

Book review:

*Santa Maria della Pace in Roma. Storia urbana e vicende artistiche tra XV e XVII secolo*, edited by Simona Benedetti, Laura Carlevari, Maria Grazia Ercolino, Roma: Artemide Edizioni, 2023 pp. 248

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The new book about the church of *Santa Maria della Pace in Roma* (2022) is food for thought, edited by a research team based at the Department of History, Representation and Restoration of Architecture (Sapienza – University of Rome). Coordinated by Simona Benedetti, Laura Carlevaris, and Maria Grazia Ercolino, three professors whose expertise reflects the three main scientific ways of approaching a monument (history, survey, and restoration), various young scholars and most accomplished academics meticulously examined the centuries-long history of this important religious building according to their specific disciplinary skills.

Since its foundation in the last decades of the 15th century, Santa Maria della Pace undertook renovation work, slowly changing its original planimetry and appearance. During the papacy of Alexander VII Chigi (1655-1667), the church was extensively transformed and provided with the current famous prospectus designed by Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669). As already stated by Rudolf Wittkower and Paolo Portoghesi, the P.I. Simona Benedetti affirms in the introduction that we are facing an extraordinary «architectural-urban case» whose complexity could be fully understood only by developing an interdisciplinary analysis. The numerous scientific papers published in the past decades provide interesting but fragmentary information, and consequently, systematization is sorely needed.

Marco Corsi summarizes the evolution of the urban area on which the building stands, namely the Parione district (in antiquity, part of the *Campus Martius*).



Outlining the progressive growth of the Tiber Bend area, the only one that has always been inhabited over the centuries, Corsi confirms that this was a lively, economically prosperous center since the early Middle Ages. After all, its proximity to the river allowed the local population to survive in the aftermath of the Roman Empire's fall and the interruption of the aqueducts. The *exemplum virtutis* of Crypta Balbi National Museum (*Castrum Aureum*) bears witness to this, as well as other significant 'castling phenomena', which configured a series of conflicting autonomous fortified settlements: an intricate urban fabric that was undermined by Pope Julius II Della Rovere (1503-1513) at the beginning of the 16th century. Corsi precisely refers to the driving role of the papacy, which slowly became an independent political entity from the 8th century onwards, to clarify the importance that the residential area around Piazza Navona achieved in the early modern age. The Eucharistic processions that took place at that time seem to have played a key role in the history of the construction of both Santa Maria dell'Anima and Sant'Andrea in Aquariciariis, which was later replaced by Santa Maria della Pace.

It was over this pre-existing church that Pope Sixtus IV (1464-1484) – the uncle of Pope Julius – promoted the construction of the new parish. Unlike Maria Luisa Riccardi (*La Chiesa e il Convento di Santa Maria della Pace*, 1981), Professor Benedetti believes that this church presented an octagonal planimetric scheme, which included the wall frescoed with the image of the *Madonna col Bambino* that was on the front of Sant'Andrea. According to tradition, the holy image miraculously bled, and the hype about what happened got the attention of many faithful devotees (cf. *Le chiavi del Paradiso, Primato petrino e devozione mariana di Sisto IV tra Cappella Sistina e S. Maria della Pace*, 2016).

Among them was the pontiff, who then would have decided to renovate the church by adding the longitudinal nave, which until 1485 had been occupied by apartments belonging to Santa Maria dell'Anima's hospice. The construction was interrupted because of the Pope's death, and it restarted in the 16th century. This last, long phase was marked by multiple modifications lined up with great clarity by Benedetti thanks to both archival evidence (reported in the appendix) and the careful observations proposed by Francesca Parrilla.

