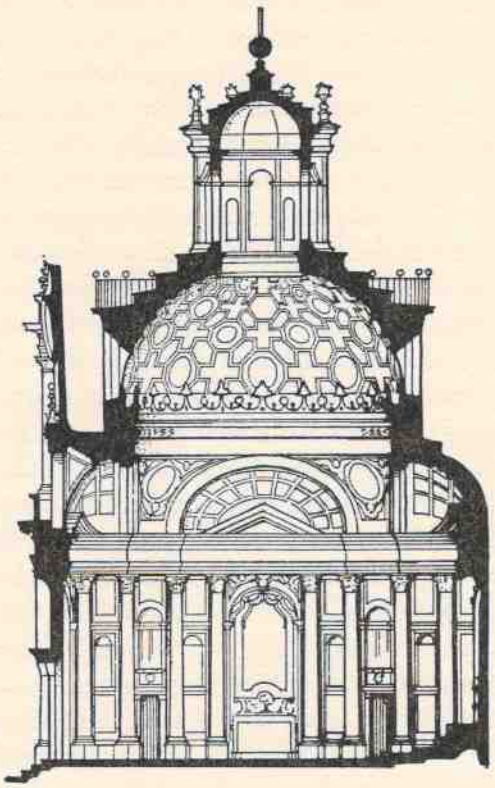

Figure 11. Francesco Borromini: Rome, S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, 1638–41. Section

bays in the main axes. The reading, again from the entrance bay, would therefore be: |b A b|c|b A′ b|c|b A b|etc. Where then are the real caesuras in this building? In the overlapping triads of bays there is certainly a suggestion of Mannerist complexity. However, instead of strengthening the inherent situation of conflict, as the Mannerists would have done, Borromini counteracted it by two devices: first, the powerful entablature serves, in spite of its movement, as a firm horizontal barrier which the eye follows easily and uninterruptedly all round the perimeter of the church; and secondly, the columns themselves, which by their very nature have no direction, may be seen as a continuous accentuation of the undulating walls. It is precisely the predominant bulk of the columns inside the small area of this church that helps to unify its complex shape. The overlapping triads may be regarded as the 'background rhythm' which makes for the never-tiring

richness and fascination of the disposition; or, to use a simile, they may be likened to the warp and woof of the wall texture. In musical terms the whole arrangement may be compared to the structure of a fugue.

What kind of dome could be erected over the undulating body of the church? To place the vault directly on to it in accordance with the method known from circular and oval plans (Pantheon type) would have been a possibility which Borromini, however, excluded at this stage of his development. Instead he inserted a transitional area with pendentives which allowed him to design an oval dome of unbroken curvilinear shape (Plate 70). He used, in other words, the transitional device necessary in plans with square or rectangular crossings. The four bays under the pendentives ('c') fulfil, therefore, the function of piers in the crossings of Greek-cross plans. And, in actual fact, in the zone of the pendentives Borromini incorporated an interesting reference to the cross-arms. The shallow transverse niches as well as the deeper entrance and altar recesses are decorated with coffers which diminish rapidly in size, not only suggesting, theoretically, a depth greater than the actual one, but also containing an illusionist hint at the arms of the Greek cross. Yet this sophisticated device was meant to be conceptually rather than visually effective. Above the pendentives is the firm ring on which the oval dome rests. The dome itself is decorated with a maze of deeply incised coffers of octagonal, hexagonal, and cross shapes.[8] They produce an exciting honeycomb impression, and the crystalline sharpness of these simple geometric forms is as far removed from the classical type of coffers in Bernini's buildings (Plate 61A) as from the smooth and curvilinear ones in those by Cortona (Figure 16). The coffers decrease considerably in size towards the lantern, so that here again an illusionist device has been incorporated into the design. Light streams in not only from above through the lantern but also from below through windows in the fillings of the coffers, partly hidden from view behind the sharply chiselled ornamental ring of stylized leaves which crowns the cornice. The idea of these windows can be traced back to a similar, but typically Mannerist, arrangement in an oval church published by Serlio in his Fifth Book. Thus the dome in its shining whiteness and its even light without deep shadows seems to hover immaterially above the massive and compact forms of the space in which the beholder moves.

Borromini reconciled in this church three different structural types: the undulating lower zone, the pedigree of which points back to such late antique plans as the domed hall of the Piazza d'Oro in Hadrian's Villa near Tivoli; the intermediate zone of the pendentives deriving from the Greek-cross plan; and the oval dome which, according to tradition, should rise over a plan of the same shape. Nowadays it is difficult to appreciate fully the audacity and freedom in manipulating three generically different structures in such a way that they appear merged into an infinitely suggestive whole. With this bold step Borromini opened up entirely new vistas which were further explored later in the century in Piedmont and northern Europe rather than in Rome.

The extraordinary character of Borromini's creation was immediately recognized. Upon the completion of the church the Procurator General wrote that 'in the opinion of everybody nothing similar with regard to artistic merit, caprice, excellence and singularity can be found anywhere in the world. This is testified by members of different

nations who, on their arrival in Rome, try to procure plans of the church. We have been asked for them by Germans, Flemings, Frenchmen, Italians, Spaniards and even Indians ...' The report also contains an adroit characterization of the buildings: 'Everything' – it says – 'is arranged in such manner that one part supplements the other and that the spectator is stimulated to let his eye wander about ceaselessly.'

The façade (Plate 76, A and B) was not erected during the early building period. It was Borromini's last work, begun in 1665 and completed in 1667, though the sculptural decoration was not finished until 1682. Although Borromini's whole career as an architect lies between the building of the church and of the façade, the discussion of the latter cannot be separated from that of the former. The system of articulation, combining a small and a giant order, derives from Michelangelo's Capitoline Palaces and the façade of St Peter's, where Borromini had started work as a *scarpellino* almost fifty years before. But he employed this Michelangelesque system in an entirely new way. By repeating it in two tiers of almost equal importance, he acted against the spirit in which the system had been invented, namely to unify a front throughout its whole height. Moreover, this determined repetition was devised to serve a specific, highly original concept; in spite of the coherent articulation, the upper tier embodies an almost complete reversal of the lower one. The façade consists of three bays; below, the two concave outside bays and the convex centre bay are tied together by the strong, unbroken, undulating entablature; above, the three bays are concave and the entablature is deployed in three separate segments. In addition, the oval medallion carried by angels and capped by the onion-shaped crowning element nullifies the effect of the entablature as a horizontal barrier. Below, the small columns of the outside bays frame a wall with small oval windows and serve as support for niches with statues; above, the small columns frame niches and support enclosed wall panels – in other words, the open and closed parts have been reversed. The opening of the door in the central bay is answered above by the 'sculptural' and projecting element of the oval 'box' in which the convex movement of the façade is echoed. Finally, instead of the niche with the figure of St Charles, the upper tier has a medallion loosely attached to the wall. The principle underlying the design is that of diversity and even polarity inside a unifying theme, and it will be noticed that the same principle ties the façade to the interior of the church. For the façade is clearly a different realization of the triad of bays which is used for the 'instrumentalization' of the interior.

The compactness of this façade, with its minimum of wall-space, closely set with columns, sculpture, and plastic decoration where the eye is nowhere allowed to rest for long, is typical of the High Baroque. Borromini also included a visionary element, characteristic of his late style. Above the entrance there are herms ending in very large, lively cherubs' heads, whose wings form a protecting arch for the figure of St Charles Borromeo in the niche (Plate 76B). In other parts of the façade, too, realistic sculptural detail supports functional architectural forms. This strange fusion of architecture and sculpture, the growth of which can be followed over a long period, is utterly opposed to the manner of Bernini, who could never divorce sculpture from narrative connotations and therefore never surrendered it to architecture.

S. Ivo della Sapienza

Almost immediately after the completion of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane Borromini was given a great opportunity further to develop his ideas on ecclesiastical architecture. He began the church of the Roman Archiginnasio (later the University), S. Ivo, in 1642;

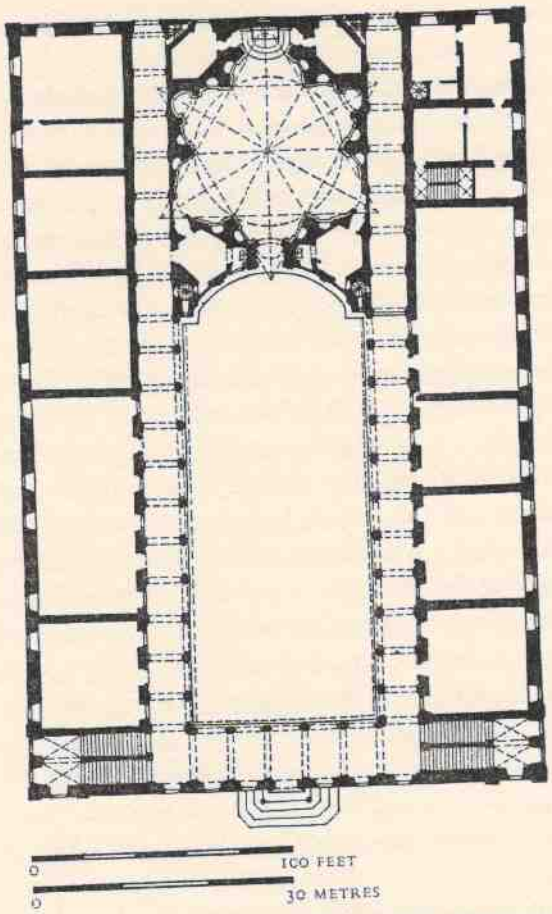

Figure 12. Francesco Borromini: Rome, S. Ivo della Sapienza, 1642–50. Plan

by 1650 most of the structure was finished. The decoration dragged on until 1660. As early as 1632 when work in the Palazzo Barberini was still in progress, Bernini had recommended Borromini as architect to the Sapienza.[9] He began by continuing the older south wing of the palace. The two great doors of the east wing on Piazza S. Eustachio, his most important exterior contribution, were executed much later, during Alexander VII's pontificate.

The church was to be erected at the east end of Giacomo della Porta's long, arcaded *cortile* (Plate 74). For its plan Borromini returned once again to the basic geometry of the equilateral triangle (Figure 12). But this time the triangles interpenetrate in such a way that they form a regular star-hexagon. The points of interpenetration lie on the perimeter of a circle, and by drawing straight lines from point to point a regular hexagon is formed. The semicircular recesses replacing the angles of one triangle are determined by circles with a radius of half a side of the hexagon, while the convex endings of the other triangle result from circles with the same radius and their centres in the points of the triangle.[10] Thus recesses of a concave shape and recesses with slanting walls and convex endings alternate and face each other across the space of the church.

Before Borromini's S. Ivo, the star-hexagon was almost entirely excluded from Renaissance and post-Renaissance planning. It may have occurred in antiquity,[11] but apart from a sketch by Peruzzi in the Uffizi and Vittozzi's SS. Trinità at Turin (begun 1598) it would be difficult to name Italian precedents. Even the simple hexagon was hardly used. The reason is not difficult to guess. In contrast to the square, the octagon, and dodecagon, where equal sides confront each other in the two main axes, in the hexagon one axis goes through two sides, the other through two angles. It is therefore evident that in plans derived from the hexagon the parts can never conform, and herein lies an element of unrest or even conflict. But it must be said at once that the complexities inherent in hexagonal or star-hexagonal planning were skilfully avoided by Borromini. His method was no less than revolutionary. Instead of creating, in accordance with tradition, a hexagonal main space with lower satellite spaces placed in the angles of the triangles, he encompassed the perimeter with an uninterrupted sequence of giant pilasters impelling the spectator to register the unity and homogeneity of the entire area of the church (Plate 69B). This sensation is powerfully supported by the sharply defined crowning entablature which reveals the star form of the ground-plan in all its clarity (Plate 71). The basic approach is, therefore, close to that in S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane; and once again a sophisticated 'background-rhythm' constantly stimulates the beholder's curiosity. Each recess is articulated by three bays, two identical small ones framing a large one ('A C A' and 'A′ B A''; Figure 13). But these alternating triads – equal in value though entirely different in spatial deployment – are not treated as separate or separable entities, for the two small bays across each corner (A A′ or A′ A) are so much alike that they counteract any tendency to perceiving real caesuras. Moreover, two other overlapping rhythms are also implied. The continuous string courses at half-height are interrupted by the central bay of the semicircular altar recess (C),[12] while the continuous string course under the capitals is not carried on across the convex bays (B). Thus two alternative groups of five bays may be seen as 'super-units', either A A′ B A′ A or A′ A C A A′. It may therefore

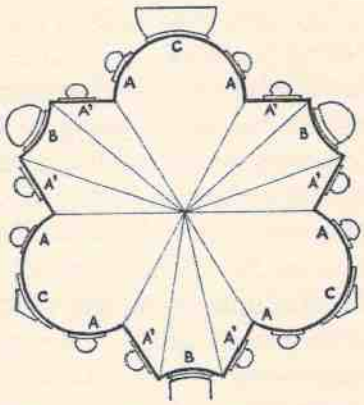

Figure 13. Francesco Borromini: Rome, S. Ivo della Sapienza, 1642–50. Plan

be said that the articulation contains three interlocking themes with the intervals placed at any of the three possible points: the large round-headed bays 'C', the convex bays 'B', or at the angles between the small bays 'A A''.

