

## 5 Architectural Collaboration

### 5.1 The Lateran Façade Competition

Within a week of the election of Lorenzo Corsini as Pope Clement XII, Ottoboni was declared arch-priest at the pope's own bishop's seat of St. John Lateran. Having served as Vice-Chancellor of the Church for forty years, and in that function having presided over the Curia, Ottoboni commanded seniority and experience that more than made up for what he lacked in intelligence and popularity among the college of cardinals. He could still wield political influence. In any case, as Lateran arch-priest, he could hardly avoid becoming involved in the plans for a much longed for new façade.<sup>253</sup> As a major arbiter of artistic tastes in Rome, he became an active participant initially.

The need for a new façade had been felt through the latter decades of the seventeenth century. Innocent XII had received 40,000 *scudi* for its completion, and his new arch-priest, Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili, contributed an additional 20,000.<sup>254</sup> Innocent's successor in 1700, Pope Clement XI Albani, set aside another 20,000 *scudi* in 1705, but instead established the completion of the apostle statues for the nave of the basilica as a priority.<sup>255</sup> The drawing exercise for the third class in the inaugural Concorso Clementino in 1702 had been a plan and elevation for one of the twelve niches erected in the Lateran nave by Francesco Borromini in 1650.<sup>256</sup> The subject for the architecture competition at the Academy of St. Luke in 1705, however, was a design for the Lateran façade, which was won by Juvarra.<sup>257</sup>

The Lateran nave project was officially completed in 1718 with the addition of paintings of prophets above the niches of the apostles in each bay. In late February the pope had examined the cartoons for the figures of prophets which Poerson

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**253** For the growing literature on the Lateran façade project, see Schiavo, A. (1961). *Progetti per la facciata di S. Giovanni in Laterano*. In *La Fontana di Trevi e le altre opera di Nicola Salvi* (pp. 37-61). Rome; Hager, H. (1971). *Il modello di Ludovico Rusconi Sassi del consorso per la facciata di San Giovanni in Laterano (1732) ed i prospetti a convessità centrale durante la prima metà del Settecento in Roma*. *Commentari*, 22, 36-67; Jacob, S. (1972). *Die Projekte Bibienas und Doris für die Fassade von S. Giovanni in Laterano*, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 35, 100-117; Hager, H. (1975). *On a Project Ascribed to Carlo Fontana for the Façade of S. Giovanni in Laterano*, *Burlington Magazine*, 117, 105-109; Hoffmann, V. (1981). *Die Fassade von San Giovanni in Laterano, 1614-1649*. *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 34, 183-187; Lorenz, H. (1981). *Unbekannte Projekte für die Fassade von San Giovanni in Laterano*. *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 34, 183-187; Kieven, 1988, pp. 255-275.

**254** Pastor, vol. 32, p. 589.

**255** See also Olszewski, 1981, 660, n. 2 and references contained therein.

**256** Olszewski, 1981, 660, n. 2. The project had involved Ottoboni's sculptor, Rossi, who had carved the figure of *St. James Minor*. See also Millon, 1984, pp. xviii-xix. For more on the construction of the Lateran tabernacles, see Blunt, A. (1979). *Borromini* (pp. 133-146). London: The Belknap Press.

**257** The category was first class and not second class; Munshower, pp. 47-48.

thought were to be installed as mosaics.<sup>258</sup> By this time, Albani's architect Carlo Fontana had died (1714), and expenses for the sculpture project had exceeded 50,000 *scudi*. On June 1, 1720, Chracas described the colossal figures and the paintings above them.<sup>259</sup> Clement XI died shortly thereafter before attention could be turned to the façade. Although his successor, Innocent XIII Conti (1721-1724), initiated work on the façade in 1723, his brief reign ended within the year. Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili had purchased Borromini's old façade designs from the architect's heirs that year, and Poerson reported in September that materials for construction were being assembled as 150 slaves had been brought from Malta as laborers.<sup>260</sup> Poerson wrote from the French Academy in 1724 that the pope had mandated 10,000 *écus* for the Lateran portal, but the project halted with the pope's death.<sup>261</sup> He was followed by Benedict XIII whose pious passion was for the dedication of altars.<sup>262</sup>

Ottoboni was a member of the congregation given responsibility for the façade. One of its charges as stipulated in a papal brief was to solicit contributions from the Christian princes of Europe. Its goal was set at 60,000 Roman *écus* although the final cost was gauged as two and a half times that sum.<sup>263</sup> When the congregation for the commission was established in August of 1730, Ottoboni held the old façade designs which Cardinal Pamphili had acquired from Borromini's heirs. (It was Pamphili's death in 1729 that freed the position of arch-priest for Ottoboni.)<sup>264</sup> Mario Bernardo had converted these drawings to a model, all of which were in Ottoboni's possession in August of 1730.<sup>265</sup> Borromini's plans seem to have lost favor, as Valesio reported Ottoboni's dissatisfaction with the designs in his diary entry of November 20<sup>th</sup>, at which point they were rejected, and he and Cardinal Corsini declared a competition for the façade.<sup>266</sup>

The Arcadian insistence on *buon gusto*, or good taste, involved a rejection of Baroque extravagance. More conservative French tastes were impacting Roman culture through the presence of the French Academy in Rome, and Ottoboni had long harbored French sympathies. Furthermore, he may have wanted to favor one of his own architects.

