The Baroque Architect’s Tomb*

“Reverend Father,” the old Giovanni Antonio de Rossi said to the general of the Jesuits, asking for a burial site at the Gesù, “an architect like me, who has built so many distinguished buildings on lordly sites for others, must now think of making one for himself in a little hole underground.” The baroque architect was occupied as never before with his tomb and sometimes his personal burial chapel. Whereas there are only about five or six architects’ tombs in Rome from the sixteenth century, there are over twenty known or recorded from the seventeenth century. With two exceptions, early Renaissance architects’ tombs tended to be extremely simple. Andrea Bregno’s tomb of 1506 in S. Maria sopra Minerva exhibited his bust, praised him as a new Polykleitus and put his sculptor’s tools on display. Raphael was buried in a niche of the Pantheon, which his heirs attempted to restore to something like its original appearance, complete with a statue all’antica. But both of these were artists in the larger humanistic sense of the word. The plain professional architects of the sixteenth century merited only a short, unadorned inscription, such as the one Peruzzi’s family put up over his grave near Raphael’s niche. Other examples are the epitaph of Bartolomeo Baronino of 1554 in the Pantheon (“Architettio Celeberrimo”) or that of Tiberio Calcagni of 1565 in S. Giovanni Decollato (“Florentino ac Ro[mano] Civi”) or that of Giulio Merisi of 1573 in S. Maria del Popolo (“Architecturae Peritiss[imo]”). Compared with what follows, these are monuments of Republican simplicity.

The new age is heralded by Michelangelo’s funeral in 1564 and his tomb in S. Croce in Florence. The obsequies arranged by the members of the Florentine Accademia del Disegno symbolized the exalted status that an artist of genius could reach, and to which the new Academy corporately aspired. Vasari wrote that the funeral would be such as “neither popes nor emperors nor kings have ever had,” not to mention artists. And the spectacle of the members of the Academy bearing the coffin in a torchlight procession had its effect on the crowds: “Everywhere people discussed the great power of true excellence, la forza della vera virtù. Passing the assembled old men or groups of youths one heard it said, ‘Take note of what la virtù means.’” Michelangelo’s exequies became the model for the funeral ceremonies of artists like Titian, Agostino Carracci and others. An architect like Borromini, born long after the event, had a medal depicting Michelangelo’s tomb, which he could finger whenever he thought of his own destiny.

However, the vogue of the monumental tomb descended on the profession only in the wake of the new knighthoods conferred by Sixtus V at the end of the sixteenth century. Domenico Fontana, the Cavaliere della Guglia, died in Naples in 1607 was finally interred in 1627 in a monumental wall tomb in S. Anna dei Lombardi by his son Giulio Cesare. The effigy shows the architect in a formal half-portrait with his chain of knighthood, like the frontispiece of his book on the moving of the obelisk. Beside him hang clusters of architectural instruments. Carlo Maderno had his young draftsman, Borromini, draw his tomb in 1623–1624, five years before his death: “Sibi suisque vivens posuit.” The heraldry that Maderno had to invent for himself seems to derive largely from the arms of his patrons, the Mattei di Giove, but the obelisk in the center and the references in the inscription to the column moved from the Basilica of Maxentius to S. Maria Maggiore show Maderno’s pride in his engineering achievements (Figs. 16–1, 16–2). A wall tomb erected in SS. Quirico e Giulitta in 1625, but demolished in 1728, commemorated the architect Antonio de Bapstitis (d. 1623), a member of the famiglia of Paul V who participated in the design of the Palazzo Della Famiglia Borghese.
Poor de Bapistis did not turn out to be for posternity the "architecto celeberrimo" that he was when the inscription was carved.\textsuperscript{13} Carlo Lambardi founded a whole chapel for himself and his descendants in S. Maria in Via in 1608 and was buried there in 1620. He decorated the central coffer of the barrel vault with an eagle, an obvious allusion to the scene of imperial apotheosis in the central coffer of the Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum, which Lambardi doubtless studied while he was building his nearby masterpiece, the façade of S. Francesca Romana.\textsuperscript{14} In 1656 Martino Longhi the Younger left provision in his will for the conversion of the apse of S. Pietro in Montorio into a repository of family tombs. Martino the Elder was already buried here, and his grandson proposed to redesign the tomb and add new monuments for his mother, his sister and himself. Longhi eventually died in Vigniù, the town where his family originated, and the project got no further than a clay model of his mother's tomb. But it epitomizes the architect's pretenses and ambitions. Born and bred in the house next to Michelangelo's, he wanted to be laid to rest under Raphael's Transfiguration, in a chapel that would rival those by Vasari and Daniele da Volterra in the transepts.\textsuperscript{15}