Her paper follows that of Professor Ercolino, who instead considered the context and the housing market during the time in which the construction would have taken place. In this way, we discover that the block layout in which the parish of Sant'Andrea loomed was an inhomogeneous cluster of houses that started to be regularized during the summer of 1482. The regeneration was supported by the feverish growth produced by the return of the papal seat to Rome at the end of the so-called Avignonese Captivity (1309-1377), and, presumably, the new Sistine church took advantage of the primitive medieval building's walls. It explains the east orientation of the portal (to keep the entrance in

the same position) and the expropriation of the nearby properties, as evidenced by the archival records. The historical analysis of the side chapels reinforces this idea of a double construction phase. As it is widely known, among Santa Maria della Pace's chapels, the most famous was that one purchased by Agostino Chigi (1466-1520) in 1514. The documents demonstrate that Marco Antonio and Mario de Ferris sold the chapel to the Senese banker when it was already decorated with «*picturis communissimis*» inspired by the subject of the Holy Trinity.

As well as the Cesi *sacellum*, the other noble chapels have also been considered in this book, with documentary details and additions, not least the discovery of a small one that, located in «*sacristia versus viam publicam [...] cum altare et reliquiariis erecta ad honorem sancti Ubaldi*», was decorated at the behest of Cardinal Berlingero Gessi (1564-1639). The valuable place of prayer was demolished during the works dated to the mid-17th century, remaining unknown until today. Simona Benedetti focused instead on the Chigi Chapel, supposing a longer participation of Cortona, who could have been involved in the retraining even before Fabio Chigi became pope (1627-1628). This hypothesis would justify Cortona's sensibility for this chapel and the attention to detail. Being more a decorator than an architect, Cortona admired Raphael's work and seemed to seek a fair compromise between the tradition and its necessary renovation. As the author highlighted, this attempt can be seen in the *putti* of the central aedicule, which invites the observer to look at the fresco above, creating a link between the subjects of the bas-relief and the inscriptions reported by the Sibyls and Prophets.

Maria Celeste Cola also focuses on the decorative topic, discussing the intriguing figure of the sculptor Cosimo Fancelli (1618-1688), who was involved in the 'baroque' renovation of Santa Maria della Pace. He sculpted the allegorical figures of Peace, Justice, Fortitude, and Prudence, which had been chosen according to both the available space and a precise iconographic intention already partially clarified by Aloisio Antinori (*La magnificenza e l'utile*, 2008). As a skilled interpreter of Cortona's decorative programs, Fancelli worked hard, and it was the effectively intense interaction between the sculptor and the architect that defined the strong sense of unity perceived in the interior of the building: a successful exchange of ideas that was able to combine the «firmness of the ancients with the spirit and his bizarre brilliance» (letter to Ciro Ferri from Luca Berrettini in 1679, published in G. Campidori, *Lettere artistiche inedite*, 1886).

Leaving aside the geometric analysis of the courtyard, which had been studied by Claudio Tiberi (*Poetica bramantesca tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento*, 1974), the research on this part of the building aimed to mainly improve the knowledge of the lunettes' frescoes and their conservation. Lorenzo Cappelletti discusses the iconographic reading of these images, while Eliana Brillì and Sara Parca deal with the best practices to safeguard the work of Nicolò Martinelli known as Trometta (c.1535-1611).

The volume ends with two wide-ranging reflections, which provide a counterpoint to the numerous survey tables collected in the appendix and made with high-precision instruments. These are two complementary essays. The first paper explores the architectural elements of Santa Maria della Pace and their peculiar characteristics (Paolo Castellani, Luisa Salani, Laura Carlevaris, Francesca Porfiri, Annalisa Brancasi). The second one considers the material consistency of the church (Maria Grazia Ercolino, Elisabetta Giorgi). While the methodologies used for the production of an H-BIM model are rigorously outlined, specifying the methods used to integrate heterogeneous data, on the other hand, it appears that comparing the raw data with the historical information is crucial to produce something accessible both to experts and the public. The point cloud cannot immediately return handy graphs. On the contrary, it is the ability of the operator that makes this translation possible, and an essential complement to the drawing is also the registration of the materials used, whose analytic list has been estimated here as a fundamental supporting element for both the research and the correct interpretation of such a stratified architecture.