In contrast to S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, the dome caps the body of the church without a transitional structural feature. It continues, in fact, the star shape of the plan, each segment opening at its base into a large window. Moreover, the vertical lines of the pilasters are carried on in the gilded mouldings of the dome which repeat and accentuate the tripartite division into bays below (Plate 71). In spite of the strong horizontal barrier of the entablature, the vertical tendencies have a terrific momentum. As the variously shaped sectors of the dome ascend, contrasts are gradually reduced until the movement comes to rest under the lantern in the pure form of the circle, which is decorated with twelve large stars. In this reduction of multiplicity to unity, of differentiation and variety to the simplicity of the circle, consists a good deal of the fascination of this church. Geometrical succinctness and inexhaustible imagination, technical skill and religious symbolism have rarely found such a reconciliation. One can trace the movement downward from the chastity of forms in the heavenly zone to the increasing complexity of the earthly zone. The decorative elements of the dome – the vertical rows of stars, the papal coat of arms above alternating windows, the cherubs under the lantern – have a fantastic, unreal, and exciting quality and speak at the same time a clear emblematical language.[13]

In continuing the shape of the ground-plan into the vaulting Borromini accepted the principle normally applied to circular and oval churches. Yet neither for the particular form of the dome nor for the decoration was there a contemporary precedent. In one way or another the customary type of the Baroque dome followed the example set by Michelangelo's dome of St Peter's. In none of the great Roman domes was the vaulted surface broken up into differently shaped units. But Borromini had classical antiquity on his side; he had surely studied such buildings as the Serapeum of Hadrian's Villa near Tivoli.[14] The dome of S. Ivo found no sequel in Rome. Again it was in Piedmont that Borromini's ideas fell on fertile ground.

The exterior of S. Ivo presented an unusual task, since the main entrance had to be placed at the far end of Giacomo della Porta's courtyard. Borromini used Porta's hemicycle with closed arcades in two tiers for the façade of the church; above it towers one of the strangest domes ever invented (Plate 74). In principle Borromini followed the North Italian tradition of encasing the dome rather than exhibiting its rising curve as had been customary in central Italy since Brunelleschi's dome of Florence Cathedral. He handled this tradition, however, in a new and entirely personal manner. His domed structure consists of four different parts: first, a high, hexagonal drum of immense weight which counters by its convex projection the concave recession of the church façade on the *cortile*. The division of each of the six equal convex sectors into two small bays and a large one prepares for the triads in the recesses of the interior. At the points where two convex sectors meet the order is strengthened; this enhances the impression of vitality and tension. Secondly, above the drum is a stepped pyramid, divided by buttress-like ribs which transfer the thrust on to the reinforced meeting-

point of two sectors of the drum; thirdly, the pyramid is crowned by a lantern with double columns and concave recessions between them. The similarity to the little temple at Baalbek cannot be overlooked and has, indeed, often been stressed.[15] Above these three zones – which in spite of their entirely different character are welded together by the strong structural 'conductors' – rises a fourth element, the spiral, monolithic and sculptural, not corresponding to any interior feature or continuing directly the external movement. Yet it seems to bind together the several fields of energy which, united, soar up in a spatial movement along the spiral and are released into the lofty iron cusp. It is futile to speculate on the exact prototypes for the spiral feature. Borromini may have developed impressions of imperial Roman columns or may have had some unexpected knowledge of a ziggurat, the Babylonian–Assyrian temple towers of which a late derivation survives in the great mosque at Samarra.[16] In any case, it can hardly be doubted that this element has an emblematic meaning, the precise nature of which has not yet been rediscovered.

S. Ivo must be regarded as Borromini's masterpiece, where his style reached its zenith and where he played all the registers at his command. By comparison, his earlier and later buildings, ecclesiastical as well as domestic, often suffer through the fact that they are either unfinished or that he was inhibited by complexities of site and the necessity to comply with existing structures.

In contrast to Bernini, who conceived architecture as the stage for a dramatic event expressed through sculpture, the drama in S. Ivo is inherent in the dynamic archtectiural conception itself: in the way that the motifs unfold, expand, and contract; in the way that movement surges upwards and comes to rest. Ever since Baldinucci's days it has been maintained that there is an affinity to Gothic structures in Borromini's work. There is certainly truth in the observation. His interest in the cathedral at Milan is well known, and the system of buttresses in S. Ivo proves that he found inspiration in the northern medieval rather than the contemporary Roman tradition. Remarkably medieval features may be noticed in his detail, such as the angular intersection of mouldings over the doors inside S. Ivo or the pedestal of the holy water stoup in the Oratory of S. Filippo Neri. Even more interesting is his partiality for the squinch, so common in the Romanesque and Gothic architecture of northern Italy before the Byzantine pendentive replaced it in the age of the Renaissance. But he used the squinch as a transitional element between the wall and the vault only in minor structures, such as the old sacristy of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, or in certain rooms of the Palazzo Falconieri and of the Collegio di Propaganda Fide. His resuscitation of the squinch was again to find a sequel in Piedmont rather than Rome.

S. Giovanni in Laterano, S. Agnese, S. Andrea delle Fratte, and Minor Ecclesiastical Works

While S. Ivo was in course of construction three large works were entrusted to Borromini: the reconstruction of S. Giovanni in Laterano, the continuation of Rainaldi's S. Agnese in Piazza Navona, and the exterior of S. Andrea delle Fratte. A thorough

restoration of S. Giovanni had become necessary since the Early Christian basilica was in danger of collapse. Borromini's work was begun in May 1646 and finished by October 1649, in time for the Holy Year.[17] His task was extremely difficult because Innocent X insisted on preserving the venerable basilica. How could one produce a modern Baroque building under these circumstances? [18] Borromini solved his problem by encasing two consecutive columns of the old church inside one broad pillar, by framing each pillar with a colossal order of pilasters throughout the whole height of the nave, and by placing a tabernacle niche of coloured marble for statuary into the face of each pillar where originally an opening between two columns had been (Plate 72A). The alternation of pillars and open arches created a basic rhythm well known since Bramante's and even Alberti's days. Borromini, however, not only carried it across the corners of the entrance wall, thereby transforming the nave into an enclosed space, but introduced another rhythm which reverses the primary one. The spectator perceives simultaneously the continuous sequence of the high bays of the pillars and the low arches (A b A b A ...) as well as that of the low tabernacles and the high arches (a B a B a ...). Moreover, this second rhythm has an important chromatic and spatial quality, for the cream-coloured arches – 'openings' of the wall – are contrasted by the dark-coloured tabernacles, which break through the plane of the wall and project into the nave.

It has recently been ascertained [19] that Borromini intended to vault the nave. The present arrangement, which preserved Daniele da Volterra's heavy wooden ceiling (1564–72), must be regarded as provisional, but after the Holy Year there was no hope of continuing this costly enterprise. The articulation of the nave would have found its logical continuation in the vault, which always formed an integral part of Borromini's structures. If the execution of his scheme thus remained a fragment, he was yet given ample scope for displaying his skill as a decorator. The naturalistic palm branches in the sunken panels of the pilasters of the aisles, the lively floral ornament of the oval frames in the clerestory, the putti and cherubim forming part of the architectural design as in Late Gothic churches, and, above all, the re-arrangement in the new aisles during Alexander VII's pontificate of the old tombs and monuments of popes, cardinals, and bishops – all this shows an inexhaustible wealth of original ideas and an uninhibited imagination. Although contemporaries regarded the settings of these monuments as a veritable storehouse of capriccios,[20] they are far from unsuitable for the purpose for which they were designed – on the contrary, each of the venerable relics of the past is placed into its own kind of treasure-chest, beautifully adapted to its peculiar character. It is typical of Borromini's manner that in these decorations realistic features and floral and vegetable motifs of dewy freshness merge with the sharp and crystalline architectural forms.[21]

If in S. Giovanni in Laterano Borromini had to renounce completion of his design, the handicap in S. Agnese in Piazza Navona was of a different nature. Pope Innocent X wanted to turn the square on which his family palace was situated into the grandest in Rome; it was to be dominated by the new church of S. Agnese to replace an older one close to the palace. Carlo Rainaldi, in collaboration with his father Girolamo, had been commissioned to build the new structure, the foundation stone of which was laid on 15 August 1652.[22] The Rainaldis designed a Greek-cross plan with short arms and pillars

of the crossing with broad bevels which were opened into large niches framed by recessed columns. While the idea of the pillars with niches derived from St Peter's, the model for the recessed columns was Cortona's SS. Martina e Luca. The building went up in accordance with this design, but soon criticism was voiced, particularly as regards the planned staircase, which extended too far into the piazza. A crisis became unavoidable, the Rainaldis were dismissed, and on 7 August 1653 Borromini was appointed in their place.

To all intents and purposes he had to continue building in accordance with the Rainaldi plan, for the pillars of the crossing were standing to the height of the niches. Yet by seemingly minor alterations he changed the character of the design. Above all, he abolished the recesses prepared for the columns and bevelled the pillars so that the columns look as if they were detached from the wall (Figure 14).[23] By this device the beholder is made to believe that the pillars and the cross arms have almost equal width. The crossing, therefore, appears to the eye as a regular octagon; this is accentuated by the sculptural element of the all but free-standing columns (Plate 72B). Colour contrasts sustain this impression, for the body of the church is white (with the exception of the high altar), while the columns are of red marble. Moreover, an intense verticalism is suggested by virtue of the projecting entablature above the columns, unifying the arch with the supporting columns; and the high attic above the entablature, which appears under the crossing like a pedestal to the arch,[24] increases the vertical movement. It will now be seen that the octagonal space – also echoed in the design of the floor – is encompassed by the coherent rhythm of the alternating low bays of the pillars framed by pilasters and the high 'bays' of the cross-arms framed by the columns. By giving the cross-arms a length much greater than that intended by Rainaldi, Borromini created a piquant tension between them and the central area. Thus a characteristically Borrominesque structure was erected over Rainaldi's traditional plan. Nor did the latter envisage a building of exceptionally high and slender design. Borromini further amplified the vertical tendencies by incorporating into his design an extraordinarily high drum and an elevated curve for the dome – which obviously adds to the importance of the area under the crossing (Figure 14). Rainaldi, by contrast, had planned to blend a low drum with a broad, rather unwieldy dome.

In spite of the difficulties which Borromini had to face in the interior, he accomplished an almost incredible transformation of Rainaldi's project. In the handling of the exterior (Plate 73) he was less handicapped. The little that was standing of Rainaldi's façade was pulled down. By abandoning the vestibule planned by the latter, he could set the façade further back from the square and design it over a concave plan. In Rainaldi's project the insipid crowning features at both ends of the façade were entirely overshadowed by the weight of the dome. Borromini extended the width of the façade into the area of the adjoining palaces, thus creating space for freely rising towers of impressive height. But he was prevented from completing the execution of his design. After Innocent X's death on 7 January 1655, building activity stopped. Soon difficulties arose between Borromini and Prince Camillo Pamphili, and two years later Carlo Rainaldi in turn replaced Borromini. Assisted by Giovanni Maria Baratta and Antonio del Grande, Carlo proceeded

to alter those parts which had not been finished: the interior decoration, the lantern of the dome, the towers, and the façade above the entablature. The high attic over the façade, the triangular pediment in the centre, and certain simplifications in the design of the towers are contrary to Borromini's intentions.[25] But, strangely enough, the exterior looks more Borrominesque than the interior. For in the interior the rich gilt stuccoes, the large marble reliefs – a veritable school of Roman High Baroque sculpture – Gaulli's and Ciro Ferri's frescoes in the pendentives and dome: all this tends to conceal the Borrominesque quality of the structure.[26] Completion dragged on for many years. The towers went up in 1666; interior stuccoes were still being paid for in 1670, and the frescoes of the dome were not finished until the end of the century.