The great pantheon of seventeenth-century Roman architects, superseding the chapel of the Virtuosi del Panteon with Raphael's tomb, was the church of the Roman Accademia del Disegno, SS. Martina e Luca. It was while excavating his own funeral chapel in the crypt of the old S. Martina in the Roman Forum that Cortona discovered the relics of the saint, which led to an influx of lavish patronage and to the rebuilding of the church (Fig. 16–3).\textsuperscript{16} The discovery happened in 1634, and soon burial in Cortona's sumptuous crypt became the reward meted out to his friends and allies. As early as 1638 Girolamo Rainaldi specified in his will that he should be buried there, and at his death in 1655 he was interred in the transept chapel of S. Lazzaro, with his father Adrian. Ottaviano Mascherino, princep of the Accademia di S. Luca in 1604, the year before his death, eventually found a resting place in the crypt. Cortona's close friend Soria was buried there in 1651, and Cortona himself, "Pictor, Et Architectus Omnium Suo Seculo Facile Princeps," was laid to rest in the crypt in 1669. His will names the church of S. Martina ("non però come unita à S. Luca, ma separata dalla Accademia di d.to S. Luca, che così intendo e non altrimente") as his universal heir, and specifies sums for music, liturgy and maintenance. In 1697 Carlo Fontana was conceded the left transept chapel, still then in rustica, to finish as his tomb chapel, although he did not in fact fulfill the obligation and the chapel later passed to Sebastiano Conca.\textsuperscript{17}

In a gesture of special importance to the architectural profession Cortona acquired an inscription commemorating the first-century architect Gaudentius, alleged to be the architect of nothing less than the Colosseum, who was martyred under Vespasian after his conversion to Christianity. The inscription is now known to be a seventeenth-century forgery. But for the builder of SS. Martina e Luca it was better even than the tombstone of Vitruvius. A relic of the first and greatest Christian architect would accompany Cortona and his friends on their eternal vigil.\textsuperscript{18}

Not every artist or architect qualified for a place in this exclusive pantheon. Some were excluded or decided to rest in other company. The nobleman artist-architect Giovanni Battista Mutti planned a chapel here in the first flush of enthusiasm, but once the initial excitement died down he and his tomb were forgotten.\textsuperscript{19} Giovio Baglione seems to have stalked out, taking with him the altarpiece that he had painted for a chapel in the old church of S. Luca and using it as the centerpiece of a new chapel in SS. Cosma e Damiano, a church that also faced the Roman Forum and also enjoyed Barberini patronage. Baglione could not abide a rival. Tremendously conscious of his place in society, both his chapel of 1638 and his autobiography of 1642 reveal the kind of aspirations that an artist could cherish, as well as the role he felt one should play in the community:

He [Baglione, speaking of himself] upheld the decorum of his postion, defended and honored the profession, and earned it the respect of the great. He was several times princep of the Accademia, caporione of the popolo romano, and he conducted himself well in two sedi vacanti.\textsuperscript{20}

Baglione's concept of the ennobled artist required participation in a larger social order. Because he was so conscious of rank and status his *Vite degli artisti* is an immensely informative source for the honors and fortunes amassed by his contemporaries. But behind the intense armor of Baglione's respectability lurks the anti-social guilt of a man who had stood for exactly the opposite style of life, Caravaggio, just as the unacknowledged source and rival of the paintings in Baglione's chapel are Caravaggio's paintings in S. Luigi dei Francesi.

In the 1660s several architects besides Cortona chose to be buried or at least commemorated in churches of their own design. In 1661 Domenico Castelli was laid to rest in S. Isidoro, where had designed the porch and
choir twenty years before. In 1667 the devout Camillo Arcucci died leaving his own church of S. Maria del Rosario on Monte Mario as his co-heir, along with an adopted son. Camillo actually requested to be buried in an unmarked grave in S. Maria in Vallicella, where he had supplantied Borromini as architect, but his real monument was the church on Monte Mario, which he had refounded and rebuilt out of his own piety and which he left as a personal monument.