**258** *Correspondance*, vol. 5, no. 2096, pp. 131-132, March 1, 1718. The use of mosaics would have suited Clement XI's paleo-Christian restorations in Rome.

**259** Chracas, vol. 14, no. 450, pp. 15, 19-20, June 1, 1720.

**260** *Correspondance*, vol. 6, no. 2537, p. 284, September 14, 1723.

**261** *Correspondance*, vol. 6, no. 2606, pp. 342-343, March 14, 1724.

**262** Pastor reports that he had consecrated 360 churches and almost 1,500 altars during his six year reign; Pastor, 1941, vol. 34, p. 121.

**263** *Correspondance*, vol. 8, no. 3470, pp. 268-269, October 26, 1731.

**264** Chracas, vol. 38, no. 973, pp. 3-6, October 30, 1723. See also, Kelly, p. 172; Kieven, p. 258.

**265** Valesio, V, p. 251, July 20, 1730; p. 264, August 19, 1730. Pamphili had been Lateran archpriest since 1699; Montalto, pp. 447-449, 545, n. 51. Kelly, p. 173; Kieven, p. 258.

**266** Valesio, V, p. 424, November 20, 1731; pp. 408-409, September 21, 1731; Pastor, vol. 34, p. 505.

The participants in the competition included Luigi Vanvitelli, Lodovico Sassi, Fernando Fuga and Alessandro Galilei. Domenico Gregorini was also involved, as well as Domenico Rossi (1657-1737).<sup>267</sup> Rossi was a native of Lugano who had designed the highly successful pyrotechnic celebrations in honor of the election of the Venetian Pietro Ottoboni as Pope Alexander VIII in 1689. The celebrations in Venice were commemorated in a pamphlet.<sup>268</sup> Rossi had been in Rome in 1710 where he met Juvarra.<sup>269</sup> His journey in 1732 was the last of several visits to Rome; as he was 75 years old at the time, the jurists might have been skeptical of his prospects for completing the Lateran façade.

Juvarra may have wished to be a participant in the competition, too. His optimism was justified given that his design for the façade competition sponsored by the Academy of St. Luke in 1705 was awarded first prize, and the eight jurists were Academy members. Two façade sketches by Juvarra survive, one with the inscription, “Per la facciata di S. Giovanni.”<sup>270</sup> Whatever Juvarra may have hoped for initially, it is clear from a letter of March 15, 1732 that the pope only wished him to serve as judge, to choose among the many models and drawings.<sup>271</sup> The drawings may have been an attempt by Juvarra to convince the pope to let him participate, but as they remained in his possession, they were more likely aborted studies, abandoned once he realized that the pope was not interested in him as a contestant.

Juvarra had renewed his Roman contacts in 1725 when he was there for the Holy Year celebrations and to participate in a project for the Vatican basilica.<sup>272</sup> He was appointed architect of St. Peter. Although Ottoboni was archpriest at Santa Maria Maggiore, Juvarra seems not to have renewed his ties with the cardinal. By August 23, 1732, Juvarra had returned to Torino, a month after the pope had viewed the competition models on display at the Quirinal Palace, and by which time Clement XII had awarded Galilei the commission for the Lateran façade, and given Nicola Salvi the charge for the Trevi Fountain.<sup>273</sup>

<sup>267</sup> Rovere, p. 97; For Rossi, see Lewis, D., “Rossi, Domenico,” *MEA*. III, p. 614.

<sup>268</sup> BC, Op. P.D. 28598, (2), *Vera, e Nuovissima Relazione Delle stupendissime Festa, e Fuochi fatti nell’Inclita Città di Venezia, per l’esaltatione al Pontificato dell’Eminentissimo Pietro Ottoboni Veneto, chiamato Alessandro VIII*, Venice: 1689, (# 12).

<sup>269</sup> Rossi published a list of Juvarra’s commissions from 1714 to 1735 which had been compiled by his pupil, Giovanni Battista Sacchetti.