In defiance of the limitations imposed upon Borromini, S. Agnese occupies a unique position in the history of Baroque architecture. The church must be regarded as the High Baroque revision of the centralized plan for St Peter's. The dome of S. Agnese has a distinct place in a long line of domes dependent on Michelangelo's creation (p. 280). From the late sixteenth century onwards may be observed a progressive reduction of mass and weight, a heightening of the drum at the expense of the vault, and a growing elegance of the sky-line. All this reached a kind of finality in the dome of S. Agnese. Moreover, from a viewpoint opposite the entrance the dome seems to form part of the façade, dominates it, and is firmly connected with it, since the double columns at both sides of the entrance are continued in the pilasters of the drum and the ribs of the vault. Circumstances prevented the dome of St Peter's from appearing between two framing towers. The idea found fulfilment in S. Agnese; here dome and towers form a grand unit, perfectly balanced in scale. Never before had it been possible for a beholder to view at a glance such a rich and varied group of towers and dome while at the same time experiencing the spell of the intense spatial suggestions: he feels himself drawn into the cavity of the façade, above which looms the concave mass of the drum. Nobody can overlook the fact that Borromini, although he employed the traditional grammar of motifs, repeated here the spatial reversal of the façade of S. Ivo.

Probably in the same year, 1653, in which he took over S. Agnese from Rainaldi, Borromini was commissioned by the Marchese Paolo Bufalo to finish the church of S. Andrea delle Fratte which Gaspare Guerra had begun in 1605. Although Borromini was engaged on this work until 1665, he had to abandon it in a fragmentary state. The transept, dome, and choir which he added to the conventional interior reveal little of his personal style. Much more important is his contribution to the unfinished exterior (Plate 75). It is his extraordinary dome and tower, designed to be seen as one descends from Via Capo le Case, that give the otherwise insignificant church a unique distinction. Similar to S. Ivo, the curve of the dome is encompassed by a drumlike casing. But here four widely projecting buttresses jut out diagonally from the actual body of the 'drum'. In this way four equal faces are created, each consisting of a large convex bay of the 'drum' and narrower concave bays of the buttresses. The plan of each face is therefore similar to the lower tier of the façade of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane. Once again Borromini worked with spatial evolutions of rhythmic triads, and once again a monumental order of composite columns placed at the salient points ensures the unbroken

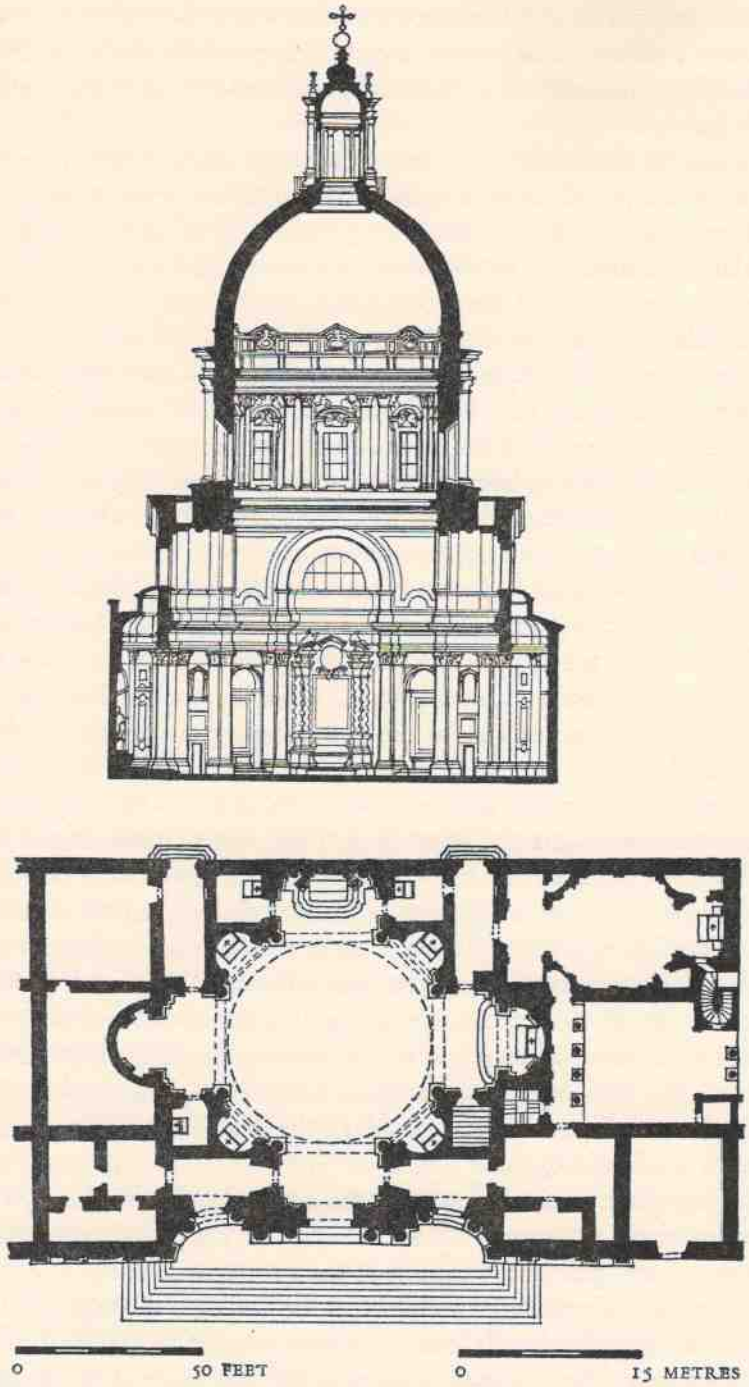

Figure 14. Francesco Borromini: Rome, S. Agnese in Piazza Navona, begun 1652. Section and plan

coherence of the design. This extraordinary structure was to be crowned by a lantern – which unfortunately remained on paper – with concave recesses above the convex walls underneath. Without this lantern the spatial intentions embodied in Borromini's design cannot be fully gauged.[27]

The tower, rising in the north-east corner next to the choir, was conceived as a deliberate contrast to the dome. Its three tiers form completely separate units. While the lowest is solid and square with diagonally-projecting columned corners, the second is open and circular and follows the model of ancient monopteral temples. By topping this feature with a disproportionately heavy balustrade the circular movement is given an emphatic, compelling quality. In the third tier the circular form is broken up into double herms with deep concave recesses between them – a new and more intensely modelled version of the lantern of S. Ivo. While full-blooded cherubs function as caryatids, their wings enfold the stems of the herms. At this late stage of his development Borromini liked to soften the precise lines of architecture by the swelling forms of sculpture, and the cherub-herm, an invention of his far removed from any classical models, fascinated him in this context.[28] The uppermost element of the tower consists of four inverted scrolls of beautiful elasticity; on them a crown with sharply pointed spikes balances precariously: the whole a triumph of complex spatial relationships and a bizarre *concetto* by which the top of the tower is wedded to the sky and the air. Thus the flexible but homogeneous massive bulk of the dome is a foil for the small scale of the tower with its emphasis on minute detail (capitals of the monopteros!) and its radical division into contrasting shapes.[29]

Among Borromini's lesser ecclesiastical works two churches may be singled out for special consideration: S. Maria dei Sette Dolori and the Church of the Collegio di Propaganda Fide. In both cases the church lies at right angles to the façade, and both churches are erected over simple rectangular plans with bevelled or rounded corners. S. Maria dei Sette Dolori was begun in 1642–3 and left unfinished in 1646.[30] The exterior is an impressive mass of raw bricks and only the rather weak portal was executed in stone, but not from Borromini's design. The interior is articulated by an imposing sequence of columns arranged in triads between the larger intervals of the two main axes, which are bridged by arches rising from the uninterrupted cornice (Plate 79B).[31] In spite of the difference in plan, S. Maria dei Sette Dolori is in a sense a simplified version of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane.[32] But above the cornice the comparison does not hold. Here there is a low clerestory and a coved vault divided by ribs, linking a pair of columns across the room.[33] This arrangement contained potentialities which were later further developed in the church of the Propaganda Fide.

In 1646 Borromini was appointed architect to the Collegio di Propaganda Fide. But it was not until 1662 that the church behind the west front of the palace was in course of construction. Two years later it was finished, with the exception of the decoration.[34] At first Borromini planned to preserve the oval church built by Bernini in 1634. When it was decided to enlarge it, he significantly preferred the simple hall type in analogy to S. Maria dei Sette Dolori and the even earlier Oratory of St Philip Neri. But the changes in design are equally illuminating. The clerestory of S. Maria dei Sette Dolori was

similar to that of the Oratory. By contrast, the church of the Propaganda Fide embodies a radical revision of those earlier structures (Plate 79A). The articulation consists here of a large and small order, derived from the Capitoline palaces. The large pilasters accentuate the division of the perimeter of the church into alternating wide and narrow bays, while the cornice of the large order and the entablature of the small order on which the windows rest function as elements unifying the entire space horizontally. Different from S. Maria dei Sette Dolori, the verticalism of the large order is continued through the isolated pieces of the entablature into the coved vaulting and is taken up by the ribs, which link the centres of the long walls with the four corners diagonally across the ceiling (Plate 78A). Thus an unbroken system closely ties together all parts of the building in all directions. The coherent 'skeleton'-structure has become all-important – hardly any walls remain between the tall pilasters! – and to it even the dome has been sacrificed. The oval project, which would have required a dome, could not have embodied a similar system. No post-Renaissance building in Italy had come so close to Gothic structural principles. For thirty years Borromini had been groping in this direction. The church of the Propaganda Fide was, indeed, a new and exciting solution, and its compelling simplicity and logic fittingly conclude Borromini's activity in the field of ecclesiastical architecture.[35]

The Oratory of St Philip Neri

The brethren of the Congregation of St Philip Neri had for a considerable time planned to build an oratory next to their church of S. Maria in Vallicella. In conjunction with this idea, plans ripened to include in the building programme a refectory, a sacristy, living quarters for the members of the Congregation, and a large library. This considerable programme was, in fact, not very different from that of a large monastery. The Congregation finally opened a competition which Borromini won in May 1637 against, among others, Paolo Maruscelli, the architect of the Congregation. Borromini replaced him forthwith and held the office for the next thirteen years. Building activity was rapid: in 1640 the oratory was in use; in 1641 the refectory was finished, between 1642 and 1643 the library above the oratory was built and between 1644 and 1650 the north-west front with the clock-tower overlooking the Piazza dell'Orologio.[36] Thus the building of the oratory coincided with that of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane. But although the work for the Oratorians was infinitely more important than that of the little church, as regards compactness and vitality the former cannot compete with the latter. This verdict does not, of course, refer to the brilliant façade of the oratory (Plate 77A), nor do we overlook the fact that many new and ingenious ideas were brought to fruition in the buildings of the monastery.

