



Architettura scultura e arti minori nel barocco italiano. Ricerche nell'Archivio Spada Minna Heimbürger Ravalli Palazzo Spada Lionello Neppi

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Ligorio's visual translations of ideas he later put into a manuscript.

Not surprising either are those five themes, for they are *topoi* in Renaissance garden design. Smith barely considers this aspect of the casino. Its architectural sources, briefly canvassed as a prelude to the iconographical chapters, are far less satisfactory. Elling's belief that the casino was a miniature reconstruction of an antique *naumachia* is rejected by Smith because there is no support from Ligorio, because the present casino was an expansion of an already existing structure, and because the casino courtyard (unlike the Palazzo Pitti courtyard in 1589) could not have been flooded and used for mock sea battles! None of these objections removes the strikingly visual similarity between the casino and *naumachiae* in Ligorio's own map of Rome of 1561 (contemporary with work on the decorations) or the relevance of the pervasive aquatic imagery which Smith stresses elsewhere. Instead Smith advances a far less plausible model in Peruzzi's Palazzo Massimo delle Colonne.

Most disappointing is the absence of any attempt to place the casino in the context of Renaissance reworkings of antique villa, garden, *nymphaeum*, and *diaeta*, and to relate the meanings of its decoration to the function of the building. Several cited sources tell of Pius being in the "new building in the grove of the garden," but the uses of this private retreat—apart from glances at the island nymphaeum at Hadrian's Villa—are not discussed. There is much research to be done on how garden and villa space were used. In such a detailed study as this of a building's decorative imagery I would have thought the author could have related its iconography more closely to its function.

A footnote (page 88, note 35) briefly acknowledges this problem when the study considers the interior frescoes: emphasis upon Eucharistic imagery "suggests" that Zuccaro's *stanza grande* may have been a chapel. The iconographical explanations of these often extraordinary images are again persuasive, but the method of analysis employed in this section is, as Smith admits (page 99), quite different. Instead of Ligorio's manuscripts providing the central text of explanation, various church fathers (Jerome, Augustine) are quoted extensively to support a complicated reading of the interior imagery that links it to Pius IV's larger endeavors in the Council of Trent. Smith "would have liked to trace the immediate sources of the exegetical tradition" employed by the person who drew up these interior programs, but feels equally that "representative" texts serve equally well and may even have been the sources used. Such fuzziness of argument at a crucial point is somewhat worrying, as is the rather odd identification of a figure in the second room frescoes as "*Ecclesia Romana* administering the waters of true baptism"; the figure is pouring water into cups for people to *drink*!

In his conclusion Smith bravely and fancifully

(his word) tries to argue for some interdependence of the pagan world in the exterior portions of the casino and the ecclesiastical and papal imagery inside: "The gifts of the first of the gods are therefore transformed into *the gift of the true God*." I imagine that more substantiation of this fascinating hypothesis would yield some interesting perspectives on the role of Christian imagery in Renaissance garden design, usually considered to be minimal.

Several studies of Pius and his casino, as well as catalogs of 1975 Barocci exhibitions in Bologna and Florence and Wolfgang Lotz's *Architecture in Italy 1400–1600*, where the casino's connection with Pliny's Laurentina villa is mooted, are cited as being too recently published for Smith to consider. One wonders why a book printed in 1977 has to relegate works of 1972 and 1974 to brief footnotes. Some of this "recent" material might have enabled Smith to expand his horizons and consider the casino in more ambitious contexts. Some suggestion of "iconography" in his title would have announced not only the subject of the major part of his book, but also the material he knows best.

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Minna Heimbürger Ravalli, *Architettura scultura e arti minori nel barocco italiano. Ricerche nell'Archivio Spada*, Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1977, 362 pp., 199 illus. L 22.000.

Lionello Neppi, *Palazzo Spada*, Rome: Editalia, 1975, 304 pp., about 280 illus. and 24 color pls. L 32.000.

