



PAVEL KALINA – FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, CZECH TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

Maurizio Ricci (ed.)

## Mascariniana

Studi e ricerche sulla vita e le opere  
di Ottaviano Mascarino

Roma 2016, Campisano Editore, 256 pp., 250 colour and b&w illustrations



Leonardo Paris, Maurizio Ricci

and Augusto Roca de Amicis

## Con più difficoltà

La scala ovale di Ottaviano Mascarino  
nel palazzo del Quirinale

Roma 2016, Campisano Editore, 160 pp., 180 colour and b&w illustrations

Roman architecture of the period 'between Michelangelo and Borromini' did not enjoy such favour among historians last century as did the periods that preceded and followed it — the architecture of the 'supreme Renaissance' and the 'Baroque'. For this very reason we must welcome the fact that last year two publications appeared, which significantly supplement and perhaps alter the view of this architecture. Both are devoted to the work of Ottaviano Mascarino, one of the leading figures of Roman architecture in the last quarter of the 16th century.

The collection of studies entitled *Mascariniana* covers a broad range of themes. The focus is evidently on the realised buildings of Ottaviano Mascarino, although there are also texts devoted to his unexecuted studies. The editor of the collection pays attention in the introductory text to Mascarino's beginnings. Linked to this article is the contribution from Angela Ghirardi, who investigates portraits of Mascarino's important patron, Pope Gregory XIII from the Bolognese family of Boncompagni, and the people surrounding him. Maurizio Ricci further pays attention to Mascarino's sacred architecture: the Bandini Chapel of the Church of San Silvestro, which was linked to Raphael's Chigi Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo. Together with Yuri Strozzi Ricci also investigated the octagonal church of Santa Maria delle Carceri in Camerino, which Mascarino built in the years 1580–1582 for Bishop Girolamo Bovio,

also originally from Bologna. There is particular emphasis on the ideal architectures as depicted by Central Italian painting of the 16th century. Augusto Roca de Amicis deals in this collection with Mascarino's unrealised studies for the Church of St Peter in Rome. The field of sacred architecture is also the subject of Fulvia Scaduto's article devoted to the monumental complex of the Cathedral in Monreale.

The collection also includes texts devoted to Mascarino's secular architecture and his urban planning. Augusto Roca de Amicis writes on the theme of Mascarino's admirable project for the Villa Mattei by the famous crossroads of the Four Fountains, in an important part of Rome that was developing at that time. Flavia Colonna then describes, in a very interesting contribution, Mascarino's intervention in the structure of Manziana, a tiny town on Lago Bracciano. One cannot but admire Mascarino's geometrically clear and simultaneously sensitive plan relating to the regulation of the town with regard to the surrounding countryside. Yuri Strozzi Ricci devoted attention to Mascarino's work for the Petrucci family, for whom he built palaces in Rome and in Amelia. In the epilogue to the entire volume Maurizio Ricci then concentrates on Mascarino's input into the structure of Borgo, an important part of the city between the Vatican and the Tiber, where the architect himself lived.



There is no doubt that Mascarino based his work on great examples. This does not mean, however, that he was not a creative architect. On the contrary, his work is marked by highly demanding typological hybridisation, the skilful combination of adopted elements into new, formally uniform wholes and an emphasis on the significance of what were then relatively new elements, such as a spiral staircase with an oval ground plan.

There is nothing to criticise in this book, perhaps only that it makes considerable demands on the reader as far as concerns previous knowledge of the theme, which is, however, the case in practically all texts written in Italian in the field of the history of architecture. One cannot fail to remark that, as opposed to some not too consistent collections claiming to be a collective monograph, the reviewed publication is a true research monograph dedicated to the person of an important architect, which advances our knowledge in a fundamental manner. One can therefore only regret that the format of a collection did make itself felt in the suppression of some synthetic themes such as, for instance, the relationship of Mascarino's architecture to church reform, once referred to by Klaus Schwager.<sup>1</sup>

