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Roman influences in the architecture of domes in Naples at the turn of the XVIth century

Salvatore Di Liello Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II - Dipartimento di Architettura

Abstract

In the modern age, the domes acquire a growing weight in the construction of the visual hierarchies of the urban landscape of Naples. The article focuses on the Roman influences of the Neapolitan domes at the turn of the sixteenth century when many projects - such as those of the churches of the SS. Severino and Sossio, of Santa Maria di Regina Coeli, of Santa Maria di Donnaromita and San Gregorio Armeno among the first realizations marked by the Tridentine upgrades seem to be part of that pauperist language affirmed in Rome by Francesco da Volterra and Martino Longhi il Vecchio.

Ascendenze romane nell'architettura delle cupole a Napoli sul volgere del Cinquecento

In età moderna le cupole acquistano un crescente peso nella costruzione delle gerarchie visive del paesaggio urbano di Napoli. L'articolo è incentrato sulle ascendenze romane delle cupole napoletane sul volgere del Cinquecento quando molte realizzazioni - come quelle delle chiese dei SS. Severino e Sossio, di Santa Maria di Regina Coeli, di Santa Maria di Donnaromita e San Gregorio Armeno - tra le prime realizzazioni improntate agli adeguamenti tridentini - sembrano iscriversi a quel linguaggio pauperista affermato a Roma da Francesco da Volterra e Martino Longhi il Vecchio.

Keywords: Rinascimento, architettura della controriforma, cupole napoletane, iconografia.
Renaissance, Counter-reformation architecture, Neapolitan domes, iconography.

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In trying to assess the impact of sacred architecture over the dense urban scene of Naples in the modern age there emerges that, from the mid 16th century onwards, domes acquired an increasing weight within the scope of the construction of visual hierarchies in the urban landscape. Their increased presence – recorded in different views of the city such as Jan van Stinemolen's (1582), Francesco Valegio's (ab.1590) as well as in Didier Barra's painting (1647) – provides evidence about the many construction sites of the Counter-Reformation, where a rich studio was taking shape, which was destined to influence the architecture and the urban setting of the viceregal capital. However, notwithstanding the profound changes imposed by the Tridentine reform, during the greater part of the 16th century the architecture of Naples appears firm to the imprint of a classicism destined progressively to move away from the magnificence announced in the Caracciolo di Vico chapel (ab.1516) and in the church of Santa Caterina in Formiello (ab.1519) which is not reflected in the more sober domes like those made in churches of San Severino e Sossio, of Santa Maria *Regina Coeli*, of Santa Maria Donnaromita, Santa Maria la Nova as well as in the church of San Gregorio Armeno – amongst the earliest constructions inspired by the Tridentine upgrades – whose volumes seem to be in keeping with the pauperist language made successful in Rome by Giacomo Della Porta, Francesco da Volterra and Martino Longhi the Older.

During the first half of the XVIth century the reality of the Papal city no longer coincided with artistic grandeur and Julius II's pomp. Within the wider perspective of the declining economic

and cultural supremacy of Italian seignories, the Church, crippled by Lutheran criticism, lost all contacts with the splendour of the earliest years of the century, celebrated by the great religious buildings. The sack of Rome in 1527 dramatically confirmed the end of the golden years of the Renaissance [Chastel 1983], of Rome as a center of antique delights, of a city rich in libraries and glorious vestiges, whose rhetoric had been uninterruptedly fed since the Middle Ages by Hildebert de Lavardin's line *Roma quanta fuit ipsa ruina docet*: the city was then ruined, palaces, churches, and convents had been plundered and, during several years, the light of art and Humanism was seemingly extinguished. And, against the background of such a catastrophe, of the scattering of artists, and of the dismay of the most cultivated humanists, harsh criticism against the Church took shape, blaming it for fuelling the pagan myth of the Eternal City. Such feelings and resentments had been expressed, even before the Sack of the Imperial troops, in the anti-humanist criticism of Adrian VI (1522-1523), who opposed the ostentatious splendor fueled by the Cardinals who had commissioned artistic masterpieces in Rome during the first decade of the XVIth century. This is stressed by Giorgio Vasari in his biography of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger where, outlining the Roman reality under Leo X, he writes: «When he died all beautiful and good arts revived by him and his predecessor Jules II died likewise. His successor Adrian VI fought against all arts and virtues and, should he have ruled the Holy See for a long time, during his pontificate in Rome it would have occurred what had already happened before, when all statues that had survived the Goths' devastation (both good and bad) were condemned to the fires» [Vasari 1988, 107]. The condemnation of the grandeur of early XVIth-century programs was even shared by the learned humanist Desiderius Erasmus, who lived in Rome from 1506 to 1509. In 1527, the year of the Sack, he waged one of the most direct attacks against Roman Humanism in his *Dialogus Ciceronianus*, published in March 1528 [Chastel 1983, 112-113; Benedetti 1974]. Erasmus' criticism sheds light on the culture prevailing in Rome during the years immediately following the Sack, since it was expressed by a humanist who not only opposed the laxity of customs and the lack of spirituality in the Church, but openly attacked the worship of the antique, the antiquarian fervor which was acknowledged as the cause of the 'paganization' of culture and life in Rome at the time of Leo X and Raphael.