Ever since a famous article of 1928 by Franz Ehrle, students of the Roman Baroque have had to reckon with the Spada family. The man whom Ehrle brought into the limelight was Virgilio Spada, an Oratorian priest of considerable diplomatic skill and financial acumen who was also an amateur of architecture; Virgilio supposedly discovered Borromini, steered the Oratory and many of the major commissions of Innocent X in his direction, composed the *Opus Architectonicum* in his name, and later acted as a buffer between this difficult genius and the outside world. Cardinal Bernardino Spada, Virgilio's brother, was a more shadowy figure best known for an ingenious architectural trick: his palace featured a perspectival colonnade that everyone attributed to Borromini and considered a cornerstone of the Baroque. Little was known of other members of the family. For decades this was the accepted picture: here and there a new document emerged; there was some progress in sorting out the two volumes of drawings in the Vatican known as the Spada papers; and in 1967 Giovanni Incisa della Rocchetta pub-

lished an important dialogue by Virgilio on the construction of the Oratory. But the situation could not really change until 1971, when the private archives of the Spada family passed into the public domain. Suddenly an immense quarry was opened, a kind of archival Pompeii which began to yield information on everything from the heights of Spada patronage to the dusty trivia of everyday life. Neppi and Heimbürger Ravalli were the first to sink exploratory trenches into this material. Naturally they came up with many common finds, and one could draw up a scorecard of their respective discoveries; but it would seem more interesting to examine the two books from the point of view of method, and to say something about the kinds of questions art historians currently think are worth asking.

Heimbürger Ravalli sets out to present a broad overview of Spada patronage from 1600 to 1660. She has three specific goals: first, to identify and attribute as many of the drawings in the Vatican volumes as possible; second, to flesh out what we know of various careers and of important buildings with new archival facts, *ulteriori notizie*; and third, to advance a broad theory to the effect that the baroque patron "knew what he wanted," or as she puts it,

that a patron with a strong personality and the ability to formulate precise ideas about the execution of a work (and possibly endowed with native inventiveness and artistic sensibility as well) plays a dominant role in determining the definitive aspect of a work, while the artist who executes it "is limited" to technical and artistic elaboration (p. xvi).

On all three counts the book is a success. It offers a complete inventory of the Vatican drawings, and although one might object to some of the Bernini and Borromini attributions (such as Figs. 25, 39, 67, 90, 109, 110, 115–117), simply sorting out the mass of material is a distinct accomplishment, and many of the dull neglected drawings for provincial projects are identified for the first time. Paolo Spada, the founding father, emerges from obscurity as an energetic and rambunctious builder in Romagna, responsible for the design of a number of interesting villas and convents. A new light is shed on Virgilio's youth, on his education in mathematics and military science, and on his training as superintendent of many of his father's buildings. There are *ulteriori notizie* galore. Two new volumes of documents are mined to retell the story of Borromini's Lateran reconstruction: the author establishes secure attributions for most of the stucco reliefs and gives us fascinating glimpses into the life of a major workyard, where rival artisans fought it out with swords and Virgilio constantly maneuvered to hold Borromini's antagonisms in check. There is new information on the affair of the St. Peter's campanile, on the Palazzo Pamphilj, on the town plan of S. Martino al Cimino, and on the Fortezza Urbana at Castelfranco, built under Bernardino's supervision in 1628–1634. There is