Borromini, too, was gripped by this fever. At the end of his life he turned to his own early masterpiece, S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, and asked the monks for a final resting place there. A document of 6 April 1666 records the request of "el muy illustre cavallero y Señor Francisco Borromini" to the chapter of the Discalced Trinitarians to choose a space in or around the lower church to build a chapel and an altar. The Trinitarians gave their architect the permission he sought, as well as a great relic, the body of St. Hyacinth. On an early plan for the crypt of S. Carlo, Alb. 180, he added pentiments in his unmistakably dark late style that show a new altar in a position directly under the high altar of the church (Figs. 16–4, 16–5). The simple design included six columns arranged radially, which presumably would have borne a superstructure or been linked in some way to the vault overhead. There were to be pedestals with portrait busts in the niches flanking the altar. But Borromini died in August 1667 before these plans could come to anything, and he was buried without ceremony, as befitted a repentant suicide, in the tomb he had helped his uncle Maderno design forty years before (Fig. 16–1). The architect who had led the way into an uncharted future came to rest under a backward looking symbol, the Sistine obelisk.

In the age of catafalques the funeral of a major artist could be a solemn and spectacular event. The biographer Pascoli remembered vividly that lugubrious day around the end of November in 1680 when the cadavers of three valent' huomini were lying in state in three major churches: Bernini in S. Maria Maggiore, Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi in S. Lorenzo in Lucina, and Athanasius Kircher in the Gesù. The baroque preoccupation with the drama of death and the art of dying well naturally had an effect on the sentiments expressed on architects' tombs. Mattia de' Rossi's sepulchral inscription of 1694 in S. Andrea delle Fratte says that he kept the uncertain day of death before his eyes while still alive, and that he and his kin will wait in the tomb until the last shrill blast of the dread trumpet. Mattia had imbibed the lesson of the bona mors from his master Bernini, and his inscription evokes the image of the Dies Irae sculpted on one of the tombs in the Raimondi Chapel.

The most playful and interesting expression of these ideas is the tomb of the Roman architect Giambattista Gisleni in S. Maria del Popolo. Gisleni was a student of mathematics who turned to the study of disegno under a painter and a sculptor and then became an architect. Rome seemed too small for the young Gisleni's talents, and so he made his way to Vienna and then to Poland, where by 1630 he was serving the Wasa dynasty as court architect, festaiuolo, and orchestrator of splendid dynastic funerals. A collection of drawings now in Sir John Soane's Museum as well as a drawing in Milan preserve some of his designs for catafalques, which featured channel houses with piles of skulls and gesticulating skeletons (Figs. 16–6, 16–7). At points in his career he sent drawings to various sovereigns in Germany and England, and he even submitted a design for the Town Hall in Amsterdam. He seems to have returned to Rome by 1656, when his name appears in the minutes of the Accademia di San Luca. He had missed the twenty-five years in which high baroque architecture had been created, but in his long Roman retirement he formed a wide circle of friends, including his future biographer Pascoli.

In 1670, aged 70, Gisleni began planning his tomb (Fig. 16–8). It is an elaborate concetto built around the academic theory of the equality of the three sister arts: "In the triple contest of painting, sculpture and architecture he gave the palm to none" reads the inscription. Painted putti above the tomb hold an hourglass and pull back the painted drapes to reveal his portrait, which is painted on a cutout support that casts a painted shadow and thus stands somewhere between the world of painting and that of sculpture. Lower down there is a bronze medallion of a snail with the motto "I shall die in my nest" (In Nidulo Meo Moriar), and another medallion of a butterfly quittting its cacoon that reads "Like the Phoenix I shall multiply my days" (Ut Phoenix Multiplicabo Dies). Reminded by the fruits, flowers and hills (the three imprese of Gisleni's shield) that life is transient, he wanted to score a victory over death by fixing it in stone and thus taking it captive.

At the bottom of the tomb a grisly skeleton (his own) in polychrome marble has awakened from its coffin and sat up behind a metal grille, pressing its bony fingers into its breast with the impassioned devotion of a Gabriele Fonseca. The visual impression is at first shocking, but the textual messages infinitely more reassuring. The inscriptions in fact undercut the meaning both of the painted portrait and of the cadaver. The portrait strikes us a lifelike but the inscription "Neque Hic Vivus" (This one is not alive) reminds us the man is gone. The skeleton should normally be lifeless but the inscription "Neque Illic Mortuus" (Nor is this one
dead) combines with the pose of passionate hope to remind us that there is life after all beyond the grave. Gisleni was a designer of catafalques and the skeleton, like the chisels and squares on Andrea Bregno’s tomb, was a tool of the trade. It is a vestige of the ephemeral art he practised so successfully in the courts of northern Europe fixed permanently in stone. It is Gisleni’s last act, so to speak. In this horrible but hopeful melodrama one is reminded of the old John Donne, preaching his own funeral sermon in St. Paul’s and then robing himself in his shroud to pose for an almost posthumous portrait drawing.29