A very important supplement to the Mascarino collection, therefore, is a publication devoted to one single theme — Mascarino's oval spindle-free staircase supported by a pair of Doric columns in the Papal Palace at Quirinal, today the residence of the President of the Italian Republic. This spindle-free spiral staircase undoubtedly represents one of the key themes of the architecture of the 16th and 17th centuries, resolved for the first time by Bramante in the Vatican Belvedere. Arnaldo Bruschi has already described the fundamental effect of this element of construction — the elementary tension between the static cylinder of the shell and the seemingly endless movement of the helix inserted within it.<sup>2</sup> Bramante designed a staircase carried by pillars, which he projected in different parts of the staircase as Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. His followers continued with this idea. Probably the most influential of these was Giacomo da Vignola, who designed for the Palazzo Farnese (sometimes also imprecisely called the Villa Farnese) in Caprarola a staircase carried by double Doric columns for its entire height. Both Bramante's and Vignola's staircases were, however, built on a circular ground plan. Mascarino's staircase differs from theirs in its oval shape.

The editor and author of the introductory text was again Maurizio Ricci, who in his contribution follows in detail the development of the villa and Mascarino's individual projects. Pope Gregory XIII already in 1573 wanted to reconstruct the Quirinal villa Carafa-d'Este as a new residence, but the work did not get started until 1583. Here Mascarino creatively transformed the typology of the villa with forward-jutting wings or risalits, a loggia and a spiral staircase. Ricci follows in detail the evolution of Mascarino's building projects on an oval floor plan.

His text also includes an exact proportional analysis of the column structure of the Quirinal staircase on the basis of Mascarino's preserved cross-section. This proportionality follows, with almost complete fidelity, Vignola's treatise *Regola delli cinque ordini*. Mascarino did, however, omit the typical trait of the Doric structure — the alternation of the triglyphs and metopes in the frieze. It is just this apparently illogical solution that strongly increases the effect of the ascending curve of the architrave and the moulding, thus giving the staircase unwonted dynamism.

Leonardo Pariso deals first and foremost with the geometrical analysis of the staircase. He started off from a comparison of the well-known Serlio constructions of ovals with the precise measurement of the existing building. On the basis of laser scanning (the Leica HDS6000 3D scanner was used) and photogrammetric measurement he created an exact model of the staircase, enabling knowledge of its spatial course and proportional design better than ever before. This surgical work leads him to all the geometrical finesse and difficulties of an apparently simple theme and helps the understanding of Mascarino's quite concrete creative work.

In the third article of the book Augusto Roca de Amicis handles with great erudition the typological prerequisites of Mascarino's project. Already the very arrangement of the entrance to the staircase gave a great sense of scenic impact. Inspiration from Sangallo's solution for the entrance to the staircase in the Palazzo Farnese, together with the situation of the main axis of the oval staircase in line with the longitudinal axis of the loggia, leads the viewer into the inside of a gradually recognised construction. Mascarino's architecture can thus be described as the architecture of well thought-out perspective aperture sequences. The author traces the development of the theme further in other examples of the same type, such as the practically unknown staircase in the Villa Aldobrandini in Frascati, the staircase in the Palazzo Borghese (Flaminio Ponzio, circa 1608) in Rome, the staircase in the Roman house of Bartolomeo Pelicci by the Teatro Pace (Onorio Longhi, 1615), the celebrated Borromini staircase in the Palazzo Barberini and the staircase in the Palazzo Cenci in Rome (after 1679), and describes their individual variations, such as the possibility of replacing the classical columns of the supporting pillars.

It is, of course, possible to consider whether Mascarino was not inspired by further other buildings in the creation of the strong impact of the entrance, and especially whether he did not start out more narrowly from the work of his great teacher Vignola. It is true that in Vignola's already mentioned Palazzo Farnese in Caprarola it is surprising how small is the impact of the entrance to the famous monumental spiral staircase ('Scala regia') on a circular ground plan from the Sala delle guardie. It seems, however, that Vignola preferred completely different entrances to this staircase. For purely practical



reasons he created a comfortable entrance at the level of the basement, where the carriages arrived. He then gave maximum exposure not to the entrance to the Sala d'Ercole, but to the circular gallery, where the access to the staircase is situated on the axis of the interval between the pillars of the gallery.<sup>3</sup> This evidently corresponded on the one hand to the aesthetic concept, seeking to achieve the greatest possible homogeneity of the entire project, on the other hand to the effort to structure the rooms on this floor into several different units with a total of seven main and three secondary entrances.