ample evidence to vindicate the thesis of the patron-designer, and as Virgilio's stock increases Borromini's goes steadily down. The famous project for a Pamphilj Villa based on antiquity and astronomy—the “study in applied mathematics” which once seemed to offer a key to Borromini's architectural theory—is given back to Virgilio, who conjured it up out of his early fascination with astronomy and astrology. The whole episode shows how Virgilio elaborated his projects, from the bookish sources that stand behind them through his own crude sketch to the finished renderings done by professionals; the plea of the young Virgilio submitting his first project at age 24, “Pay attention to the idea and not the botched drawing” (page 32), was to turn into a leitmotif of his designing career. The various Spada chapels, which had long sat uneasily on Borromini's shoulders, are returned to Virgilio. In the family chapel in S. Maria dell'Angelo at Faenza, for example, Virgilio thought up the idea, solicited drawings from Borromini and his shop, and entrusted the execution to a *scarpellino*, calling in experts as they were needed; in the end one breathes easier to know what little part Borromini played in this dreary provincial shrine. Virgilio's projects of 1630–1631 for a Spada chapel in S. Andrea della Valle in Rome have nothing to do with Borromini but a great deal to do with the family's self-conception, and in a revealing way the documents stress competition with the neighboring chapels and homage to the Barberini Chapel opposite. The major family project outside Rome was the high altar and façade of S. Paolo in Bologna, undertaken in 1634–1636 in anticipation of a marriage with the local nobility; Heimbürger Ravalli shows that Bernini did the model for the high altar, but tries to go further and suggests that Virgilio was the real *ideatore* of the project. Finally in 1654–1659 Bernardino and Virgilio joined forces to design the Spada Chapel in S. Girolamo della Carità in Rome, which quickly evolved into an ancestor gallery or apotheosis of the house based on Bernardino's obsession with genealogical research. Heimbürger Ravalli documents the decorative sculpture, traces the Neapolitan craftsmen who did the *intarsie*, and presents an interpretation of the chapel as a *salotto* with family portraits, a room of the living rather than a chamber of the dead. The chapters on these chapels corroborate the author's main thesis and in many ways represent the high point of the book.

If new facts and attributions are the main strengths of Heimbürger Ravalli's work, lack of a larger historical framework is a weakness. One wades through the flood of *ulteriori notizie* with the uneasy feeling that progress in scholarship should not be just a cumulative matter, that archives by themselves do not amount to history. For instance, one might have wished for a sharper and more complex portrait of Virgilio, not just more information on what he did, but some attempt to probe his motivations

and to measure his inner growth. Heimbürger Ravalli sees him as a kind of baroque civil servant, a sterling character and a disinterested expert who manages to maintain “tendenze equilibristiche” in the most difficult situations. Somehow the picture of the modern expert seems too simple. Of course Virgilio was an efficient manager, but the institutions of Roman finance and philanthropy that he manipulated in the service of architecture were often bizarre and idiosyncratic, and we learn nothing of their nature or of Virgilio's economic thought. He never built anything for himself, as the author stresses; on the other hand he did mobilize two great institutions, the Oratory and the Banco di S. Spirito, to carve out the Piazza dell'Orologio as a monumental environment around his rooms. He was indeed a good architectural critic, but the patterns of reasoning that emerge from his books and his *pareri* tend to be a strange mix between the vocabulary of a master mason and the grammar of a moral theologian; his language still awaits exegesis. Much of what Virgilio had to say was said in buildings or in drawings, and with all her literal fidelity to the written documents the author tends to neglect this other language, often the more eloquent and expressive. For example, a set of drawings for the Casa dei Filippini (Figs. 140–142), which she is too cautious to attribute or to date, can be assigned to Maruscelli and dated 1627 on Virgilio's own testimony. This project reveals more than any surviving document about the Oratorians' corporate image and their aspirations for a place in the Roman social order; by not risking an interpretation here the author pulls back from the brink of a real discovery. Furthermore, it is the drawings that could have given us some idea of Virgilio's development as a designer, both those executed by him and those carried out under his supervision. One studies a convent project of 1628 (Fig. 16) and finds that it borrows a clever trick (a symmetrical façade disguising an asymmetrical plan) from the Filippini project of the year before (Fig. 140); one checks the date of the Bologna façade and finds that it was finished just a few months before Borromini's façade makes its appearance at Virgilio's Oratory; one looks at the material on fortifications, and suddenly the strange gunport metaphors sprinkled through the *Opus Architectonicum* fall into place.