The Church of Rome, humiliated by the Reformation, that criticized its worldly excesses perpetrated in the name of art and humanism, began to recover its prestige in Europe – which seemed to be irretrievably jeopardized – only during the early 1530s. The new climate was first and foremost expressed by a renewed religious sensibility which was to redesign the relations between art and society against the background of a strict moral discipline. During those years the Pontiffs – starting with Paul III Farnese, elected in 1534, then with Julius III (1550-1555), Pius IV (1559-1565), Pius V (1566-1572), and Gregory XIII (1575-1585), reasserted the prestige and the central role played by Rome and its Church, thus ending the tolerant era of the Renaissance and ushering a new climate of rigour and control, which was sanctioned by the Counter-Reformation and ultimately led to the establishment of the Inquisition (1542), the censorship of the press (1543) and the commencement of the Council of Trent (1545). Within this framework, there was a strong concourse of cultural strategies in order to react to the allegations made by the Lutheran Reformation, which had detected in the Roman Church an unacceptable continuity among theological laxity, corrupted habits, and worship of the antique. According to the Catholic Reformation, the very connection between artistic production and research about the antique had to be revised. If the antique can be an *instrumentum regni*, there was a need to rethink the link created by the Church of the XVth century with the ancient and pagan world of the imperish-

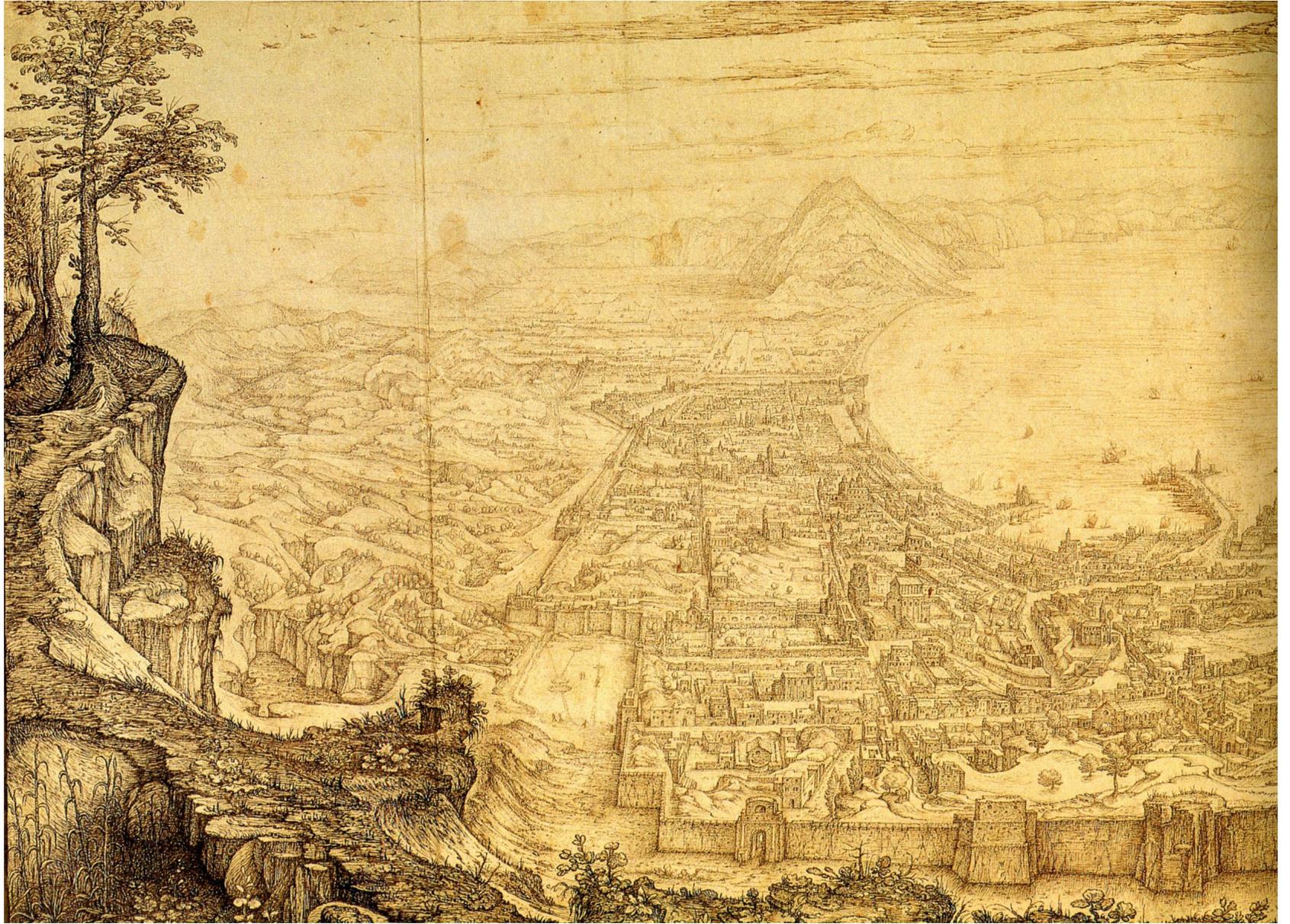


Fig. 1: J. van Stinemolen, View of Naples (1582), detail.