Gisleni’s tomb indulges in the same kind of self-dramatization. It is not a monument to the growing lugubriousness of the architectural profession or to the grim preoccupation with death that gripped funereal imagery in the wake of the Council of Trent.30 For by the later seventeenth century the figure of Death often played the role of a vitae testimonium, a witness to life, not the destroyer of the person but the vindicator of his reputation.31 It had entered the service of the ruling élites and the highest aristocracy, bearing aloft their portraits and immortalizing their names with its bony finger. The baroque skeleton had shed its skin but taken on, invisibly, the livery of the nobility. Gisleni cages and defeats death with the same triple weapon that had elevated architects from the status of master builders to that of ennobled artists, the three arts of disegno. No tomb is closer to Michelangelo’s in its insistence on this theme, or more playful in its ambiguities about what is real and what is art. Death has been taken captive by wit.

But Gisleni’s career also reminds us that there was not room enough for every good architect to remain in Rome: “Architectus non uno in Capitolio fuit.” By the later seventeenth century the flow of aspiring provincials into the city would be reversed, as talented men left to make their careers in the wide world north of the Alps. Gisleni was lucky enough, at least, not to be laid to rest in foreign soil. This citizen of the world returned to Rome but soon took his leave again, exacting neither applause nor tears from the onlooker: “In aditu ave, in exitu salve.”

Joseph Connors
Columbia University
American Academy in Rome

Notes

My thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation, which enabled me to enjoy the warm hospitality of Roberto and Gianna Celli at the Villa Serbelloni in Bellagio while writing this article.


4 Giorgio Vasari, Le opere, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, Florence, 1906, IV, p. 606, with the observation that the inscription, dated 4 January 1536, was no longer to be seen by Bottari in the eighteenth century.


6 Forcella, Iscrizioni, VII, p. 60, number 138.

7 Forcella, Iscrizioni, I, p. 352, number 1357.


9 Wittkower, Divine Michelangelo, p. 74f.


Figure 16–3, a drawing by Cortona at Windsor (number 4449), shows a wall tomb for the artist himself, plausibly assigned to the phase before the discovery of the relics of S. Martina and the subsequent enlargement of the whole project: see Anthony Blunt and Hereward Lester Cooke, The Roman Drawings of the XVII and XVIII Centuries in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle, London, 1960, p. 77f., cat. 592, fig. 59.


The forgery is discussed in Carlo Promis, "Gli architetti e l’architettura presso i Romani," Memorie della Reale Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, ser. II, XXVII, 1873, p. 146f. According to G. Incisa della Rocchetta, "Notizie sulle opere d’arte e le memorie storiche," in Noehles, SS. Luca e Martina, p. 184, the inscription is still in situ in the crypt, opposite Cortona’s bust. Bernini remained unimpressed, however, and in 1665 told Chantelou that he did not know who the architect of the Colosseum was (Paul Fréart, sieur de Chantelou, Journal du voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France, ed. Ludovic Lalanne, Paris, 1885, p. 208).

Noehles, SS. Luca e Martina, p. 340, doc. 30, 26 November 1634: "In oltre deliberarono unitamente a una viva voce, che all’Ill.mo Sig.re Cav.re Gio Battista Muti si concedesse in detta chiesa il luogo che è in contro all’ alta del Sig.r Cav.r Baglione per farvi una Cap.la dedicata alli tre Santi, nuovamente ritrovati . . ."

Baglione, Le vie, p. 404f.


Archivio di S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, vol. 207, Libro en que se escriben las cosas que se de examinan en capitulas conventuales. Año 1652, folio 3v:

Año 1666 en seis de Abril el Min.o y Religiosos del Convento de S. Carlo a la 4. fontanas del Orden de Descalzos de la Sma. Trinidad Redencion de Cautivos de la Congregacion de
España, Juntos en la sala Capitular, como lo han de uso y costumbre, hicieron el decreto del tenor siguiente: Atendiendo al afecto, devoción, y amor, que el muy illustre cavallero y Señor Francisco Borromino tiene a nuestra Religión, y a este convento de S. Carlos, y por mostrarnos agradecidos a lo mucho que le devemos, con mucho gusto, y graciosamente concedemos, que dicho señor cavallero Francisco Borromino escoja en la iglesia baja, o en su contorno, el sitio que mejor le pareciere, para fabricar una capilla, y altar, y acomodar su sepulcro. Item, le donamos el cuerpo del glorioso martir S. Jacinto, que al presente esta en el altar de la iglesia vaja, para que su Señoría muy illustre lo pueda colocar en el altar que hara en su capilla, y lo firmamos.

Fray Juan de la Concepción ministro.

The whole passage is cancelled and a note added in the margin:

Murio este Architecito Cavallero sin hacer cosa.