Another problem is that Virgilio's own account of his family's building activity is on the shallow side, and by accepting it without reserve Heimbürger Ravalli misses some of their deeper motivations. In Virgilio's words Paolo and Bernardino were gripped by a “building mania,” an “itch,” an “errant whim” to follow “caprices” and “chimeras”; they move through his account like marionettes driven by some inexplicable compulsion to design and build. Possibly so, but what would have been more helpful is a picture in which artistic patronage

was more closely tied to the image and status of a clan. It is striking that the great flowering of Spada commissions coincides with two or three generations of rapid social rise; before that period one can trace the family back into the middle ages and not find the slightest interest in art, while after it patronage became a sporadic affair generated mostly by important weddings. Virgilio may portray his father as a sympathetic old fool who squandered money on architecture, but all the same it was Paolo who first grasped the basic fact that, if building costs money, it also attracts money, and that for the family to put down its roots in the aristocracy it had to convert liquid wealth into landed property: residences, villas, above all rural *castelli* that carried titles. Virgilio may have considered his father's buildings rustic, but certainly they had a sophisticated side: the Brisighella villa had a circular island that recalls Hadrian's Villa; its gardens and *delizie* were designed to entertain people like the dukes of Florence and the legates of Romagna; it was the place where Paolo first made contact with the future Urban VIII, who took kindly to the family and later made Bernardino's career. After Paolo's death the family's rise became more accelerated and their patronage more intense. The great monument to their social ambitions in the 1630s is the church of S. Paolo in Bologna, which was unequivocally viewed by the local nobility as an attempt to usurp status; when the façade was unveiled their reaction had little to do with aesthetics: “On what grounds does your house use the *corona*?” to which Virgilio responded with an account of the family's *castelli*. After the family had established its Roman branch the Palazzo Spada came to be the fullest embodiment of their pretensions; Heimbürger Ravalli's chapter on the building is full of new discoveries, but for the complete treatment we must turn to Neppi's book.

II

Neppi's *Palazzo Spada* is one of the finest monographs we possess on any Roman building. Appearances do not do it justice: it has the over-lavish look of an Italian bank publication, a binding that falls immediately apart, and a plate format that is the devil to use; what makes it special, on the other hand, is the total revision it offers in our picture of the baroque palace, the relentless erudition on every front, the razor's edge with which the prose cuts, and finally the way in which painting and architecture are traced down the stem of patronage to their roots in social and economic life. Neppi sees the palace as an outgrowth of two ecclesiastical careers unfolding about a century apart. The first is that of Cardinal Girolamo Capodiferro, who built the original palace in 1548–1550, and the second that of Cardinal Bernardino Spada, who bought the Renaissance structure in 1632 and who continued to alter and expand it until his death in 1661. Before

Neppi, Capodiferro's story was the better known. When he attributes the architecture to Giulio Merisi da Caravaggio, or analyzes how the older foundations influenced the design, or discusses the complex legal arrangements surrounding the building, Neppi covers familiar ground, reinforcing in particular Frommel's recent work; but he also adds important documents, like the one in which Julius III concedes permission for a piazza, and he is able to chart the mercantile origins of the Capodiferro clan and to trace their patterns of settlement in the area. Neppi appears to be fascinated by the relationship between art and a public career; therefore he introduces the fresco cycles in the palace with an account of Capodiferro's diplomatic missions to France, of French influences on his thought, and of his ambiguous stance toward various currents of the Catholic reform. The appendix in which he interprets the iconography of the frescoes in terms of a neo-Platonic theology is rough going, but there are also passages in which he treats matters of style with great finesse, such as his discussion of Giulio Mazzoni's development in the context of Roman mannerism or of Fontainebleau influence (proven among other things by new graffiti that show French artisans at work) on what is still the first Roman *galleria*.