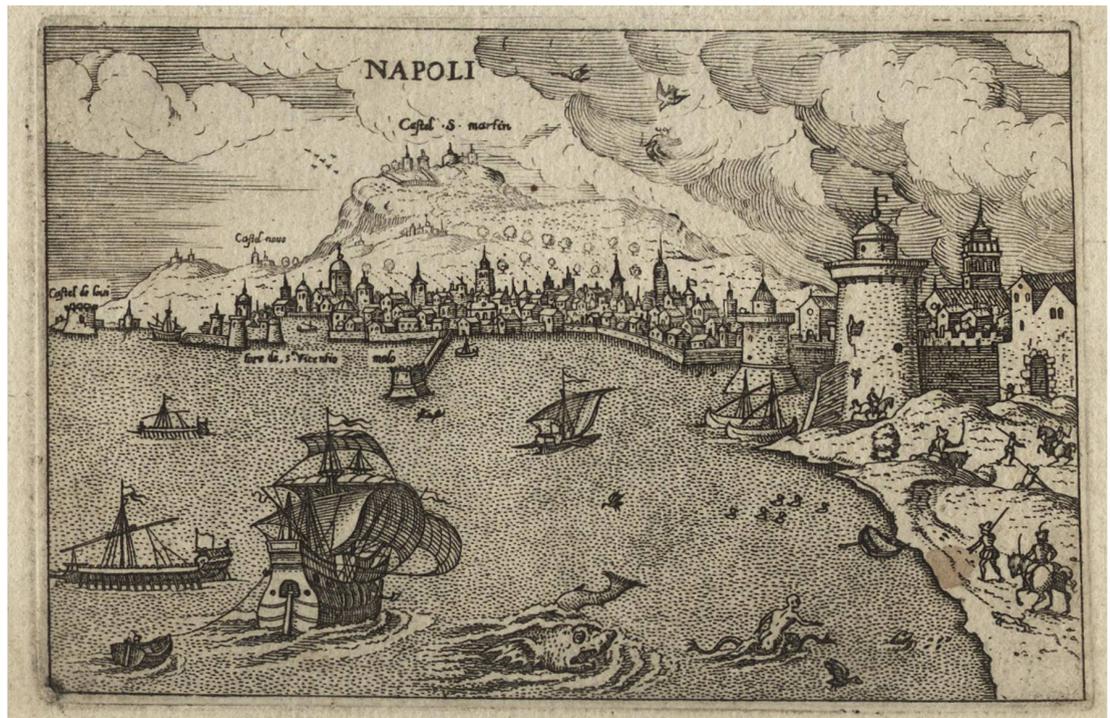


Fig. 2: F. Valegio, *Napoli*, c. 1590.

able Roman monuments. But soon this new trend became much more than a mere reconsideration: the last convocation of the Council of Trent, in December 1563, coincided with a reform route that lasted for almost twenty years, in whose wake took shape the urgency of an artistic practice far from formal artificiality and lavishness, therefore expressing a new lexical clarity and an immediate intelligibility of the message. The most important movements born during the Tridentine age – such as the Oratory of St. Philip Neri and the Society of Jesus of St. Ignatius of Loyola (founded in 1540), – were all moving towards these new values and intended to promote, in the artistic domain, a drastic simplification of the researches concerning the complex centric spatialities of the early decades of the XVIth century, from Bramante to Raphael and Palladio. In short, this new line proclaimed a «precise break with the past, with the antique world imbued with pre-Christian mythologies» [Benedetti 2001, 13] – as lucidly described by Sandro Benedetti – that characterized the architectural production in Rome during the third and fourth decades of the XVth century. Works designed in the renewed climate of severity and simplification recorded in Borromeo's writings, intolerant of the widespread use of ancient architectural styles, as well as in the *Trattato di Architettura* by Cardinal Alvise Cornaro (1516-1584), who was ready to relinquish the very bases of classicism in the name of essentiality [Carpeggiani 1980; Puppi 1980; Benedetti 1984, 20]: as a matter of fact he wrote, referring to such styles, «I will not discuss such forms because new books about them have been written [...] because I do not think it necessary that the body of a building may not be beautiful if it does not contain some of such works, given that the churches of Sant'Antonio di Padova and other beautiful buildings do not contain any ornamentation, neither Doric, Ionian, nor Corinthian orders» [Benedetti 1984, 20]. The Neapolitan reality, too, before being officially reached by the strict Tridentine precepts,

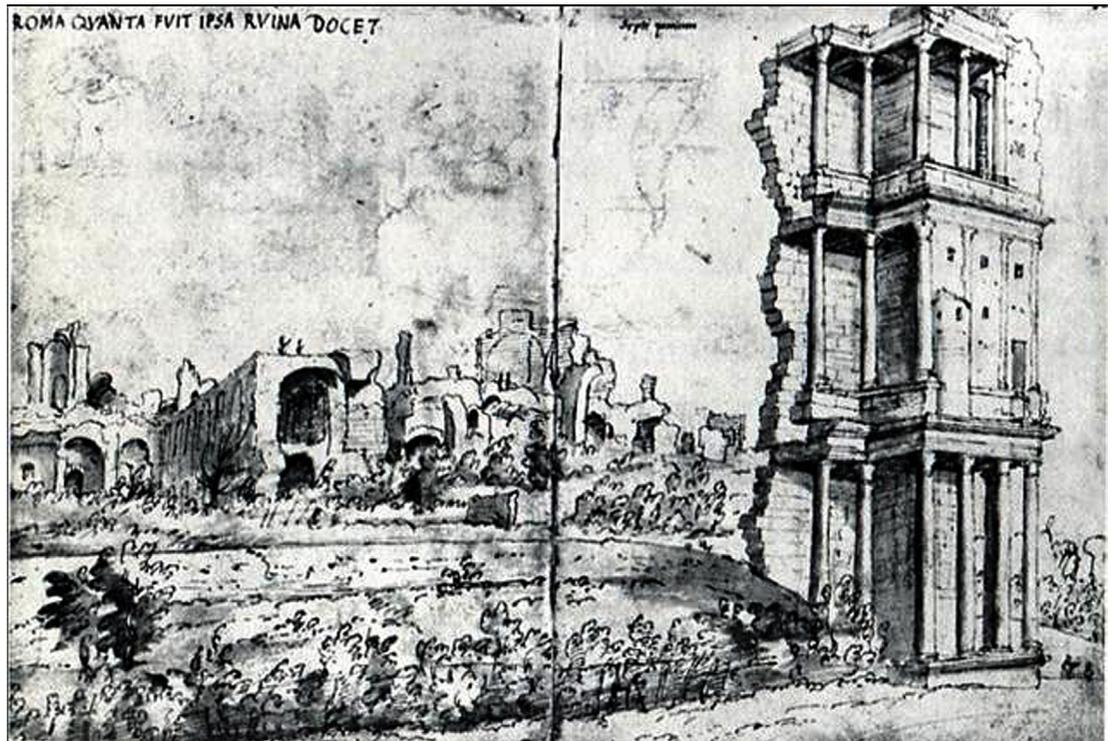


Fig. 3: View of the Palatine Hill and the Septizonio from the di M. van Heemskerck's scketbook (ab. 1530).