The passage is quoted, along with an Italian translation, in Leo Steinberg, Borromini's San Carlo Alle Quattro Fontane. A Study in Multiple Form and Architectural Symbolism, New York and London, 1977, p. 272, note 3. Steinberg (pp. 270-275) advances the hypothesis that Borromini meant to be buried in the small octagonal chapel to the left of the crypt's high altar, in spite of the fact that this chapel was built approximately 25 years before the request.

However, the tomb of “Yacinthus martyr” was discovered only in 1845 in the cemetery of S. Ermete, and the remains transferred to the chapel of the Propaganda Fide in 1881; see Giovanni Antonazzi, Il Palazzo di Propaganda, Rome, 1979, p. 100.

Pascelli, Vita de' pittori, I, p. 48.


Emile Mâle, L’art religieux après le Concile de Trente, Paris, 1932, p. 221, fig. 119; Henriette s’Jacob, Idealism and Realism: A Study of Sepulchral Symbolism, Leiden, 1954, p. 52 and p. XXXI. b. Marc Wordsdale is preparing a study of the tomb in the context of baroque sepulchral imagery. The basic source is Pascoli, Vita de’ pittori, II, pp. 532–541. The inscription reads:

IOANNES BAPTISTA GISELENVS ROMANVS SED ORBIS CVIS POTIVS QVAM VIATOR CVM SIGISMVNDI III. WALDLSLAI IV. AC IOANNIS CASIMIRI POLONIAE ET SVECIEAE REGVM ARCHITECTVS NON VNO IN CAPITOLIO FVIT OMNIA BONA VT MALA SECVM TLVTI DOMVM HIC QVAEREIN BREVEM ALIBI AEITERNAV SVIS EDOCTVS FLORIBVS POMIS AC MONTIBVS VITAM NON MODO CADVCM ESSE SED FLYXAM EA SESE VIIVM EXPRSSIT IMAGINE QVAM NON NISI PVLSVS ET VMBRA FINGERET MEMOR VERO HOMINEM E PLASTICE NATIVM HAEC ARTIS SVAE VESTIGIA FIXIT IN LAPIDE SED PEDE MX TEMPORIS CONTENDERAM ITA MORTIS SVAE OBVDVRESCENS IN VICTORIA VT ILLAM CAPTVAM AC SAXEAM FECERIT PICTVRAE SVCLVPTRAE ET ARCHITECTVRAE TRIPLOC IN PVGNVA NVLLI DATVRVS PALMAM IVDEX NON INTEGR SVCESSVS IN PARTES ANNO MDCCLXV SVVM AGEBAT LXX CVM HAECA INTER RVDIVM AETERNVM PRALVDVDERE PEREIT TANDEM EXTREMVM ANN MDCCLXXII A TÈ NCE PLAVSVS EXACTVRVS NCV PLANCTVS SED IN ADTV AVE IN EXITV SALVE

30 This was the interpretation of Mâle, *Concilie de Trente*, pp. 213–227, especially p. 221, where he reads the inscription “Neque Hic Vivus ... Neque Illic Mortuus” in a much more negative vein than I do: “Ainsi, c’est le vivant qui était mort, et c’est maintenant le mort qui est vivant. On croirait lire quelque sentence tirée de l’*Horologium* du jésuite Drexelius.”

Fig. 16-1  Rome, S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini, tomb of Carlo Maderno and later of Francesco Borromini, 1623–1624. Fototeca Unione.
Fig. 16–2 Francesco Borromini, project for Maderno’s tomb, 1623–1624. Vienna, Albertina 369, now C 18.
Fig. 16-3  Pietro da Cortona, design for a wall tomb for the artist in the crypt of SS. Luca e Martina. Windsor, Royal Library, no. 4449.
Fig. 16–4  Francesco Borromini, crypt of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, 1638–1641.
Fig. 16-5  Francesco Borromini, plan of the crypt of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, 1638, with a project for his own funeral chapel at the high altar added in 1666. Vienna, Albertina 180.
Fig. 16–6  G. B. Gisleni, design for a funeral apparatus for the royal house of Poland. London, Sir John Soane's Museum, Vari disegni di architettura, folio 116.
Fig. 16–7  G. B. Gisleni, funeral apparatus. *Ibid.*, folio 113.
Fig. 16-8  Rome, S. Maria del Popolo, tomb of Giovanni Battista Gisleni, 1672.
Fig. 15-28 O. Spada, Stemma degli Spada Veralli (A.C.O.R., C.I.31, c. 130 v.). Foto di Riccardo Lodovici ©.