Before Neppi no one knew much about the baroque palace, and most scholars were content to date the perspectival colonnade to 1632–1636 and leave it at that. The real chronology turns out to be far more complex. For the first 17 years Bernardino's architect was not Borromini but Maruscelli, the man who enlarged the entrance atrium in 1633–1634 and who laid out the garden with its carriage road from the Via Giulia, its representations of the six major fortresses of Italy, and its *lizza* or tilting ground for the chivalrous exercises of the nephews. In 1636–1637 Maruscelli closed the street along the left side of the palace and built the cardinal's picture gallery over it. The *sala grande* was frescoed and the staircase renovated in 1633–1635; the meridian gallery outfitted in 1644; and an early unknown version of the *prospettiva* was painted on the garden wall on Maruscelli's design in 1640–1642. Borromini came onto the scene in an active way in about 1650, when he submitted projects for the piazza and the renovation of the rear wings of the palace, which were carried out in altered form by his assistant Righi in 1652–1660. The *prospettiva* as we know it was built in 1652, but on the designs of an Augustinian priest, Giovanni Maria da Bitonto, who along with Borromini and his assistant Righi supervised its execution. After Bernardino's death in 1661 there were two important additions: the garden *teatro*, built by Camillo Arcucci in 1665, and the terrace over the *prospettiva*, built by Tommaso Mattei in 1700–1702. Both of these works used to be attributed to Borromini, even though one was really by a weak competitor and the other by

a minor 18th-century revivalist of his style; the footnotes in which Neppi sets the matter straight, though merciless, are an indication of the degree to which his book supersedes previous scholarship.

The thread of continuity that runs through these complex changes is of course Bernardino's own personality. The cardinal's active career was short and his retirement long: the 6 years as nunzio in Paris and legate in Bologna were followed by 30 restless years in which Bernardino was left to pursue his interests in poetry, astronomy, architecture, genealogy, and the procurement of noble titles for his nephews. We learn of a long-standing interest in perspective, evident in the frescoes of the *sala grande*; and we meet two interesting mathematicians among the cardinal's friends: Padre Bitonto, the designer of the colonnade, and Padre Emmanuel Maignan of the Minimi order at the Trinità ai Monti, the man who designed the meridian gallery in 1644 and who illustrated the workings of the elaborate solar clock in his book *Perspectiva Horaria*, published in 1648. Neppi follows these monks into a world where architecture and mathematics overlap; at times his analysis becomes technical and immensely difficult, but it throws light on the milieu which was about to produce the greatest mathematician-architect of the age, Guarini, then a theological student in Rome. Neppi also shows just how complex the matter of attribution can be. The famous *prospettiva*, for instance, is partly Bernardino's, since he was the one so fascinated by perspective; but Borromini should not be forgotten, since he whetted the Cardinal's interest with a perspectival apparatus designed for a Forty Hours' devotion in about 1646, nor should Righi, who did the drawings and led the construction crew. On the other hand Bitonto was the real designer, and it was to him that Bernardino turned when he wanted to build another *prospettiva* in the choir of S. Lorenzo in Lucina, while Borromini expressed a mild skepticism of the idea. Attributions are complex because the working relationship between these men was close, and here and there a document lights up the kinds of personal contacts which existed between the cardinal and his architect. One shows the two men going through Palladio in the hunt for precedents to justify some motif (page 168, n. 153); another records Bernardino's sense of loss when Borromini abandoned the works in 1657: "Show this note to Cavaliere Borromini," he writes to Righi, "and tell him that my building needs an architect, a man with whom I can confer day by day, and whose drawings I can vary to some extent as they are put into execution. . . . I repeat, I need an architect; the building is not well. . ." (page 283).