Maruscelli, before Borromini, had already solved an intricate problem: he had designed a coherent layout for the whole area with long axes and a clear and logical disposition of the sacristy and the courtyards. Borromini accepted the essentials of this plan, which also included the placing of the oratory itself in the western (left) half of the main wing. Many refinements were introduced there by Borromini, but it must suffice

to mention that, contrary to Maruscelli's intentions, he created for the eye, rather than in actual fact, a central axis to the entire front between S. Maria in Vallicella and the Via de' Filippini (Figure 15). The organization of this front is entirely independent of the

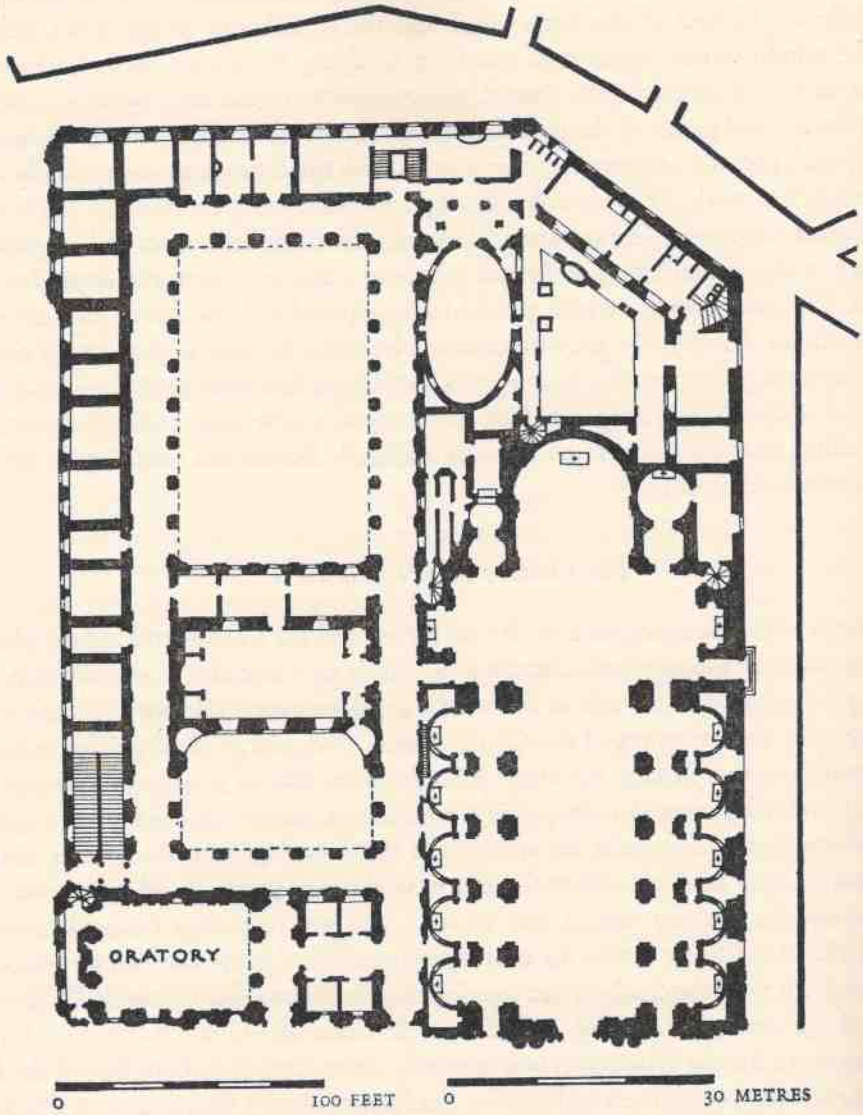

Figure 15. Francesco Borromini: Rome, Oratory of St Philip Neri and Monastery, begun 1637 (on the right the Chiesa Nuova, 1575–1606). Plan

dispositions behind it. The central entrance does not lead straight into the oratory which lies at right angles to it and extends beyond the elaborate part of the façade, nor is the plan of the whole area symmetrical in depth, as a glance at the façade might suggest.

Although the façade is reminiscent of that of a church, its rows of domestic windows seem to contradict this impression. This somewhat hybrid character indicates that

Borromini deliberately designed it as an 'overture' for the oratory as much as for the whole monastery. By request of the Congregation the façade was not faced in stone so that it would not compete with the adjoining church of S. Maria in Vallicella. Borromini, therefore, developed a new and extremely subtle brick technique of classical ancestry, a technique which allowed for finest gradations and absolute precision of detail. The main portion of the façade consists of five bays, closely set with pilasters, arranged over a concave plan. But the central bay of the lower tier is curved outward, while that of the upper tier opens into a niche of considerable depth. Crowning the façade rises the mighty pediment which, for the first time, combines curvilinear and angular movement. The segmental part answers the rising line of the cornice above the bays, which are attached like wings to the main body of the façade, and the change of movement, comparable to an interrupted S-curve, echoes, as it were, the contrasting spatial movement of the central bays in the elevation. The form of the pediment is further conditioned by the vertical tendencies in the façade. Once that has been noticed, one will also find it compellingly logical that the important centre and the accompanying bays are not capped by a uniform pediment. The latter, in addition to suggesting a differentiated triple rhythm, also pulls together the three inner bays, which are segregated from the outer bays by a slight projection and an additional half-pilaster. Without breaking up the unity of the five bays, a triad of bays is yet singled out, and the pediment reinforces the indications contained in the façade itself. The treatment of detail further enriches the complexities of the general arrangement. Attention may be drawn to the niches below, which cast deep shadows and give the wall depth and volume; to the windows above them, which with their pediments press energetically against the frieze of the entablature; and to the windows of the second tier, which have ample space over and under them.[38]

The interior of the oratory, carefully adapted to the needs of the Congregation, is articulated by half-columns on the altar wall and a complicated rhythm of pilasters along the other three walls.[39] Michelangelo's Capitoline palaces evidently gave rise to the use of the giant order of pilasters in the two courtyards. It is worth recalling that Palladio had introduced a giant order in the *cortile* of the Palazzo Porto-Colleoni at Vicenza (1552); but, although Borromini's simple and great forms seem superficially close to Palladio's classicism, the ultimate intentions of the two masters are utterly different. Palladio is always concerned with intrinsically plastic architectural members in their own right, while Borromini stresses the integral character of a coherent dynamic system. Thus in Borromini's courtyards the large pilasters would appear to screen an uninterrupted sequence of buttresses. This interpretation is supported by the treatment of the corners.

Renaissance architects had more often than not evaded facing squarely a problem which was inherent in the use of the classical grammar of forms. The half-pilasters, quarter-pilasters, and other expedients, which abruptly break the continuity of articulation in the corners of Renaissance buildings, must be regarded as naive compromise solutions. Mannerist architects who fully understood the problem not infrequently carried on the wall decoration across the corners, thereby neutralizing the latter and at the same time producing a deliberate ambiguity between the uninterrupted decoration and the change in the direction of the walls. Borromini abolished the cause for compromise

or ambiguity by eliminating the corners themselves. By rounding them off, he made the unity of the space-enclosing structural elements, and implicitly of the space itself, apparent. In the two courtyards of the Filippini he applied to an external space the same principle that Palladio had used in a comparatively embryonic manner in the interior of the Redentore.[40] This new solution soon became the property of the whole of Europe.

In contrast to the elaborate south façade, Borromini used very simple motifs for the long western and northern fronts of the convent: band-like string courses divide the storeys and large horizontal and vertical grooves replace the cornices and corners.[41] From then on this type of design became generally accepted for utilitarian purposes in cases where no elaborate decoration was required.

Domestic Buildings

Between about 1635 and the end of his career Borromini had a hand in a great number of domestic buildings of importance, though it must be said that no palace was entirely carried out by him. At the beginning stands his work in the Palazzo Spada, where he was responsible for the erection of the garden wall, for various decorative parts inside the palace and, above all, for the well-known illusionist colonnade which appears to be very long, but is, in fact, extremely short. The idea seems to be derived from the stage (Teatro Olimpico). But one should not forget that it also had a respectable Renaissance pedigree. Bramante applied the same illusionist principle to his choir of S. Maria presso S. Satiro at Milan, which must have belonged to Borromini's earliest impressions.[42] The concept of the Spada colonnade is, therefore, neither characteristically Baroque nor is it of more than marginal interest in Borromini's work. To over-emphasize its significance, as is often done by those who regard the Baroque mainly as a style concerned with optical illusion, leads entirely astray.

Between 1646 and 1649 followed the work for the Palazzo Falconieri, where Borromini extended a mid-sixteenth-century front from seven to eleven bays.[42a] He framed the façade with huge herms ending in falcons' heads, an emblematic conceit which had no precedent. He added new wings on the rear facing the river and provided decoration for porch and vestibule. But his most signal contribution is the twelve ceilings with their elaborate floral ornament,[43] and, overlooking the courtyard, the Palladian loggia, equally remarkable for its derivation and for its deviation from Palladio's Basilica at Vicenza.[44] The U-shaped river front, dominated by the loggia, gives proof of the versatility of Borromini's extraordinary genius (Plate 77B). His problem consisted in welding old and new parts together into a new unit of a specifically Borrominesque character. He solved it by progressively increasing the height of the four storeys in defiance of long established rules and by reversing the traditional gradation of the orders. The ground floor is subdivided by simple broad bands; in the next storey the same motif is given stronger relief; the third storey has Ionic pilasters; and above these are the recessed columns of the loggia. Thus instead of diminishing from the ground floor upwards, the wall divisions grow in importance and plasticity. Only in the context of the whole façade is the unconventional and anti-classical quality of the loggia motif fully revealed.

Between 1646 and 1647 Borromini helped in an advisory capacity the aged Girolamo Rainaldi, whom Innocent X had commissioned to build the extensive Palazzo Pamphili in Piazza Navona. Borromini had a tangible influence on the design, although his own plan was not accepted for execution.[45] He alone was, however, responsible for the decoration of the large salone and the building of the gallery to the right of S. Agnese, on a site which originally formed part of the Palazzo Mellini. Inside the gallery, to which Pietro da Cortona contributed the frescoes from the *Aeneid*, are to be found some of the most characteristic and brilliant door surrounds of Borromini's later style. Of his designs for the palace of Count Ambrogio Carpegna near the Fontana Trevi very little was executed,[46] but a series of daring plans survive which anticipate the eighteenth-century development of the Italian palazzo. Borromini took up all the major problems where they were left in the Palazzo Barberini and carried them much further, such as the axial alignment of the various parts of the building, the connexion of a grand vestibule with the staircase hall, and the merging of vestibule and oval courtyard. The latest drawing of the series shows two flights of staircases ascending along the perimeter of the oval courtyard and meeting on a common landing – a bold idea, heretofore unknown in Italy, which was taken up and executed by Guarini in the Palazzo Carignano at Turin.[47]

Between 1659 and 1661 Borromini was concerned with the systematization of two libraries, the Biblioteca Angelica adjoining Piazza S. Agostino and the Biblioteca Alessandrina in the north wing of the Sapienza. Of the plans for the former hardly anything was carried out, but the latter survives as Borromini had designed it. The great hall of the library is three storeys high, and the book-cases form a constituent part of the architecture. This was a new and important idea, which he had not yet conceived when he built the library above the Oratory of St Philip Neri about twenty years earlier. It was precisely this new conception which made the Biblioteca Alessandrina the prototype of the great eighteenth-century libraries.

The Collegio di Propaganda Fide

Borromini's last great palace, surpassing anything he did in that class with the exception of the convent of the Oratorians, was the Collegio di Propaganda Fide. His activity for the Jesuits spread over the long period of twenty-one years, from his appointment as architect in 1646 to his death in 1667. At that time the Jesuits were at the zenith of their power, and a centre in keeping with the world-wide importance of the Order was an urgent requirement. They owned the vast site between Via Capo le Case, Via Due Macelli, and Piazza di Spagna, which, though large enough for all their needs, was so badly cut that no regular architectural development was possible. Moreover, some fairly recent buildings were already standing, among them Bernini's modernization of the old façade facing Piazza di Spagna and his oval church which was, however, as we have seen, replaced by Borromini. As early as 7 May 1647 Borromini submitted a development plan for the whole site; but little happened in the course of the next thirteen years. It is known that Borromini gave the main façade in front of the church its final shape in

1662, and the other much simpler façades also show characteristics of his latest manner. The execution of the major part of the palace would therefore seem to have taken place in the last years of his life. Part of the palace was reserved for administrative purposes, another large part contained the cells for the alumni. But very little of Borromini's interior arrangement and decoration survives; in fact, apart from the church, only one original room seems to have been preserved.

All the more important are the façades. The most elaborate portion rises in the narrow Via di Propaganda where its oppressive weight produces an almost nightmarish effect (Plates 68B and 78B). Borromini's problem was here similar to that of the oratory, for the façade was to serve the dual purpose of church and palace. Once again the long axis of the church lies parallel with the street and extends beyond the highly decorated part of the façade, but in contrast to the oratory this front has a definite, though entirely unusual, palace character. Its seven bays are articulated by a giant order of pilasters which rise from the ground to the sharply-projecting cornice.[48] Everything here is unorthodox: the capitals are reduced to a few parallel grooves, the cornice is without a frieze, and the projecting pair of brackets over the capitals seems to belong to the latter rather than to the cornice. The central bay recedes over a segmental plan, and the contrast between the straight lines of the façade and the inward curve is surprising and alarming. No less startling is the juxtaposition of the austere lower tier and the *piano nobile* with its extremely rich window decoration. The windows rise without transition from the energetically drawn string course and seem to be compressed into the narrow space between the giant pilasters.

It is here that the active life in the wall itself is revealed. All the window frames curve inwards with the exception of the central one which, being convex, reverses the concave shape of the whole bay. The movement of the window frames is not dictated simply by a desire for picturesque variety but consists like a fugue of theme, answer, and variations. The theme is given in the door and window pediments of the central bay; the identical windows of the first, third, fifth, and seventh bays are variations of the door motif while the identical second and sixth windows answer the central window, also spatially. In the windows of the attic above the cornice [49] the theme of the *piano nobile* is repeated in another key: the first, third, fifth, and seventh windows are simpler variations of the second and sixth below, and the windows in the even bays of the attic vary those in the uneven ones underneath. Finally, in the undulating pediment of the fourth attic window the two different movements are reconciled. By such means Borromini created a palazzo front which has neither precursors nor successors.