experienced an era of deep changes, punctually recorded in the architectural language of the numerous conventual buildings that, since the early decades of the XVIth century, started to agglomerate in the heart of the historical city. The *longue durée* of the Renaissance in Naples is well known: the Tuscan classicism introduced, during the humanist *climax* of the Aragonese age, by Michelozzo, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Luciano Laurana, Giuliano da Sangallo, and Giuliano da Maiano, went on producing conspicuous results in the work of the two Mormando, Giovanni Donadio and Giovan Francesco di Palma [Ceci 1900; Rotili 1972, 52-61; Pane 1974; Di Resta 1991; Venditti 1995, 117-145], free from any experimentation and from any exception to the classicist code. This was in line with a pervasive historiographic orientation, as noted among others by Antony Blunt in his *history* of Baroque and Rococo in Naples [Blunt 1975] where, pointing out the apparent stagnation in the architecture of the Spanish Viceregal capital, went so far as to maintain that «the architectural revolution that took place in Rome during the first half of the XVIth century does not seem to have produced any consequence in Naples, so much so that, as far as Neapolitan architects were concerned, Bramante and Michelangelo may even not have existed at all» [Lenzo 2006, 51].

During the second half of the century as well, Neapolitan architecture persisted in reviving a repertoire of architectural forms closely linked with the Florentine Renaissance, even if there were some hybridizations when the building sites were entrusted to less learned labourers. Against the background of such an artistic reality we need to assess the consequences of historical events that underpinned the XVIth century in Naples, with repercussions on local architecture and especially on religious buildings that were destined, from that period on, to transform

the city into one of the most active laboratories in Europe. Actually, the consequences of social and religious circumstances for architecture should be highlighted, emphasizing those critical opinions that are inevitably eluded when the investigation is limited to the scope of authorship. Following up such observations, Art and Architecture could shed a clearer light on aspects that would otherwise remain left out or in any event isolated from the circumstances of which they are a symptomatic expression. In these brief notes, focusing our attention on the architecture of domes – one of the elements of construction where figurative intention and symbolic value are best condensed – surely there is no need to point out how these participate in the construction of the ‘scenic majesty’ of the Neapolitan *imago urbis*, extraordinarily celebrated, between the end of the XVIth century and the start of the XVIIth, in the most airy urban horizons painted between the sky and the sea in Flemish vistas. Conversely, it would be useful to overcome the ‘visible’, in an attempt to bring to the surface the ideas and aspirations of which the architecture of those domes appears as a clear-cut semiological development. As previously indicated, this is what took place on a large scale as concerns the domes of many important Neapolitan monastic complexes of that age – among others, Santa Maria del Popolo, Santa Maria della Mercede a Montecalvario, Santa Maria *Regina Coeli*, Santi Severino e Sossio, Santa Maria la Nova, as well as Santa Maria Donnaromita and San Gregorio Armeno – erected as so many mirrors of the reformation of convent life that, from the 1530s on, was promoted by the new religious institutions committed to react against the profane excesses documented in plenty important ancient monastic complexes.

The report on Neapolitan monasteries that the Franciscan Bartolomeo Vadiglia [Miele 2001, 109-111; Valerio 2006, 21-32] sent to Sixtus V in 1587 actually confirmed the corruption and licentiousness of religious life, signaling among others the complexes of Santa Chiara, Santa Maria Donnaromita, San Gregorio Armeno, Santa Patrizia, and Santa Maria Donnaregina, where for a long time ecclesiastical hierarchies were not able to contain the worldly excesses and the interferences of the city’s nobility in what happened inside such convents. As a reaction against this climate of moral decay, the precepts of rigours and poverty inspiring the new orders of the Capuchins (about 1520), of the Theatins (1524), and of the Society of Jesus (1534) became widespread both in town and in the Viceroyalty at large. These orders, subsequently followed by the Oratorians (1575), promoted the enforcement of very strict rules that were destined to find an important consolidation in Naples [Fragno 1992, 115-206].

In this emerging climate of moral reformation many initiatives converged, such as the one undertaken by Maria Lorenza Longo who, since 1519, with the support of the Roman Church, began the construction – in the heart of ancient Naples – of the complex of Santa Maria del Popolo, including a hospice to take care of the poor. In 1535 the same noblewoman founded the order of the Capuchin Poor Clares, inspired by the stern Rule of Saint Clare and situated within the complex of Santa Maria di Gerusalemme [Valerio 2010]. During those same years a similar action was undertaken by her disciple Maria d’Ayerbe who in 1538 founded the Convent of the Converted Nuns for the re-education of prostitutes, who were subject to a most strict seclusion and to a life of renouciations and deprivations. In this way the rhetoric of Poverty and Charity took shape and soon broke throughout the society of the Spanish Viceroyalty.