Two important features that bear Borromini's stamp are the piazza and the garden wings of the palace. The piazza had already been opened up in 1550, and when Bernardino

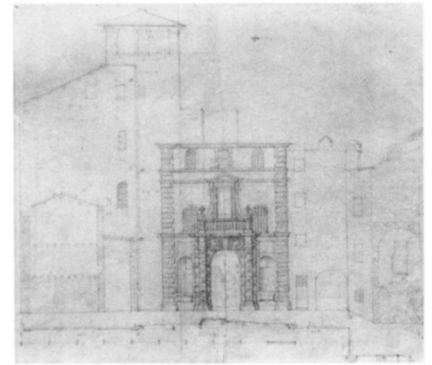


Fig. 1. Francesco Righi, possibly revised by Borromini, project for the Piazza Spada, Rome, 1650 (Albertina 1161).

turned to it in 1650 it was not to clear a new urban space but to create a scenic backdrop for one that already existed, in effect to paint a stage set in the spirit of the Renaissance graffiti façades that stood in the area. An early design for the piazza is preserved in a drawing that somehow slipped through Neppi's fine net (Fig. 1): it seems to be by Righi and it shows a blind gateway made of diamond-cut blocks and a general scheme distantly related to the Villa Giulia. The final design was still more rustic, combining medieval crenellations with an *Abbondanza* fountain derived from the Farnesina; not much survives, but Neppi publishes a rare print which shows what the fountain looked like.

The garden wings are shown in a Borromini plan of 1650 which both authors publish without quite squeezing it dry (Neppi, pages 149 and 248; Heimbürger Ravalli, Fig. 101). The feature which immediately catches the eye is the *salone* vestibule with three small cupolas, "tre lanternini per dar luce," as though Maderno's cupolas in the side aisles of St. Peter's had been taken and reduced to domestic scale. But still more interesting is the way the plan can be read as a sociological document, particularly by emphasizing the contrasts which it shows between ceremonial patterns of circulation and those encountered in everyday domestic life. A straight *scale grande* for visitors of rank coexists with spiral staircases for normal use. Corridors coexist with grand enfilades: on the one hand the whole *famiglia* wing is serviced by a corridor that insures the privacy of the individual rooms; on the other hand no such privacy exists in the main apartment, where rooms are linked in sequence and an enfilade of vision cuts through the entire building. Virgilio later claimed that Bernardino had ruined the apartment merely for the sake of "grandezza e splendore," but he neglected to mention the fact that the enfilade served an important function: in baroque decorum the rank of a visitor was expressed by the number of rooms through which the host accompanied him upon taking leave, and palaces with an extensive lineup of rooms in succession allowed



Fig. 2. Giovanni Maria da Bitonto, Francesco Borromini and Francesco Righi, colonnade at the Palazzo Spada, 1652 (Richter).

rather fine nuances in this matter (F. Sestini, *Il maestro di camera*, Venice, 1664 ed., pages 69ff. and 87). In any case a network of secret staircases and suspended galleries running along the outer walls provided private circulation to anyone who wanted it. These elevated passages are a major forgotten feature of the baroque palace, and they form a curious link with the old Capodiferro settlements in the area, once connected by elevated bridges that spanned public streets; it is as though the escape routes of the Rome of the Sack had been transformed into means of escape from polite society: "If the ladies want . . . to slip furtively away . . ." is the note on which Bernini begins a letter of advice in 1660 (page 284).

III

The lesson of the Palazzo Spada is that there were some baroque palaces which were not so much designed in an aesthetic sense as outfitted, that is, equipped with a number of features that brought prestige, nobility, and an up-to-date look. Naturally it helps to know how much the patron contributed, but it would be more helpful still to have a general typology of the outfitting process, or in simpler terms, a list of the kinds of features society had come to expect from a modern aristocratic residence. To judge from the Spada example such a list would have three major headings: the Rustic, the Curious, and the Grand. The Rustic element at the Palazzo Spada was primarily the piazza, which took the form of a *castello* in the countryside, as though one of the frescoes in the Sala dei Feudi had been brought outdoors to testify to the family's roots in the land and their right to use the coronet. The Curious element was the meridian gallery, a modern *meraviglia* that was thought to rival