<sup>270</sup> See Rovere, pp. 96-97, 125-126, 156, Pls. 74-75 for the two pen and wash sketches for the Lateran façade in the Biblioteca Nazionale, Turin. These seem not to have been Juvarra’s studies for the Academy of St. Luke’s architecture competition of 1705.

<sup>271</sup> Brinckman reports Juvarra as not among the jurists; “Certo è che il nome del Juvarra non compare nell’elenco dei concorrenti;” Rovere, p. 97. Kelly’s list of judges does not include Juvarra; p. 209, n. 252.

<sup>272</sup> For Juvarra’s drawings in the Vatican, see BAV, Cod. Vat. Lat. N 13750.

<sup>273</sup> *Correspondance*, vol. 8, no. 3552, p. 348, July 8, 1732.

All entries had been put on exhibit in a gallery of the Quirinal palace the first week of June, and by the end of that month the eight members of the Academy of St. Luke who served as jurors cast their lots. The committee of jurists included painters such as Pier Leone Ghezzi, Sebastiano Conca and Giovanni Paolo Panini. The Congregation of the Fabbrica favored Vanvitelli, but he received only three votes to Galilei's four. Gregorini did not appear in the balloting, and Sassi received one vote. At this point Ottoboni had already withdrawn from the process dissatisfied with the proceedings. He would shortly commission works from both Sassi and Gregorini, and may have favored one of them for the project. Conca was Ottoboni's court painter, and had cast the lone vote for Sassi.<sup>274</sup> Gregorini was not yet affiliated with Ottoboni.

The president of the French Academy in Rome wrote to d'Antin on June 18, 1732, that the pope had had a meeting with Domenico Gregorini which he believed dealt with the subject of the Lateran façade.<sup>275</sup> Because Galilei had received a plurality of votes but not a clear majority, another competition was declared among the three finalists, but the pope ruled in favor of his Florentine countryman, Galilei. Panini called Galilei's design simple.

Excavations at the site continued with the discovery of antique marble columns and many Roman coins. Ten days before Juvarra's departure for Torino, Ottoboni, on orders from the pope, assigned Galilei to prepare the foundations, and 300 laborers were imported from Acquila.<sup>276</sup> Galilei, aware of his privileged position, threatened to return to Florence if his monthly stipend of fifty *écus* was not doubled; he insisted on an advance of 4,000 *écus*.<sup>277</sup> The pope promised 10,000 *écus*, and by mid-September 230 laborers were reported at work on the façade.<sup>278</sup> In the end, Ottoboni participated in the ceremonies on December 8<sup>th</sup> when the pope blessed the foundation stone.<sup>279</sup> The final cost exceeded 300,000 *scudi* or 350,000 *scudi* including the sculpture.<sup>280</sup>

The commission's duties continued after completion of the project, with the calculation of the expenses and settlement of an appropriate donation from the King of France. The king debated the amount. When it was suggested by Ottoboni and the Duke de Saint-Aignon that the gift should be proportionate to the dignity of the prince

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**274** Kelly states that Conca favored Sassi; p. 178. For an illustration of Sassi's model, see Kieven, 1988, p. 270, fig. 190.

**275** *Correspondance*, vol. 8, no. 3543, p. 341, June 14 & 18, 1732, from Rome; "Le Pope fait venire chez luy le chevalier Gregorini, fameux architecte. On croix que c'est au sujet de la façade de Saint-Jean-de-Latran..."

**276** *Correspondance*, vol. 8, no. 3586, p. 363, August 13, 1732; no. 3572, August 23-27, 1732.

**277** *Correspondance*, vol. 8, no. 3578, pp. 366-367, September 10, 1732.

**278** *Correspondance*, vol. 8, no. 3583, p. 371, September 13 & 17, 1732, from Rome.

**279** *Chracas*, vol. 70, no. 2553, p. 6, December 12, 1733.

**280** *Correspondance*, vol. 8, no. 3671, p. 440, April 23, 1733.

making the donation, he finally agreed to pay the sum proposed. Chracas recorded the ceremonies of gratitude for the completion of the Lateran façade in May of 1736.<sup>281</sup> Meanwhile, Ottoboni had turned his attention to other projects in the Cancelleria.<sup>282</sup>

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**281** *Correspondance*, vol. 8, no. 3685, p. 449, May 26, 1733; no. 3701, p. 460, June 25, 1733; no. 3710, p. 466, July 13, 1733; no. 3720, p. 473, July 30, 1733; no. 3723, p. 475, August 3, 1733; no. 3756, p. 14, October 8, 1733; no. 3785, p. 37, January 8, 1734.

**282** Msgr. G.M. Ferroni conducted the public ceremonies to celebrate the successful conclusion of the façade campaign; Chracas, vol. 80, no. 2933, pp. 7-8, May 19, 1736.