This publication also touches significantly on the Czech environment. Augusto Roca de Amicis in his article throws doubt upon the opinion stated earlier that the author of the no longer existing oval staircase in the Mathematical Tower of the cross wing of Rudolf's Palace in Prague Castle was Bernardo Buontalenti.<sup>4</sup> Apart from Giovanni Maria Filippi, who came from Rome to Prague in 1602, a possible author for consideration was also Vincenzo Scamozzi, which would correspond to the erstwhile consideration of Jarmila Krčálová.<sup>5</sup>

In this connection one must also mention another idea, referred to for decades in Czech literature, that Mascarino was allegedly the author of the project for the oval Italian Chapel in Prague.<sup>6</sup> It must be said that the oval ground plan really does occur in many of Mascarino's projects. But an oval ground plan in itself cannot, of course, be understood as something on the lines of Mascarino's signature. The syntax of the chapel definitely has nothing in common with Mascarino. Its thermal windows do not appear exclusively in Mascarino's work and are not even restricted solely to Roman architecture.<sup>7</sup> In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century we find them in the buildings of Galeazzo Alessi, especially in his churches of San Barnaba in Milan and Santa Maria di Carignano in Genoa (from 1552).<sup>8</sup> Thermal windows were also designed for his sacred buildings by Andrea Palladio who, as is well known, also published these designs. Thermal windows also appear in the drawing/cross-section of the Church of San Sebastiano on the Corso di Porta Ticinese in Milan (1578-1586, Pellegrino Tibaldi or Giuseppe Meda), the situation of which on a busy street in Milan is reminiscent of the Prague chapel.<sup>9</sup>

In this connection the question thus arises of whether the author of the Italian Chapel project might not have been Giovanni Battista Aleotti, who slightly later designed, on an oval ground plan, not only the Church of San Carlo in Ferrara (1613-1623) but also the Church della Celletta near Argenta, built from 1607 and practically destroyed at the end of the Second World War.<sup>10</sup> With regard to the fact that oval churches appeared in Aleotti's work relatively late, it might be possible to consider whether of project of the Italian Chapel could have been an early attempt of his.

For the older literature Mascarino was, in comparison with Peruzzi and Vignola, 'unbefangen und

unschöpferisch'.<sup>11</sup> His staircase is certainly unimaginable without Vignola's staircase in Caprarola.<sup>12</sup> In the same way we might say, however, that Vignola's staircase with the double pillars is *unimaginable* without Bramante's staircase for the Vatican Belvedere. And the same applies to Borromini's oval staircase in the Palazzo Barberini, which would be unthinkable without Bramante, Vignola and Mascarino. In spite of this, it has not yet occurred to anyone to explain this as meaning that Borromini was not creative. Even Bramante was not, in any case, there from the very start; his realised staircase in the Vatican Belvedere was preceded by Leonardo's studies in drawings.<sup>13</sup> Leonardo too, of course, started out from the centuries-old tradition of medieval spiral staircases. In this respect it is interesting that, right at the beginning of the 16th century, Benedikt Ried built in Prague Castle a spindle-free staircase describing a helix around an empty space encircled by subtle pillars.<sup>14</sup>

Mascarino's work thus forces us once again to consider the dialectic relationship between *regola* and *innovazione* in the architecture of the 16th century. It is clear that even apparently negligible changes can lead to the transformation of, if not the system, then at the very least one single type, and these cannot be ignored, nor can their author be deemed not to be creative. Such an evaluation is only the projection of the absolutism of the romantic view of genius in creation from previous centuries. The reviewed publication described Mascarino's contribution to the history of architecture as being of the highest professional standard and it therefore merits our appreciation.