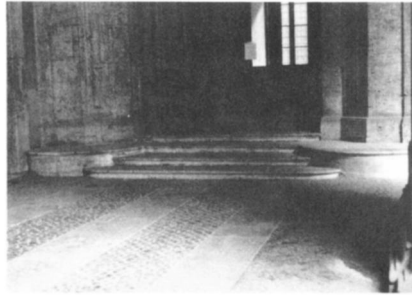


Fig. 3. Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Palazzo Farnese, Rome, entrance to main staircase (Maguire).



Fig. 4. Francesco Borromini, Casa dei Filippini, Rome, entrance steps, 1641 (Gabinetto Fotografico Nazionale).

the curio collections of the older nobility: "In other palaces you will see assorted wonders and marvel at the wealth of the *orbs* and the *urbs*. But when here you see the sun itself run its course and mark the hours you will say, 'Who could bring the Sun down from heaven? O prodigy of genius and of art.'" (Inscription quoted in Neppi, page 190.) The Grand element came from many sources: from *fasti*, luxurious furnishings, antiquities, paintings; also from great size or the appearance of size produced by long enfilades. But there was also grandeur of another sort that came from using architectural motifs that were taken from a prestigious context and brought a kind of borrowed aura with them. For example, many motifs from the Palazzo Farnese find their way into early 17th-century palaces, as though dismantling the great Renaissance model and reassembling its parts had become a general theme of baroque palace design. As Neppi demonstrates, the Spada colonnade represents an atrium of the Farnese type, compressed to fit a narrow space, and equipped with a set of steps (now gone) and semicircular blocks called *cavalcatori* (mounting blocks), which were a common feature of palace stairs modelled on the Farnese (Figs. 2, 3). Details like this no longer served their original function, but were taken over simply to confer a borrowed dignity on the new building, to "impart magnificence" as Borromini explained when outfitting the Casa dei Filippini with a similar detail (Fig. 4; cf. *Opus Arch.*, ix). Thus the Spada colonnade

should be understood as a composite image made up of several pieces assembled to impart magnificence; to make the meaning clearer Bernardino inscribed a poem over the colonnade which treated it as a metaphor for worldly *grandezza* (Neppi, Doc. 37).

It is the current fashion to disassociate the Spada *prospettiva* from the Vatican Scala Regia, to see one as a childish perspectival trick and the other as a noble anti-perspectival statement. Perhaps the concept of outfitting offers a way to bring the two works back together again and to underline their fundamental similarity. Both were part of a campaign to update an older palace by outfitting it with motifs that brought a borrowed grandeur, with pieces of the Farnese, so to speak, cut up and reassembled. Both are composite images: when Bernini built the stairs between the Scala Regia landing and the portico of St. Peter's he added two semicircular *cavalcatori* in a place where there can be no question of function; operating almost below the threshold of perception these details reinforce the impression of grandeur created by the larger image of the colonnade. In the end the differences between the two works are largely differences of psychological effectiveness. Bernardino's colonnade is taken in at a glance, and further exploration proves that its length, like all worldly *grandezza*, is illusory. The Scala Regia offers no such irony; one moves through it without delusions and experiences simultaneously what usually would have been experienced in sequence, namely ceremonial entrance into a palace and ceremonial ascent.

If historians of the Italian family of the sort now operating in Renaissance Florence ever push on to baroque Rome and stumble across the Spada Archives, they will find that two art historians have been there before them to map the way. One, Heimbürger Ravalli, has provided a fine guide to the labyrinth, and in so doing come up with many surprising new answers to the time-honored questions of who did what and when. The other, Neppi, has written the definitive history of the Spada Palace, a book which solves a great number of conventional art historical problems but also rises above the usual pursuits of the discipline to a level where architecture, urbanism, iconography, social history, and mathematics fuse in the self-conception of a family of great patrons.

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