Fuelled by the charitable zeal asserted through such initiatives – which were to have significant outcomes during post-Tridentine years – from the 1550s on many institutions connected with the formation of congregations, schools, and hospices for the poor were founded in the Viceroyalty. In the capital this phenomenon soon influenced the urban dimension, for religious or-

ders, strengthened by tax privileges and economic incentives, bought wide areas of the historical city which were occupied by the new large conventual complexes. These, increasing the density of buildings, altered the ancient rapports among open areas, streets, and the urban fabric. The urban layout, which until the 1550s was still substantially structured according to the functional and visual hierarchies of the medieval city was then transformed following a process of quick and uncontrollable agglomeration that was never rebalanced. Within the city walls, residential construction – having filled out the remaining spaces on the fringes of the large conventual fabrics and of the noble mansions – grew dramatically, often reaching the height of the ancient Angevin churches that had until then soared above the urban landscape. In a physical or at least functional continuity with religious complexes, other buildings were being built – schools, hospitals, charitable institutions – financed by a growing flux of donations and bequests fed by the Counter-Reformation assumption that the soul can be saved through charitable works. The program of the Reformed Church required that this religious feeling encompassed every aspect of life and every layer of society; thus, the new buildings destined to this purpose had to solemnly express the aims, the functions, as well as the practical and symbolic needs of charitable institutions. In this new religiosity a great importance was ascribed to charity towards the poor and the destitute who, brought to town by the extreme poverty of rural areas, augmented in an alarming way, occupying spaces both in and out the city walls. Losing every contact with the image fixed in the Strozzi panel, picturing the harmonic city in its relations among buildings, free spaces and suburb, many places of the historic structure started to become suffocating and unhealthy due to the growing crowding [Galasso 1965; Galasso 1972; Labrot 1979; Galasso 1984, 23-28]. And, in the ganglia of the fiscal harassments imposed by the establishment, on a background made grim by enduring and extreme poverty and constant epidemics, there were wide scopes for the intervention of the Church, committed to strengthen, also through charitable works, its faith threatened, especially in Naples, by the Lutheran heresy. In this same direction moved the phenomenon of Neapolitan public benches, which were to play a founding role in the care-giving and charitable activities going on in the capital of the Viceroyalty and resulted in the creation of lay or religious institutions that, with the endorsement of the Counter-Reformation doctrine on charity and relief, were committed to promote activities to benefit the poor and the sick, to the point of economically supporting the more deprived, by ensuring credit facilities for the poorest classes.

Such actions effectively summarize the religious renewal that was ongoing in Naples, aimed at establishing an artistic code far from any formal lavishness and capable of translating the refusal of luxury and excess even in architecture. In their capacity as contractors in the construction of the new Neapolitan buildings meant to host the numerous communities devoted to poverty and seclusion, the new religious orders imposed strictness and artistic sobriety to the architects hired to direct the large building works of conventual bodies that had to fulfil as much as possible the Rule, avoiding any suggestion of formal lavishness. These ideas were also enforced in the design of domes, which were to make apparent the programmatic renunciation to a strong sign and to artistic luxury, just as seclusion estranged monastic life from the uproar of the city compelling builders to raise railings and trellises, to wall up windows, to erect partitions high as walls to isolate religious complexes: religious architecture became the artistic rendition of a most strict Christian life, under the direct control of the local Bishop, as it will be officially enforced by the Council of Trent through its *Decretum de regularibus et monialibus* (1563) especially targeting women's monasteries [Benedetti 1984].

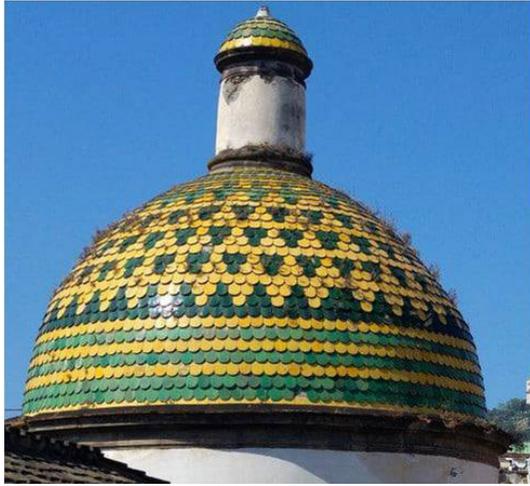


Fig. 4: The church of Santa Caterina a Formiello.

Fig. 5: The dome of the church of Santa Maria Donnaromita.

Fig. 6: Detail of the dome of San Gregorio Armeno with the polychrome tiles.

This contraction of monumental evidence towards more somber forms is especially detectable in the architecture of Neapolitan domes. The solemn Bramantesque suggestions and the Tuscan monumentality of the domes dating back to the early decades of the century – from the Chapel Caracciolo di Vico in San Giovanni a Carbonara (ab.1516) to the church of Santa Caterina a Formiello (ab.1519), a sacred *pendant* to the stately civic sign immediately within the main city gate – in subsequent years actually deteriorated towards a conspicuous production of simple and unadorned volumes which denote an apparent gap in the architecture of the city that lasted at least until the onset of the XVIIth century, when grand signs such as Grimaldi's in the Chapel of the Treasure of San Gennaro in the Duomo of Naples [Russo 2012; Savarese 1986, 116-126] came crashing into the urban scene, exalting the evidence of religious buildings within the dense built areas of the city. Between the slender dome of Santa Caterina a Formiello and the double shell of the Treasure of San Gennaro, comparable for their visual value, plenty churches of the Neapolitan XVIIth century show more ascetic solutions that, anticipating the official Tridentine prescriptions, reveal a severe 'rigourist' climate promoted by the new religious orders founded during the early decades of the XVIIth century.