In the south-western and southern façades only the ground-floor arrangement and the division of the storeys was continued, which assured the unity of the entire design. Otherwise Borromini contrasted these fronts with the intensely articulated main façade. There is no division into bays by orders, nor are the windows decorated. But their sequence is interrupted at regular intervals by strong vertical accentuations. At these points Borromini united the main and mezzanine windows of the *piano nobile* under one large frame, thereby creating a window which goes through the entire height of the tier. The boldly projecting angular pediment seems to cut into the string course of the

next storey, where the framework of the window with its gently curved pediment and concave recession shows a characteristic reversal of mood.

A comparison of the façades of the Oratory and the Collegio illustrates the deep change between Borromini's early and late style. Gone is a great mass of detail, gone are all the subtle gradations of wall surface and mouldings and the almost joyful display of a great variety of motifs. However, the impression of mass and weight has grown immensely; the windows now seem to dig themselves into the depth of the wall. And yet the basic approach hardly differed.

To summarize Borromini's life-long endeavour, it may be said that he never tired in his attempt to mould space and mass by means of the evolution and transformation of key motifs. He subordinated each structure down to the minutest detail to a dominating geometrical concept, which led him away from the Renaissance method of planning in terms of mass and modules towards an emphasis on the functionally, dynamically, and rhythmically decisive 'skeleton'. This brought him close to the structural principles of the Gothic style and enabled him, at the same time, to incorporate into his work what suited his purpose: Mannerist features of the immediate past, many ideas from Michelangelo's architecture and that of Hellenism, both equally admired by him, and even severely classical elements which he found in Palladio. Being an Italian, Borromini could not deny altogether the anthropomorphic basis of architecture. This becomes increasingly apparent during his advancing years from the stress he laid on the blending of architecture and sculpture. Nevertheless, the antagonism between him and Bernini remained unbridgeable. It was in Bernini's circle that he was reproached for having destroyed the accepted conventions of good architecture.

CHAPTER 10

PIETRO DA CORTONA

⟨1596–1669⟩

Introduction

The genius of Pietro Berrettini, usually called Pietro da Cortona, was second only to that of Bernini. Like him he was architect, painter, decorator, and designer of tombs and sculpture although not a sculptor himself. His achievements in all these fields must be ranked among the most outstanding of the seventeenth century. Bernini and Borromini have been given back the position of eminence which is their due. Not so Cortona. When this book first appeared in 1958 no critical modern biography had been devoted to him; G. Briganti's work[1] has now at least partially satisfied this need. To be sure, Cortona's is the third name of the great trio of Roman High Baroque artists, and his work represents a new and entirely personal aspect of the style.

An almost exact contemporary of Bernini and Borromini, he was born at Cortona on 1 November 1596 of a family of artisans. He probably studied under his father, a stonemason, before being apprenticed to the undistinguished Florentine painter Andrea Commodi,[2] with whom he went to Rome in 1612 or 1613. He stayed on after Commodi's return to Florence in 1614 and changed over to the studio of the equally unimportant Florentine painter Baccio Ciarpi.[3] According to his biographer Passeri he studied Raphael and the antique with great devotion during these years; while this is, of course, true of every seventeenth-century artist, in Cortona's case such training has more than usual relevance since he could not profit very much from his teachers. His copy of Raphael's *Galatea*[4] impressed Marcello Sacchetti so much that he took to the young artist who, from 1623 onwards, belonged to the Sacchetti household. It was in the service of the Sacchetti family that Cortona gave early proof of his genius as painter and architect. In the Palazzo Sacchetti he also met the Cavaliere Marino, fresh from Paris,[5] and Cardinal Francesco Barberini, Urban VIII's nephew, who became his lifelong patron; through him he obtained his early important commission as a fresco painter in S. Bibiana. At the same time he was taken on by Cassiano del Pozzo, the learned secretary to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, who employed in these years a number of young and promising artists for his collection of copies of all the remains of antiquity.[6] Thus Cortona was over twenty-six years old when his contact with the 'right' circle carried him quickly to success and prominence. As to his early development, relatively little has so far come to light.[7] More discoveries will be made in the future, but it will remain a fact of some significance that, whereas we can follow the unfolding of Bernini's talent year by year from his precocious beginnings, in Cortona we are almost suddenly faced with a distinctly individual manner in painting and, even more astonishingly, in architecture, though his training in this field can have been only rather superficial.[8]

From about the mid twenties his career can be fully gauged. From then until his death he had large architectural and pictorial commissions simultaneously in hand – he

being the only seventeenth-century artist capable of such a *tour de force*. During the 1630s, with SS. Martina e Luca rising (Plate 82) and the Barberini ceiling in progress (Plate 89), he reached the zenith of his artistic power and fame, and his colleagues acknowledged his distinction by electing him *principe* of the Accademia di San Luca for four years (1634–8). Between 1640 and 1647 he stayed in Florence painting and decorating four rooms of the Palazzo Pitti, but the architectural projects of this period remained on paper. Back in Rome, his most extensive fresco commission, the decoration of the Chiesa Nuova (Plate 92), occupied him intermittently for almost twenty years. During one of the intervals he painted the gallery of the Palazzo Pamphili in Piazza Navona (1651–4); the erection of the façade of S. Maria della Pace is contemporaneous with the frescoes in the apse of the Chiesa Nuova, that of the façade of S. Maria in Via Lata with the frescoes of the pendentives, that of the dome of S. Carlo al Corso follows three years after the frescoes of the nave. Even if it were correct, as has more than once been maintained, that the quality of his late frescoes shows a marked decline,[9] the same is certainly not true of his late architectural works. In any case, his architectural and pictorial conceptions show a parallel development, away from the exuberant style of the 1630s towards a sober, relatively classicizing idiom to which he aspired more and more from the 1650s onwards.

Architecture

The Early Works

Before he began the church of SS. Martina e Luca, Cortona executed the so-called Villa del Pigneto near Rome for the Sacchetti and possibly also the villa at Castel Fusano, now Chigi property. The latter was built and decorated between 1626 and 1630.[10] It is a simple three-storeyed structure measuring 70 by 52 feet, rather rustic in appearance, crowned with a tower and protected by four fortress-like corner projections. The type of the building follows a long-established tradition, but the interest here lies in the pictorial decoration rather than in the architecture. The Villa del Pigneto on the other hand commands particular attention because of its architecture (Plate 80, A and B). Unfortunately little survives to bear witness to its original splendour.[11] Nor is anything certain known about its date and building history. The patron was either Cardinal Giulio or Marchese Marcello Sacchetti;[12] the former received the purple in 1626, the latter died in 1636 (not 1629). There is, therefore, room for the commission during the decade 1626–36. For stylistic reasons a date not earlier than the late twenties seems indicated.[13]

The ground floor of the building (Plate 80B) with its symmetrical arrangement of rooms reveals a thorough study of Palladio's plans, but the idea of the monumental niche in the central structure, which is raised high above the low wings, derives from the Belvedere in the Vatican. It is even possible that Cortona was impressed at that early date by the ruins of the classical temple at Praeneste (Palestrina) near Rome, of which he undertook a reconstruction in 1636.[14] In any case, the large screened niches of the side fronts – a motif which has no pedigree in post-Renaissance architecture – can hardly have been conceived without the study of plans of Roman baths. While the arrangement of terraces

with fountains and grottoes is reminiscent of earlier villas such as the Villa Aldobrandini at Frascati, the complicated system of staircases with sham flights recalls Buontalenti's Florentine Mannerism. If one can draw conclusions from the ground-plan, essentially Mannerist must also have been the contrast between the austere entrance front and the over-decorated garden front, a contrast well known from buildings like the Villa Medici on the Pincio. Although small in size and derived from a variety of sources, the building was a landmark in the development of the Baroque villa. The magnificent silhouette, the grand staircases built up in tiers so as to emphasize the dominating central feature, and above all the advancing and receding curves which tie together staircase, terrace, and building – all this was taken up and further developed by succeeding generations of architects.

It is an indication of Cortona's growing reputation that on Maderno's death in 1629 he took part in the planning of the Palazzo Barberini. His project seems to have found the pope's approval, but the high cost prevented its acceptance.[15] Although Bernini was appointed architect of the palace, Cortona was not altogether excluded. The theatre adjoining the north-west corner of the palace was built to his design (Plate 81B).[16] It would be a matter of absorbing interest to know something about Cortona's project for the palace. In earlier editions of this book I illustrated the plan of a palace which I had come across on the London art market in the 1930s and which I immediately diagnosed as by Cortona's hand. In 1969 I discussed this plan at considerable length before a group of specialists, and the critical tenor of my colleagues induced me to remove the illustration from this edition. But since I still believe in the correctness of my original conclusions, some remarks about that plan are in place. It represents only the ground floor containing a web of octagonal rooms (apparently meant to be used as store-rooms), the walls of which were to serve as substructures to the rooms above.[17] In spite of the obvious difficulties of location, the colossal dimensions of the plan make it almost certain that it refers to the Palazzo Barberini. Cortona wanted to return to the traditional Roman block-shape; his design is a square of 285 by 285 feet as against the 262 feet of the present façade.[18] Even the scanty evidence of this plan reveals four rather exciting features: the palace would have had bevelled corners framed by columns; the main axes open into large rectangular vestibules articulated by columns; two vestibules give direct access to the adjoining staircase halls; finally, the double columns of the courtyard would have been carried on across the corners in an unbroken sequence. The idea of integrating vestibule and staircase hall, hardly possible without a knowledge of French designs, was new for Italy. Also the principal staircase with two opposite flights ascending from the main landing has no parallel in Rome at this time. Moreover, the arrangement of the courtyard anticipates Borromini's in the nearby monastery of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, while the plan of the vestibules was taken up by Borromini in S. Maria dei Sette Dolori and the church of the Propaganda Fide. The most astonishing element, however, is the kind of structural grid system that controls every dimension of the plan.

In 1633 Cortona won his first recognition as a designer of festival decoration: for the Quarantore of that year he transformed the interior of the church of S. Lorenzo in Damaso into a rich colonnaded setting with niches and gilded statues of saints.[19] Cortona was a born 'decorator', and it is therefore all the more to be regretted that none of his occa-

sional works seems to have come down to us in drawings or engravings. It was not until his thirty-eighth year, the year of his election as *Principe* of the Academy of St Luke, that he received his first big architectural commission. He had hardly begun painting the great Salone of the Barberini Palace when the reconstruction of the church of SS. Martina e Luca at the foot of the Capitol fell to him. This work requires a detailed analysis.

SS. Martina e Luca

In July 1634 Cortona was granted permission to rebuild, at his own cost and according to his plans, the crypt of the church of the Academy of St Luke, in order to provide a tomb for himself.[20] During the excavations, in October of that year, the body of S. Martina was discovered. This brought about an entirely new situation. Cardinal Francesco Barberini took charge of the undertaking and in January 1635 ordered the rebuilding of the entire church.[21] By about 1644 the new church was vaulted, and its completion in 1650 is recorded in an inscription in the interior.[22]

Cortona chose a Greek-cross design with apsidal endings (Plates 81A, 82, 84A, and 85; Figure 16). The longitudinal axis is slightly longer than the transverse axis.[23] This difference in the length of the arms, significant though it seems in the plan, is hardly perceptible to the visitor who enters the church. His first sensation is that of the complete breaking up of the unified wall surface, and his attention is entirely absorbed by it. But this is not simply a painterly arrangement, designed to seduce and dazzle the eye, as many would have it who want to interpret the Baroque as nothing more than a theatrical and picturesque style. The wall so often no more than an inert division between inside and outside has here tremendous plasticity, while the interplay of wall and orders is carried through with a rigorous logic. The wall itself has been 'sliced up' into three alternating planes. The innermost plane, that nearest to the beholder, recurs in the segmental ends of the four arms, that is, at those important points where altars are placed and the eye requires a clear and solid boundary. The plane furthest away appears in the adjoining bays behind screening columns. The intermediate plane is established in the bays next to the crossing. Similarly varied is the arrangement of the order: the pilasters occupy a plane before the columns, and the columns under the dome and in the apses are differently related to the wall. But all round the church pilasters and columns are homogeneous members of the same Ionic order. The overwhelming impression of unity in spite of the 'in' and 'out' movement of the wall and the variety in the placing of the order makes a uniform 'reading' of the centralized plan not only logically possible but visually imperative. Thus Cortona solved the problem of axial direction inherent in centralized planning by means entirely different from those employed by Bernini. It is also characteristic that at this period Cortona, unlike Bernini, rejected the use of colour. The church is entirely white, a neutrality which seems essential for the full impact of this richly laden, immensely plastic disposition of wall and order.