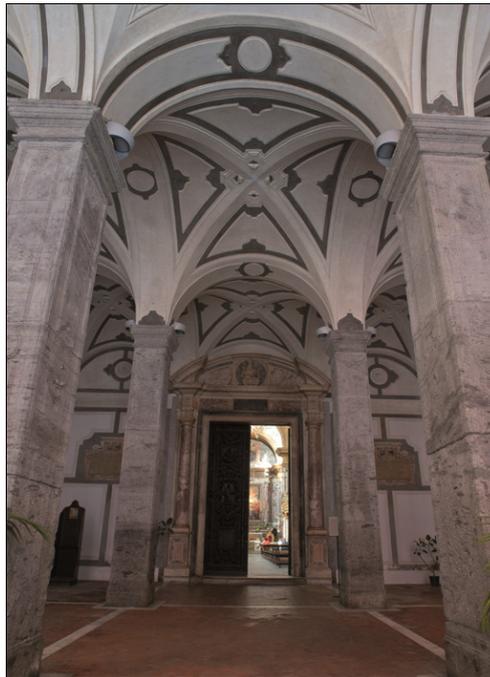
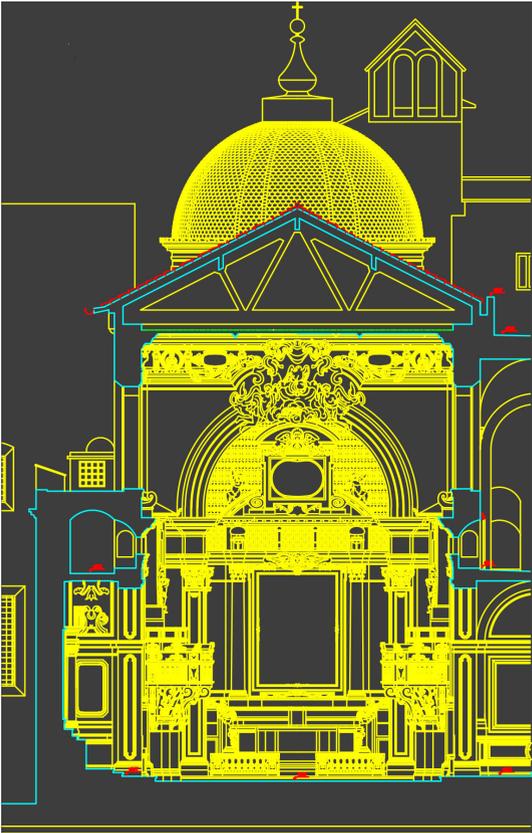


Fig. 7: The interior of the dome of San Gregorio Armeno (photograph by the architect G. Piezzo).

Fig. 8: The interior of the church of San Gregorio Armeno (photograph by M. Velo).

Fig. 9: Cross section of the church of S. Gregorio Armeno, edited by the architect G. Piezzo.

Fig. 10: The arched atrium of the church of San Gregorio Armeno (photograph by M. Velo).

Simple domes with scarcely projecting volumes, often without a lantern or with a small one, in line with the mitigated classicism of the halls partitioned by meagre lexes at the most limited to some stone pilasters standing out on white unadorned surfaces that, between the end of the XVIIth and the beginning of the XVIIIth centuries, acted as a warp to the triumph of polychromy in painting and of the multifaceted Baroque and Rococo sculpture destined to erase the simpler XVIth-century styles.

The Roman influences in the XVIth-century Neapolitan architecture, in line with the provisions made in terms of aspiring to rigour and the seriousness of the circumstances of that period had their first important affirmation with the arrival of Giovan Battista Cavagna (about 1530-1613) in the Viceregal capital [Di Liello 2012]. Born in Rome at a time when the influence of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger was quite strong, so much so that many architects such as Cavagna (who were making their early progress in the practice of the art) were formed on his works. During the last decade of the XVIth century, encouraged by new assignments, he moved permanently to Naples, where he had worked before in previous years, revealing his adhesion to a clear-cut syncretist rigour that, in a different measure and with less recognizable linguistic accents, had already emerged in the work of Giovan Francesco Di Palma. As a matter of fact, there are some emblematic similarities between the domes and more generally between the architecture of the two churches of the monastic complexes of Santa Maria Donnaromita and San Gregorio Armeno, built in the Dark Ages in the orthogonal mesh of the ancient city and comparable in some of their aspects: a common Basilian influence, linked with the arrival in the Bizantine city of Eastern nuns fleeing from their countries at the time of iconoclasm, their subsequent merging with the Benedictine Rule, the presence within them of noble women belonging to influential families affiliated to the main city Seats, a monastic life modulated according to title privileges and constant exceptions to the Rule of the orders, as confirmed in the report sent to the Pope by Vadiglia, who saw them as one of the main causes that necessitated an urgent control-oriented action. Both the complexes were submitted to a radical transformation of the former buildings – which, according to Donnaromita [Pessolano 1975, 55-66; Buccaro 2004, 81-93], began during the 1550s and, according to Saint Gregory the Illuminator, approximately twenty years later. Within the framework of this transformation the churches built were inspired to a common sober classicism and topped by domes with simple shells supported by windowed tambours and externally covered with multicoloured tiles. Although the dome of Donnaromita was built roughly thirty years before that of San Gregorio Armeno, the two works effectively summarize the local classicism of Giovan Francesco di Palma, the architect of the church of Donnaromita, and that pauperism of Roman descent introduced in Naples by Giovan Battista Cavagna [Di Liello 2012], to whom the church of San Gregorio Armeno was credited starting from Celano [Celano 1692, 230]. Until 1570 that complex maintained its ancient Basilian structure of the VIIIth century and it was founded by the Eastern nuns who had brought to Naples the relics of the Armenian Illuminator [Pane 1957; Spinosa-Pinto-Valerio 2013; Di Liello 2012, 61-71]. The drastic change imposed by the Tridentine precepts is dramatically narrated in the famous writing by Fulvia Caracciolo, the Benedictine nun who followed up the reconstruction of the monastery and wrote an accurate report on those works, which were to transform the spaces and the life of her sisters, until then still essentially linked with the ancient Byzantine tradition. This was confirmed by Celano as well, who described the original structure as «a compound containing different houses surrounded by a medium-sized wall, called ‘enclosure’. Every house had different rooms, closets, kitchen and cellar, with more comforts. [...] In the

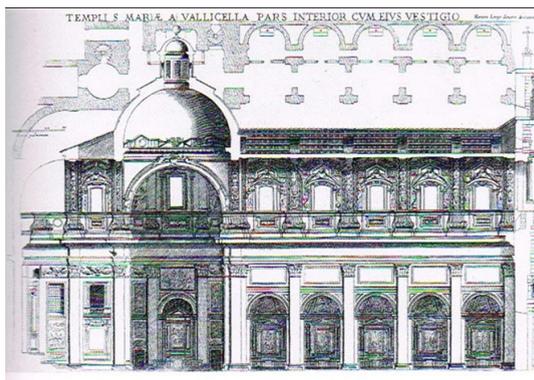


Fig. 11: Longitudinal section of the church of S. Maria della Vallicella in Rome with the dome in the version prior to the Baroque modernization, by G. G. de Rossi, *Insignum Romae Templorum...*, Roma 1684.

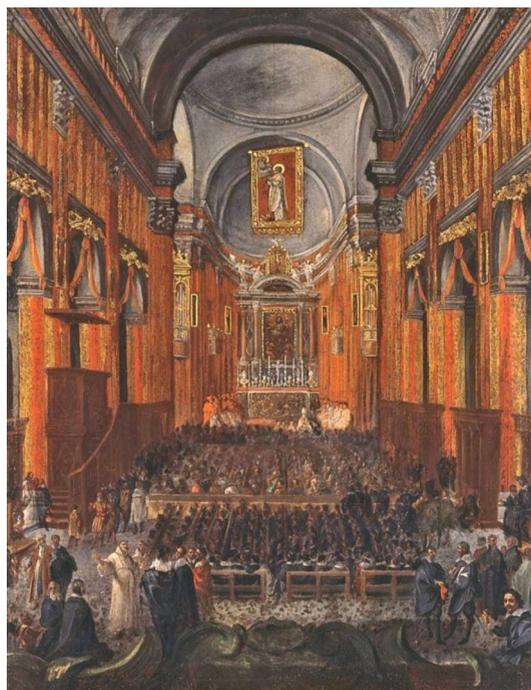


Fig. 12: A. Sacchi, *The interior of S. Maria della Vallicella during the celebration of March 13, 1622*.

Fig. 13: The dome of Santa Maria della Vallicella in the version following the baroque modernization made by Pietro da Cortona (1650).



midst of said houses there was the church, where they recited their divine office, which in those days was quite lengthy» [Celano 1692, 244]. It is well known that the division of tasks between Cavagna and Vincenzo Della Monica has never been specified as regards the reconstruction of the original Dark Ages complex begun in 1574, at a time when the long-lasting presence of the Roman architect is still documented, since in 1577 he bought a dwelling and one year later he was Consul of the Accademia di San Luca.¹ However, some lexical solutions adopted in the church of San Gregorio Armeno, against the background of the works implemented by the Roman architect both in Naples and in the Marche – most of all the Palazzo dell'Arringo at Ascoli Piceno (1610) and the church of the Philippine fathers dedicated to San Pietro a Valle (1610) at Fano – induce us to ascribe to Cavagna a large portion of the architecture of the church of San Gregorio Armeno and to Della Monica, quoted several times in the documents related to the building site, the role of supervisor of the construction, charged of directing the yard because of his qualities as an expert building contractor belonging to a family skilled in piperno stonework coming from Cava dei Tirreni. Moreover, the architectural lexicon of the Neapolitan church is fully formulated in Cavagna's restrained and strict classic language acquired in the Rome of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and of Tridentine severity.

«Today the church could not be more beautiful, especially in holy days, so much so that it seems a room of Paradise on earth» [Celano 1692, 257]. At the turn of the XVIIth century, when Celano emphasized the grandeur of the adornments in the church of San Gregorio Armeno, the Baroque refurbishment of the sacred building according to the Counter-Reformation was already under way and only a few traces remained of its sober late XVIth-century lines: a rectangular hall, with lateral chapels, connoted by a scant classicism assigned on the outside walls to a simple series of piperno stone pilaster strips looming over the white of the surfaces that

¹ Archivio dell'Accademia di San Luca, *Introiti*, vol. 2, vol. 41 f° 18 r.