By contrast to the severe forms of the architecture below, the vaultings of the apses above the entablature are copiously decorated. The entire surface is plastically moulded and hardly an inch of the confining wall is allowed to appear. And yet the idea of working

with varying wall planes is transposed into the concept of using overlapping decorative elements. The windows between the ribs are framed by stilted arches; over these arches a second frame of disproportionately large consoles is laid which support broken segmental pediments. Similarly, the system of ribs in the dome is superimposed upon the coffers. It is now apparent that the use here of what would previously have been considered two mutually exclusive methods of dome articulation is characteristic of Cortona's style in this church. We have seen before (p. 117) that this idea was soon taken up by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century architects.

Despite the new plastic-dynamic interpretation of the old Greek-cross plan, Cortona's style is deeply rooted in the Tuscan tradition. Even such a motif as the free-standing columns which screen the recessed walls in the arms of the cross is typically Florentine. Its origin, of course, is Roman, but in antiquity the columns screen off deep chapels from the main space (Pantheon). When this motif was applied in the Baptistery of Florence, the walls were brought up close behind the columns, whereby the latter lost their specifically space-defining quality. It is this Florentine version with its obvious ambiguity that attracted Mannerist Florentine architects (Michelangelo,[24] Ammanati, etc.), and it is this version of the classical motif that was revived by Cortona. Similar solutions recur in some of his other structures, most prominently on the drum of the dome of S. Carlo al Corso (Plate 84B), one of his latest works (1668), where the screening columns correspond closely to those inside SS. Martina e Luca.

An analysis of the decoration of SS. Martina e Luca supplies most striking evidence of Cortona's Florentine roots. In spite of the wealth of decoration in the upper parts of the church, figure sculpture is almost entirely excluded and indeed never plays a conspicuous part in Cortona's architecture. His decoration combines two different trends of Florentine Mannerism: the hard and angular forms of the Ammanati–Dosio idiom with the smooth, soft, and almost voluptuous elements derived from Buontalenti. It is the merging of these two traditions that gives the detail of Cortona's work its specific flavour. Florentine Mannerism, however, does not provide the whole answer to the problem of Cortona's style as a decorator, for the vigorous plasticity and the compact crowding of a great variety of different motifs – such as in the panels of the vaultings of the apses – denote not only a Roman and Baroque, but above all a highly personal transformation of his source material. This style of decoration was first evolved by Cortona not in his architecture but in his painting. He translated into three-dimensional form the lush density of pictorial decoration to be found in the Salone of the Palazzo Barberini (Plate 89). The similarity between painted and plastic decoration is extremely close, even in details. For instance, the combination of heads in shells and rich octagonal coffers above the windows of the apses, so striking a feature of the decoration of SS. Martina e Luca, also appears at nodal points of the painted system of the Barberini ceiling. But, having pointed out the close connexion between his architectural and painted decoration, one must emphasize once again that in his built architecture Cortona eliminates the figure elements which form so integral a part of his painted architecture. No stronger contrast to Bernini's conception of architecture could be imagined. For Bernini the very meaning of his classically conceived architecture was epitomized in realistic sculpture.

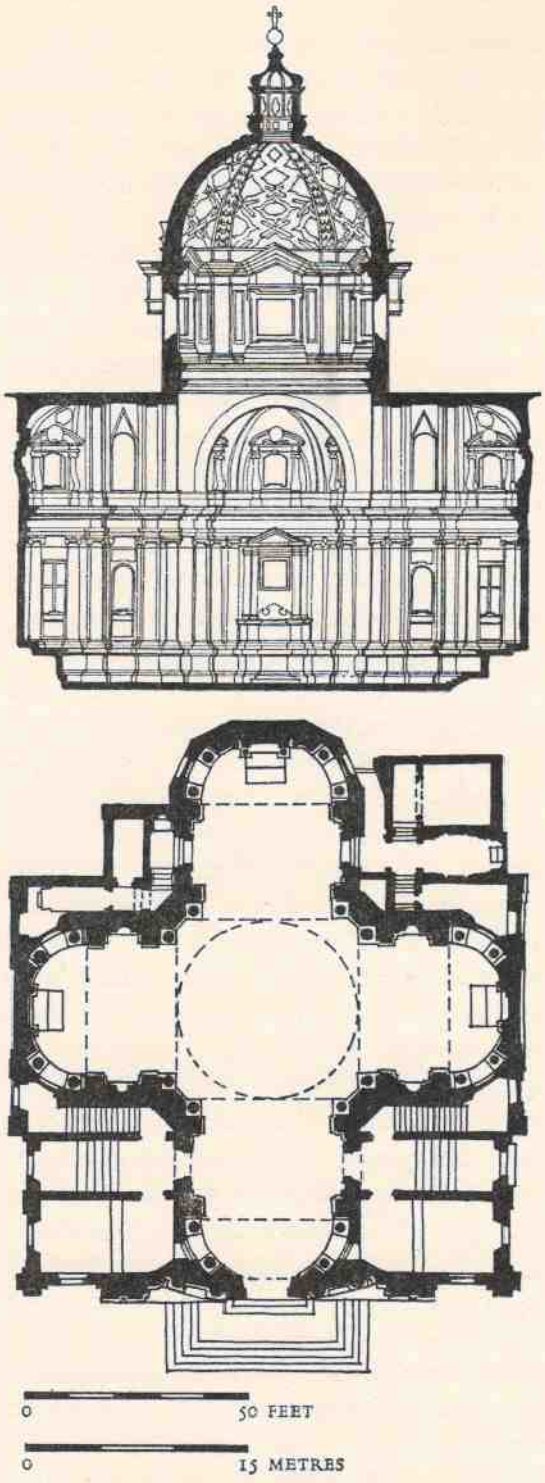

Figure 16. Pietro da Cortona: Rome, SS. Martina e Luca, 1635–50. Section and plan

Such sculpture would have obscured the wealth and complexity of Cortona's work. His decorative effervescence reaches its culmination in SS. Martina e Luca with the entirely unprecedented, wildly undulating forms of the dome coffering. The very personal design of these coffers found no imitators, and it was only after Bernini had restored Cortona's coffers to their classical shape that their use in combination with a ribbed vault was generally accepted.

The undulation of Cortona's coffers is countered by the severe angularity of the pediments of the windows in the drum which intrude into the zone of the dome. On the exterior of the dome a similar phenomenon can be observed. Here the austere window frames of the drum are topped by a sequence of soft, curved decorative forms at the base of the vaulting, and these forms are taken up in the lantern by scrolls of distinctly Mannerist derivation. The exterior of the dome is also highly original in that the drum and the foot of the vaulting are emphasized at the expense of the curved silhouette of the dome itself. With this Cortona anticipates a development which, though differently expressed, was to come into its own in the second half of the century.

The façade of SS. Martina e Luca represents another break with tradition. The two-storeyed main body of the façade is gently curved, following the precedent of the Villa Sacchetti (though the curve is here inwards). Strongly projecting piers faced with double pilasters seem to have compressed the wall between them, so that the curvature appears to be the result of a permanently active squeeze. At precisely this period Borromini designed his concave façade for the Oratory of St Philip Neri. In view of their differences of approach, however, the two architects may have arrived independently at designing these curved fronts. The peculiarity of the façade of SS. Martina e Luca lies not only in its curvature but also in that the orders have no framing function and do not divide the curved wall into clearly defined bays. In the lower tier, the columns seem to have been pressed into the soft and almost doughy mass of the wall, while in the upper tier sharply cut pilasters stand before the wall in clear relief. This principle of contrasting soft and hard features, which occurred in other parts of the building, is reversed in the projecting central bays: in the upper tier framing columns are sunk into the wall, whereas in the lower tier rigid pilaster-like formations top the door. It would be easy to describe at much greater length the almost incredibly rich variations on the same theme, but it must suffice to note that specifically Florentine Mannerist traits are very strong in the subtle reversal of architectural motifs and in the overlapping and interpenetration of elements as well as in the use of decorative features. This is true despite the carefully framed realistic palm and flower panels. Moreover, the type of the façade with two equally developed storeys and strongly emphasized framing features has its roots in the Florentine rather than in the Roman tradition.[25]

Quite unlike any earlier church façade, this front prepares the beholder for an understanding of the internal structure, for the wall treatment and articulation of the interior are here unfolded in a different key.[26] Cortona thinks in terms of the pliability of the plastic mass of walls, and it is through this that he achieves the dynamic co-ordination of exterior and interior. To him belongs the honour of having erected the first of the great, highly personal and entirely homogeneous churches of the High Baroque.[27]

S. Maria della Pace, S. Maria in Via Lata, Projects, and Minor Works

Cortona's further development as an architect shows the progressive exclusion of Mannerist elements and a turning towards Roman simplicity, grandeur, and massiveness even though the basic tendencies of his approach to architecture remain unchanged. This is apparent in his modernization of S. Maria della Pace, carried out between 1656 and 1657 (Plate 83 and Figure 17).[28] The new façade, placed in front of the Quattrocento

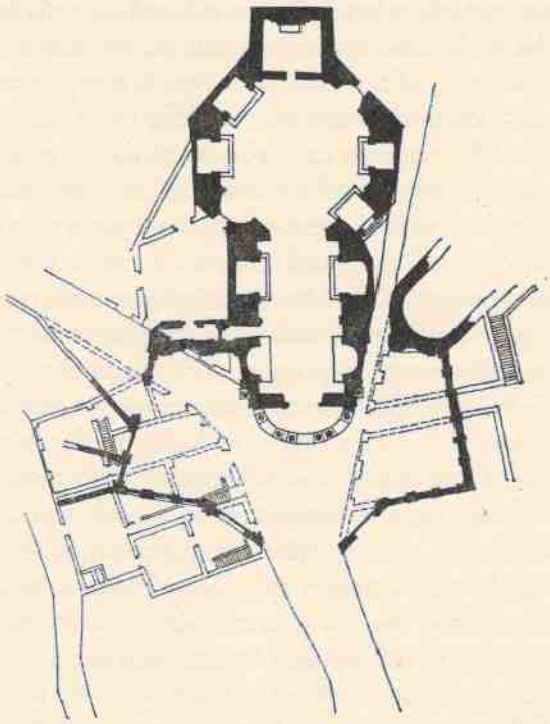

Figure 17. Pietro da Cortona: Rome, S. Maria della Pace, 1656–7.
Plan of church and piazza

church, together with the systematization of the small piazza is of much greater importance than the changes in the interior.[29] Although regularly laid-out piazzas had a long tradition in Italy, Cortona's design inaugurates a new departure, for he applied the experience of the theatre to town-planning: the church appears like the stage, the piazza like the auditorium, and the flanking houses like the boxes. It is the logical corollary of such a conception that the approaches to the piazza from the side of the church are through a kind of stage doors, which hide the roads for the view from the piazza.[30]

The convex upper tier of the façade, firmly framed by projecting piers, repeats the motif of the façade of SS. Martina e Luca. But in the scheme of S. Maria della Pace this tier represents only a middle field between the boldly projecting semicircular portico and the large concave wings which grip like arms round the front, in a zone much farther removed from the spectator.[31] The interplay of convex and concave forms in the

same building, foreshadowed in a modest way in Cortona's Villa Sacchetti, is a typically Roman High Baroque theme which also fascinated Borromini and Bernini.

S. Maria della Pace contains many influential ideas. The portico is one of Cortona's most fertile inventions. By projecting far into the small piazza and absorbing much space there, a powerful plastic and at the same time chromatically effective motif is created that mediates between outside and inside.[32] Bernini incorporated it into the façade of S. Andrea al Quirinale, and it recurs constantly in subsequent European architecture. The detail of the portico, too, had immediate repercussions. As early as 1657 Bernini made an intermediary project with double columns for the colonnades of St Peter's; [33] and his final choice of a Doric order with Ionic entablature was here anticipated by Cortona.[34] The crowning feature of the façade of S. Maria della Pace is a large triangular pediment encasing a segmental one. Such devices had been used for more than a hundred years from Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana onwards. With the exception, however, of Martino Longhi's façade of SS. Vincenzo ed Anastasio (p. 187), the motif does not occur in Rome at this particular time. Encased pediments are a regular feature of the North Italian type of the aedicule façade (Plate 39A), and to a certain extent Cortona must have been influenced by it. But he goes essentially his own way by working with a pliable wall and by employing once again architectural orders as an invigorating rather than a space-(or bay-)defining motif. Moreover, the 'screwhead' shape of the segmental pediment which breaks through the entablature so as to create room for Alexander VII's coat of arms adds to the unorthodox and even eccentric quality of the façade.[35]

In his next work, the façade of S. Maria in Via Lata, built between 1658 and 1662,[36] Cortona carried simplification and monumentality a decisive step further (Plate 86, A and B). The classicizing tendencies already apparent in the sober Doric of S. Maria della Pace are strengthened, while the complexity of SS. Martina e Luca seems to have been reduced to the crystalline clarity of a few great motifs. It is obvious that the alignment of the street did not warrant a curved façade. Nevertheless, there are connexions between Cortona's early and late work; for, like SS. Martina e Luca, the façade of S. Maria in Via Lata consists of two full storeys, but, reversing the earlier system, the central portion is wide open and is flanked by receding bays instead of projecting piers. The main part, which opens below into a portico and above into a loggia, is unified by a large triangular pediment into which, as at S. Maria della Pace, a segmental feature has been inserted. Here, however, it is not a second smaller pediment, but an arch connecting the two halves of the broken straight entablature. The motif is well known from Hellenistic and Roman Imperial architecture (Termessus, Baalbek, Spalato, S. Lorenzo in Milan) and, although it was used in a somewhat different form in medieval as well as Renaissance buildings (e.g. Alberti's S. Sebastiano at Mantua), it is here so close to the late classical prototypes that it must have been derived from them rather than from later sources.[37] While thus the classical pedigree of the motif must be acknowledged, neither Cortona's Tuscan origin nor the continuity of his style is obscured. The design of the interior of the portico is proof of this (Plate 86B). With its coffered barrel vault carried by two rows of columns, one of which screens the wall of the church, it clearly reveals its derivation from the vestibule of the sacristy in S. Spirito at Florence (Giuliano da Sangallo and

Cronaca, begun 1489). But in contrast to the Quattrocento model, the wall screened by the columns seems to run on behind the apsidal endings, and so does the barrel vault. Cortona thus produces the illusion that the apses have been placed in a larger room, the extent of which is hidden from the beholder. Only the cornice provides a structural link between the columns and the niches of the apses. The comparison of Cortona's solution with that of S. Spirito is extraordinarily illuminating, for the 'naive' Renaissance architect ignored the fact that a screen of columns placed in front of an inside wall must produce an awkward problem at the corners. Cortona, by contrast, being heir to the analytical awareness gained in the Mannerist period, was able to segregate, as it were, the constituent elements of the Renaissance structure and reassemble them in a new synthesis. Unlike Mannerist architects, who insisted on exposing the ambiguity inherent in many Renaissance buildings, he set out to resolve any prevarication by a radical procedure: each of the three component parts – the screen of columns, the apses, and the barrel vault – has its own fully defined structural *raison d'être*. There is hardly a more revealing example in the history of architecture of the different approaches to a closely related task by a Renaissance and a Baroque architect. But only a master of Cortona's perspicacity and calibre could produce this result; it is rooted in his old love for superimpositions (to wit, the vaults of the apses upon the barrel vault), and even he himself would not have been capable of such penetrating analysis at the period of SS. Martina e Luca, a time when he had not entirely freed himself from Mannerism.

Cortona's major late architectural work is the dome of S. Carlo al Corso, which has been mentioned (Plate 84B).[38] Its drum shows a brilliant, and in this place unique, version of the motif of screening columns. Structurally, the buttresses faced with pilasters and the adjoining columns form a unit (i.e.: bab | bab | bab | ...), but aesthetically the rhythm of the buttresses predominates and seems accompanied by that of the open, screened bays (i.e.: | a | b–b | a | b b | a | ...). A comparison of this dome with that of SS. Martina e Luca makes amply clear the long road Cortona had travelled in the course of a generation, from complexity tinged by Mannerism to serene classical magnificence. Similar qualities may be found in two minor works of the latest period, the Cappella Gavotti in S. Nicolò da Tolentino, begun in 1668, and the altar of St Francis Xavier in the Gesù, executed after the master's death.[39]

What would have been one of Cortona's most important ecclesiastical works, the Chiesa Nuova (S. Firenze) at Florence, remained a project. At the end of 1645 his model was finished. But as early as January 1646 there seem to have been dissensions, for Cortona writes to his friend and patron Cassiano del Pozzo that he was never lucky in matters concerning architecture.[40] The affair dragged on until late in 1666, when his plans were finally shelved. A number of drawings, now in the Uffizi, permit us to get at least a fair idea of Cortona's intentions.[41] Equally, all his major projects for secular buildings remained unexecuted, while the Villa del Pigneto and the house which he built for himself late in life in the Via della Pedacchia no longer exist.[42]

Three of his grand projects should be mentioned, namely the plans for the alterations and additions to the Palazzo Pitti at Florence, the designs for a Palazzo Chigi in the Piazza Colonna, Rome, and the plans for the Louvre. As regards the Louvre, he competed

with Bernini, who again superseded him as he had thirty-five years before in the work at the Palazzo Barberini. Cortona's Louvre project has recently been traced.[43] It always was in the Cabinet des Dessins of the Louvre, but remained unrecognized because it makes important concessions to French taste and is the least 'cortonesque' of his architectural designs. The biased Ciro Ferri was certainly not correct when he maintained that Bernini had plagiarized his competitor's plan.[44] The modernization of the façade of the Palazzo Pitti was planned between 1640 and 1647, when Cortona painted his ceilings inside the palace.[45] His most notable contribution, however, would have been a theatre in the garden, for which several sketches are preserved. It was to rise high above curves and colonnaded terraces on the axis of the palace and would have formed a monumental unit with the courtyard. It is in these designs that Cortona's preoccupation with the ruins of Praeneste makes itself more clearly felt than in any of his other projects. He incorporated into his designs free-standing colonnades and a lofty 'belvedere', corresponding by and large to his reconstruction of the classical ruins made in 1636 for Cardinal Francesco Barberini and first published in Suarez's work on the ruins of Palestrina in 1655.[46] The prints probably influenced Bernini in his choice of colonnades for the Square of St Peter's. Moreover, the free-standing belvedere as a focusing point on high ground was frequently used in northern Europe, particularly for gardens. If in such cases architects were no longer aware of the debt owed to Cortona's reconstruction of Praeneste, on occasion its direct influence can yet be traced. An impressive example is the eighteenth-century Castello at Villadeati in Piedmont with its sequence of terraces and its crowning colonnaded belvedere.[47] Cortona himself drew on his reconstruction for the designs of the Palazzo Chigi, which Alexander VII wanted to have erected when he planned to transform the Piazza Colonna, on which the older family palace was situated, into the first square in Rome. The most brilliant of the projects, preserved in the Vatican Library,[48] shows, for the first time, a powerful giant order of columns screening a concave wall above a rusticated ground floor from which the waters of the Fontana Trevi were to emerge. The repercussions of this design can still be felt in Bouchardon's Fontaine de Grenelle in Paris (1739–45).

Cortona once wrote in a state of despondency that he regarded architecture only as a pastime.[49] But can we believe him? It seems impossible to say whether he was primarily painter or architect. As a painter his real gift lay in the effective manipulation of large-scale ensembles which are inseparable from their settings. One cannot, therefore, think of the painter without the architect in the same person. The study of Cortona as a painter should not be divorced from the study of Cortona as a decorator of interiors.

Painting and Decoration

The Early Works

Until recently it has been thought that Cortona's first frescoes were those in S. Bibiana.[50] The discovery of frescoes by his hand in the Villa Muti at Frascati and in the Palazzo Mattei makes a revision necessary. The Frascati frescoes, powerful though crude and weakly designed, reveal the hand of the beginner,[51] while in the frescoes of

the gallery of the Palazzo Mattei, executed between May 1622 and December 1623, Cortona's style appears fully developed.[52] He painted here four scenes from the story of Solomon. They show his sense for drama, his characteristic manner of composition, his love for archaeological detail, and his solidity and clarity in the conception of the main protagonists. Single figures as well as whole scenes seem to herald his later work, and the panel with the *Death of Joab* looks like an anticipation of the *Iron Age* painted in the Palazzo Pitti in 1637. And yet although the style is formed, or rather in the process of being formed, it lacks vigour and assurance, and the full-bloodedness of his mature manner. Interesting though these frescoes are as the first major performance of a great master, by contrast to Bernini's work at the age of twenty-five they do not reveal the hot breath of genius. It remains true that it was only in the frescoes in S. Bibiana, executed between 1624 and 1626, that Cortona created a new historical style in painting.

The responsibility for the pictorial decoration was in the hands of the old-fashioned Mannerist Agostino Ciampelli, and Cortona's contribution consisted mainly of the three frescoes with scenes from the life of the saint above the left-hand arches of the nave. One of these scenes, *St Bibiana refuses to sacrifice to Idols* (Plate 87), may be chosen to assess the change which has taken place during the intervening decade since Domenichino's St Cecilia frescoes (Plate 21). The figures have grown in volume and their immensely strong tactile values make them appear real and tangible. Thus breathing life seems to replace the studied classicism of Domenichino's work. There is also a broadening of touch and a freer play of light and shade which, incidentally, is in keeping with the general development of the 1620s. Contrary to Domenichino's loose, frieze-like composition, in which every figure appears in statuesque isolation and is given almost equal significance, Cortona creates a diagonal surge into depth, a gradation in the importance of figures, and a highly dramatic focus. One diagonal is made up of the *dramatis personae*, St Bibiana and St Rufina, who press forward against the picture plane; the other is formed by the group of priestesses, unruffled bystanders recalling the chorus in the classical drama. The result of all this is a virile, bold, and poignant style which is closer in spirit to Annibale's Farnese ceiling than to Domenichino's manner and possesses qualities similar to Bernini's sculpture of these years.

Yet Cortona's point of departure was not in fact very different from that of Domenichino. The figures, as well as the accessories like the sacrificial tripod and the statue of Jupiter in the background, meticulously follow ancient models. Cortona's antiquarian taste was nurtured and determined by his early intense study after the antique[53] and the scientific copying of classical works for Cassiano del Pozzo, whom he began to serve at about this time. It is often not realized that throughout his whole career and even during his most Baroque phase, Cortona shared the erudite seventeenth-century approach to antiquity. Thus, although there is a world of difference between Domenichino's rigid classicism of 1615 and Cortona's 'Baroque' classicism of 1625, the latter's work is essentially closer to the Carracci–Domenichino current than it is to the bold illusionism of Lanfranco, which asserted itself on the largest scale precisely at this moment.

In these early years Cortona was employed primarily by the Sacchetti family.[54] The major work in the service of Marchese Marcello was the decoration of the Villa at

Castel Fusano (1626–9), and this time the direction was in Cortona's hands. It is known that a number of artists worked under him, among them Domenichino's pupil Andrea Camassei (1602–49) [55] and, above all, Andrea Sacchi [56] – a fact of particular interest, since their opinions on art as well as their practice soon differed so radically. The Castel Fusano frescoes are in a poor state and largely repainted, but the chapel with Cortona's *Adoration of the Shepherds* over the altar is well preserved. Here all around the walls are brilliantly painted landscapes with small figures depicting the life of Christ; evidently derived from Domenichino, their painterly freedom is an unexpected revelation, and in a more accessible locality they would long have been given a place of honour in the development of Italian landscape painting. The principal decoration was reserved for the gallery on the second floor, and Marchese Marcello himself worked out the programme for the cycle of mythological–historical–allegorical frescoes. On entering the gallery, one is immediately aware that Cortona depends to a large extent on the Farnese ceiling, a clear indication that in these years he was still tied to the Bolognese tradition.[57]

During the same period he painted for the Sacchetti a series of large pictures (now in the Capitoline Museum) illustrating mythology and ancient history. The latest of these, *The Rape of the Sabine Women* of *c.* 1629 (Plate 88A), a pendant to the earlier *Sacrifice of Polyxena*,[58] shows him amplifying the tendencies of the S. Bibiana frescoes. Once again an elaborately contrived antique setting is used as a stage for the drama, and details such as armour and dress are studied with a close regard for 'historical truth'. The scene is none the less permeated by a sense of Venetian romanticism, and indeed in its colour the painting owes much to Venice.[59] Three carefully considered groups close to the observer are the main components of the composition. The one on the right is clearly dependent on Bernini's *Rape of Proserpina*, while that in the centre seems to be indebted to poses known from the stage. Despite the loose handling of the brush, these powerful groups produce almost the sensation of sculpture in the round. They are skilfully balanced on a central axis and yet they suggest a strong surge from right to left; this movement, stabilized by the three architectural motifs, is simultaneously counteracted in the middle distance by the sequence of gestures starting from the figure of Neptune and passing through Romulus to the centurion, who seems to be about to intervene on behalf of old age and virginity in their contest with brute force. Furthermore, these figures adroitly fill the gaps between the main groups in the foreground. It will be noticed how subtly the earlier frieze composition of the Domenichino type of classicism has been transformed. A dynamic flow of movement and counter-movement is integrated with a stable and organized distribution of groups and figures. The *Rape of the Sabine Women* impressed following generations almost more than any other of Cortona's canvases, and its effect can be seen, for instance, in works by Giacinto Gimignani and Luca Giordano. Nevertheless the richness of its compositional devices, typical of the Baroque trend in the years around 1630, still owes a debt to Annibale's Farnese ceiling and in particular to his *Triumph of Bacchus* (Plate 15B).