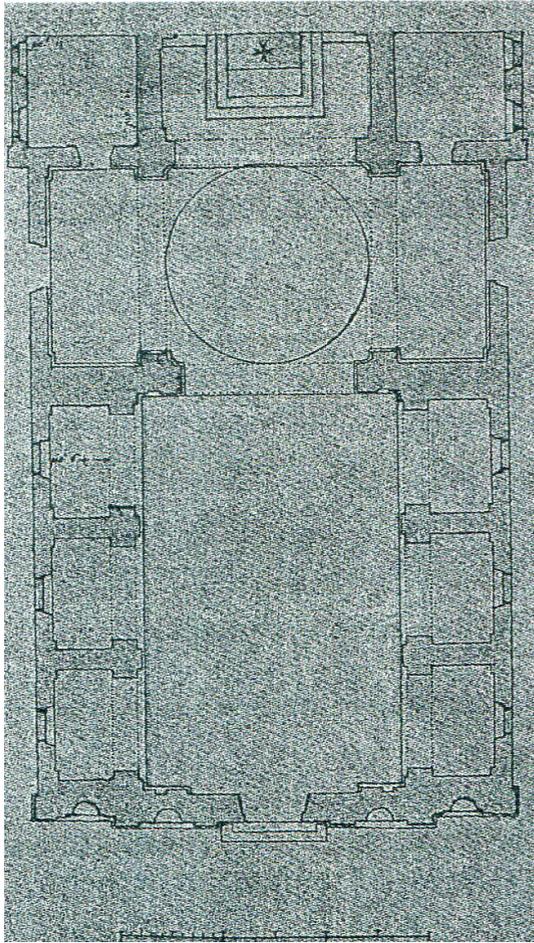


Fig. 14: G. B. Cavagna (attributed), Plan of the church of S. Pietro a Valle di Fano, Rome, Archive of the Congregation of the Oratory of S. Filippo Neri.

– jointly with the tile floor with white marble inserts dating back to 1579 [Borrelli-Giusti 2013, 178-182] – increased the prominence of the paintings hung over the altars and of the magnificent coffered ceiling, the one element of plastic and chromatic buoyancy in the XVIth-century decorations, implemented by Teodoro D’Errico and Giovanni Andrea Magliulo together with a large company of painters and engravers. The dome on a windowed tambour, topped by a thin pinnacle instead of a lantern, shows on its extrados a coating of majolica tiles assembled like scales since 1579, when the *rigiole* setting up of green and yellow majolicas was under way [Picone 2005, 125; Di Mauro 2013, 114]; such majolicas were widespread in the Neapolitan region, following a tradition referrable to the ancient Byzantine and Arab background of the city. Even before the arrival of Luca Giordano, the dome, that we may picture with an unadorned white intrados, matched the sober magnificence of the hall, pointing out the shining triumph of the tribune, preceded by a calibrated shift from the severe darkness of the arched atrium on the street, a violent cloistered hiatus with the outside, to the dimness of the hall, faintly illuminated by its high windows. The cupolar body and more generally the whole church, consecrated in 1580, recall Roman architecture and more specifically the pauperistic rigidity of the domes of the Chiesa del Gesù, designed by Vignola, and the unadorned and tambour-less dome of the church of Santa Maria della Vallicella executed by Martino Longhi the Older and subsequently transformed by Pietro da Cortona in 1650 [Villani 2008, 111-115]. The construction of the main seat of the Oratorians, begun in 1575, translated into stone the pauperistic ideals of St. Philip Neri who personally followed the building process with a keen attention to ensure that the church would result as much as possible close to the austerity required by the founder of the order since, as it was well known in those days, «the saint did not like sumptuous buildings» [Cistellini 1989, 707]. The adhesion of Cavagna to the rigour-oriented line enforced by the founder of the order of the Oratorians also seems to be corroborated by the devotion of its author to the Philippine ideals confirmed by his decision to leave his legacy to the Order of St. Philip Neri, as documented in his will written in 1609². In the will, following the early loss of his only son Cosimo, dead at Loreto in 1608, Cavagna entrusted his wife and all his possessions to the care of the Oratorians. Thanks to his legacy³, the Philippine friars were able to complete the building of the Oratorian church at Fano dedicated to San Pietro a Valle, designed by Cavagna in 1610 and depicted in a drawing attributed to him and kept at the Congregation of the Philippines in Rome [Di Liello 2012, 220-230]. The drawing shows a single nave plan with a transept inscribed within its perimeter, three side chapels on each side, a circular dome on the tribune, thus following a planimetric layout very similar to the one of the Neapolitan church of San Gregorio Armeno [Di Liello 2012, 220-230].

As concerns this last church, continuing the decorative program that had already brought about, during the 1630s, the application of a new marble and slate floor that is still extant and that replaced the original XVIth-century tile floor [Borrelli-Giusti 2013, 196], from 1671 on Luca Giordano painted the intrados of the dome, where the artist added to the presumably white original surface the Baroque ‘skin’ of the fresco depicting the *Glory of St. Gregory* where, in an airy and luminous *Paradise*, angels and saints are arranged in circles and look upward to the Redeemer [Borrelli-Giusti 2013, 198]. Eight Benedictine female saints, between the windows of the tambour and the virtues in the pendentives of the tribune concluded an iconographic program that was rearranged from 1749 on, following the addition of new adornments conceived by Nicolò Tagliacozzi Canale, who heightened the plasticism of the cornices of the tambour necessitating the modification of some parts of the figures painted by Luca Giordano, to be readjust-

² Biblioteca Federiciana di Fano, sect. I 76, J. Ligi, Congregazione dell’Oratorio di Fano, manuscript, [ab.1720], sect. I 76, f° 113.

³ Ivi, 113-119.

ed according to the changed dimensions of the mixtilinear cornices that framed them. In those same years, the plastic tension of the harmonic cupolar volume was also enhanced through the insertion of the great stucco group of the *Coronation of the Virgin*, attributed to Matteo Bottiglieri [Rocco 1993, 465; Borrelli-Giusti 2013, 190], where the figure of the Virgin Mary is positioned among those of the Christ, of the Eternal Father, and of the angels, thus dramatizing in a Rococo style the grafting of the tambour on the arch and affecting the rigorous harmony of the XVIth-century dome.

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