The *Rape of the Sabine Women* shows both Cortona's strength as a painter and his weakness. Among his Roman contemporaries, Sacchi's characters are far more convincing, Poussin lends a moral weight to his canvases of which Cortona was incapable, Guercino

is superior as a colourist. But none of them matches his fiery temperament, his wealth of ideas in organizing a canvas on the largest scale, his verve in rendering incidents, and his great gift as a narrator. These virtues predestined him to become the first fresco painter in Rome and lead this branch of painting to a sudden and unparalleled climax.

The Gran Salone of the Palazzo Barberini

The years 1633–9 mark the turning point in Cortona's career, and in retrospect they must be regarded as one of the most important caesuras in the history of Baroque painting. During these years he carried out the ceiling of the Gran Salone in the Palazzo Barberini, a work of vast dimensions and a staggering performance by any standards (Plate 89).[60] There was an interruption in 1637 when he paid a visit to Florence and Venice. The Venetian painter Marco Boschini reports that, after his return, Cortona removed part of what he had done in order to apply the lessons learnt in Titian's and Veronese's city. Whether this is correct or not, the Venetian note is certainly very prominent. But we have reached the cross-roads of Baroque ceiling painting, and one source of inspiration, decisive as it may be, cannot account for the conception of this work.

Following the tradition of *quadratura* painting (p. 36), Cortona created an illusionistic architectural framework which he partly concealed beneath a wealth of garland-bearers, shells, masks, and dolphins – all painted in simulated stucco. At this juncture two points should be noted: that, in contrast to the orthodox *quadratura*, the architectural framework here is not meant to expand the actual shape of the vault; and that the feigned stuccoes take up and transform a local Roman tradition. But it was *real* stucco decoration that was fashionable in Rome from Raphael's Logge onwards and became increasingly abundant in the course of the sixteenth century.

The framework divides the whole ceiling into five separate areas, each showing a painted scene in its own right. Although something of the character of the *quadro riportato* can thus in fact still be sensed,[61] Cortona has created at the same time a coherent 'open' space. The illusion is a dual one: the same sky unites the various scenes behind the painted stucco framework, while on the other hand figures and clouds superimposed on it seem to hover within the vault just above the beholder. In other words, it is the existence of the framework that makes it possible to perceive both the illusionist widening and the illusionist contraction of objective space.

It is worth recalling that Mannerist ceiling and wall decoration in Central Italy was concerned primarily with figures illusionistically intruding into, but not extending, the space of the beholder.[62] By contrast the architectural constructions of the *quadratura* painters aim first and foremost at a precisely defined extension of space. A diametrically opposed method, namely the suggestion of an unlimited space continuum, was applied by Correggio to the decoration of domes. Finally, the double illusion, where figures may appear in painted space behind and in front of a feigned architecture, has also a long history, mainly in Northern Italy, from Mantegna's Camera degli Sposi onwards.

Cortona, it will now be seen, followed basically the North Italian tradition descending from Mantegna through Veronese, but he changed and amplified it by making use

of the local stucco tradition, by applying to the framework *quadratura* foreshortening, and by employing and transforming Mannerist conventions of figure projection in front of the architecture. At the same time, he showed an awareness of the Correggiesque space continuum. Moreover, he devised the middle field in the typically Venetian mode of *sotto in su*, in analogy to Veronese's *Triumph of Venice* in the Palazzo Ducale, and for colour too he relied to a large extent on Veronese.

All these diverse elements are united in a breathtaking and dynamic composition which overwhelms the beholder. At first sight throngs of figures seem to swirl above his head and to threaten him with their bulk. But soon the elaborate arrangement makes itself felt, and attention is guided through the chiaroscuro and the complex formal relationships to the cynosure of the composition, the luminous aureole surrounding the figure of Divine Providence, which is also the centre of meaning. It was to Francesco Bracciolini (1566–1645), court poet from Pistoia, a minor star of the sophisticated literary circle gathered round the pope, that the programme of the ceiling was due. Although his text has not yet been discovered, it is clear that he had devised an intricate story in terms of allegory, mythology, and emblematic conceits.[63] Divine Providence, elevated high on clouds above Time and Space (Chronos and the Fates), requests Immortality with commanding gesture to add the stellar crown to the Barberini bees. These magnificent insects (themselves emblems of Divine Providence) are flying in the formation of the Barberini coat of arms. They are surrounded by a laurel wreath held by the three theological Virtues so as to form a cartouche. The laurel is another Barberini emblem and also another symbol of Immortality. A putto in the top left corner extends the poet's crown – an allusion to Urban's literary gifts. When decoded, the visually persuasive conceit tells us that Urban, the poet-pope, chosen by Divine Providence and himself the voice of Divine Providence, is worthy of immortality. The four scenes along the cove, accessory to the central one, are like a running commentary on the temporal work of the pope. They illustrate in the traditional allegorical–mythological style his courageous fight against heresy (Pallas destroying Insolence and Pride in the shape of the Giants), his piety which overcomes lust and intemperance (Silenus and satyrs), his justice (Hercules driving out the Harpies), and his prudence which guarantees the blessings of peace (Temple of Janus). This summary barely indicates the richness of incidents compressed into these scenes. Never again did Cortona achieve, or aspire to, an equal density and poignancy of motifs animated by an equally tempestuous passion.[64]

The Frescoes of the Palazzo Pitti and the Late Work

When passing through Florence in 1637, Cortona had been persuaded by the Grand Duke Ferdinand II to stay for a while and paint for him a small room (Camera della Stufa) with representations of the Four Ages.[65] A characteristic sign of the time: there was no painter in Florence who could have vied with Pietro da Cortona. In 1640 he returned for fully seven years, first to finish the 'Ages' and then to execute the large ceilings of the grand-ducal apartment in rooms named after the planets Venus, Jupiter, Mars, Apollo, and Saturn.[66] The programme, written by Francesco Rondinelli, may be

regarded as a kind of astro-mythological calendar to the life and accomplishments of Cosimo I (Plate 90).[67] Events take place, therefore, in the sky rather than on earth, giving Cortona a chance to exploit in the ceiling frescoes the painterly potentialities of the airy realm. But it is the return to real stucco decorations [68] and their particular handling that guarantee these rooms a special place in the annals of the Baroque.

The wealth of these decorations baffles accurate description. One meets the entire repertory: figures and caryatids, white stuccoes on gilt ground or gilded ones on white ground; wreaths, trophies, cornucopias, shells, and hangings; duplication, triplication, and superimpositions of architectural and decorative elements; cartouches with sprawling borders incongruously linked with lions' heads, and with palmettes, cornucopias, and inverted shells (Plate 91B) – a seemingly illogical joining, interlocking, associating of motif with motif. Unrivalled is the agglomeration of plastic forms and their ebullient energy. The quintessence of the Baroque, it would appear – and in a sense this may be agreed to. There is, however, another side to these decorations. Cortona carefully observed the inviolability of the frames of the ceiling frescoes; the character of the decorations implies renunciation of illusionism; upon analysis it becomes evident that the decoration is placed before the architecture and not fused with it, that each element of the design is so clearly defined and self-contained that the figures could be taken out of their settings without leaving 'holes'; that, finally, the colour scheme of pure white and pure gold aims at stark and decisive contrasts. Thus the classicizing note is undoubtedly strong in the gamut of these High Baroque decorations. The details, too, open interesting perspectives: reminiscences of Michelangelo (corner figures, Sala di Marte; Plate 90) appear next to Rubenesque tritons (Sala di Giove; Plate 91B) and chaste classical female caryatids (Sala di Giove); Buontalenti-like superimpositions (Sala di Apollo [Plate 91A], and Sala di Venere) next to panels with trophies derived straight from antiquity (Sala di Marte). In a word, the basis for Cortona's decorative repertory is extremely broad, and yet the strange balance between effervescence and classical discipline remains unchanged.

To a certain extent these decorations epitomize Cortona's work in SS. Martina e Luca and the Palazzo Barberini, with which they are linked in many ways. But his earlier work as a decorator cannot account for the new relationship between the plastic decorations and the illusionist paintings (Plate 90) contained in heavy frames. The explanation is provided by Cortona's experience of Venice. Cinquecento ceilings such as that of the Sala delle Quattro Porte in the Palace of the Doges show essentially the same combination of stucco and painting. Here were the models which he translated into his personal luscious Seicento manner. It is the union of dignity and stateliness, of the festive, swagger, and grand, that predestined Cortona's manner to be internationally accepted as the official decorative style of aristocratic and princely dwellings. The 'style Louis XIV' owes more to the decorations of the Palazzo Pitti than to any other single source.[69]

Returning to Rome in 1647 without having finished the work in the Palazzo Pitti, Cortona immediately engaged upon his most extensive ecclesiastical undertaking, the frescoes in S. Maria in Vallicella. After the execution of the frescoes of the dome (1647–51) there was an interruption until 1655, and in the intervening years he painted for Pope

Innocent X the ceiling of the long gallery in the Palazzo Pamphili in Piazza Navona (1651–4),[70] only recently (1646) built by Borromini. Here Cortona designed a rich monochrome system creating an undulating framework for the main scenes with the life and apotheosis of Aeneas. A work of infinite charm, the problem of changing viewpoints has here been approached and solved with unequalled mastery. His palette has become even more transparent and luminous than in the last ceilings of the Palazzo Pitti. Delicate blues, pale pinks, violet, and yellow prevail, foreshadowing the tone values used by Luca Giordano and during the eighteenth century. While this work easily reveals the study of antiquity, Raphael, and Veronese, the frescoes of S. Maria in Vallicella look back to Lanfranco and Correggio (Plate 92); whereas the sophistication, elegance, delicacy, and decorative profuseness of the Pamphili ceiling appeal to the refined taste of the few, the work in the church speaks to the masses by its broad sweep, its dazzling multitude of figures and powerful accentuation. Once again, these frescoes form an ensemble of mesmerizing splendour with their setting, the criss-cross of heavy, gilded coffers, the richly ornamented frames (in the nave), and the white stucco figures – all designed by Cortona. But he did not attempt to transplant into the church his secular type of decoration; nor did he employ the illusionistic wizardry used in the Bernini–Gaulli circle and by the *quadraturisti*. Faithful to his old convictions, he insisted on a clear division between painted and decorative areas.

Compared with his great fresco cycles, his easel pictures are of secondary importance. But if they alone had survived, he would still rank as one of the leading figures of the High Baroque. Pictures like the *Virgin and Saints* in S. Agostino, Cortona (1626–8), and in the Brera (*c.* 1631), *Ananias healing St Paul* (S. Maria della Concezione, Rome, *c.* 1631), *Jacob and Laban* (1630s) and *Romulus and Remus* (*c.* 1643), both in the Louvre, and the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* (S. Lorenzo in Miranda, Rome, 1646), with their brilliant painterly qualities, their careful Renaissance-like grouping, their powerfully conceived main protagonists, and their concentration on the dramatic focus, belong to the highest class of 'history painting' in which the most coveted traditions of Raphael, Correggio, and Annibale Carracci find their legitimate continuation. The *Sacrifice to Diana* (after 1653, formerly Barberini Gallery, present whereabouts unknown; Plate 88B) may serve to illustrate Cortona's late manner. True to the allegorical–mythological mode of thinking, Xenophon's sacrifice after his happy return from the East (*Anabasis* V, iii) was meant to celebrate the homecoming of the Barberini after their exile. Compared with the early *Rape of the Sabine Women* (Plate 88A) the classical and archaeological paraphernalia have grown in importance at the expense of the figures. The meticulous observance of classical decorum shows Cortona in step with the late Poussin. But unlike the latter, who aimed at extreme simplicity and concentration, Cortona tended to become diffuse, epic, and pastoral, and to this extent such pictures prepare the new stylistic position of the Late Baroque. At the same time, he toned down the *fortissimo* of his early manner, and with the insistence on predominant verticals, the firm framing of the composition, and the arrangement of figures in parallel layers, he confirmed that the period of the exuberant High Baroque was a thing of the past.