TRANSLATED BY JOANNE DOMIN

## NOTES

1 Klaus Schwager (rec.), Jack Wasserman, 'Ottaviano Mascarino and His Drawings in the Accademia Nazionale di San Luca', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* XXXI, 1968, No. 3, pp. 246-68, esp. p. 248.

2 Arnaldo Bruschi, *Bramante architetto*, Bari 1969, pp. 422-424.

3 Christoph Luitpold Frommel, 'Gli esordi e le ville nell'Italia centrale', in Richard J. Tuttle, Bruno Adorni, Christoph Luitpold Frommel, and Christof Thoenes (eds), *Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola*, Milano 2002, pp. 39-59, esp. pp. 56-57, and further in particular the ground plans of Gabriele Valvassori in the Gabinetto dei disegni e delle stampe, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, 3513 A and 3515 A (ibidem, cat. No. 107-08, pp. 228-29).

4 Guido Carrai, 'I fiorentini al castello. Il progetto di Bernardo Buontalenti e Giovanni Gargioli per la nuova galleria di Rodolfo II', *Umění* LI, 2003, pp. 370-84, esp. p. 374.

5 Jarmila Krčálová, 'Das Oval in der Architektur des böhmischen Manierismus', *Umění* XXI, 1973, pp. 303-331, esp. p. 322 (still without the proposal about the authorship of the staircase). — Eadem, *Centrální stavby české renesance*, Praha 1976, p. 77. — Eadem, 'Notes on Rudolfiné

architecture', *Umění XXIII*, 1975, pp. 499–526, pp. 507, 517–518. — Eadem, 'Česká renesanční schodiště', *Umění XXXI*, 1983, pp. 97–117, esp. pp. 99–100. — Eadem, Italské podněty v renesančním umění českých zemí, *Umění XXXIII*, 1985, pp. 54–82, esp. p. 66. Krčálová points out here that the considerably more modest oval staircase with hollow helix was installed in his house in the Prague Lesser Town (No. 303/III) by Orazio Fontana, who participated in the construction of the gallery of the cross wing of the Royal Palace in Prague Castle. Eadem, 'Architektura doby Rudolfa II.', in Jiří Dvorský (ed.), *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění II/1*, Praha 1989, pp. 160–181, esp. p. 169.

6 Jarmila Krčálová, 'Das Oval' (note 5), pp. 316–22. — Eadem, 'Centrální stavby' (note 5), pp. 69–77. — Eadem, 'Italské podněty' (note 5), p. 65. — Eadem, 'Architektura doby Rudolfa II.' (note 5), pp. 169–70. — Petra Nevimová, 'La cappella italiana della Città Vecchia. Così graziosa che difficilmente in Italia se ne trovano di uguali', in Angela Trezza Cabrales (ed.), *La congregazione italiana di Praga. Luoghi e memorie dell'Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Kutná Hora and Praga 2003*, pp. 78–88. — Eadem, *Vlašská kaple*, Praha 2005, p. 27. — Mojmír Horyna and Petra Oulíková, *Kostel Nejsvětějšího Salvátora a Vlašská kaple*, Praha 2006. — Petra Oulíková, 'Historie objektu' / 'Storia dell'edificio', in: Petra

Oulíková, Václav Girsá, and Tomáš Berger, *Vlašská kaple v Praze*, Praha 2006, pp. 25–60. I rejected Mascarino's authorship in the publication Pavel Kalina, *Praha 1437–1610. Kapitoly o pozdně gotické a renesanční architektuře*, Praha 2011, pp. 161–163.

7 Horyna and Oulíková (note 6), p. 35–7.

8 Andrea Walther Ghia, 'I disegni di Galeazzo Alessi per la basilica di Santa Maria di Carignano in Genova', *Studi di Storia delle Arti XI*, 2004–2010, pp. 169–180.

9 Debora Antonini, 'San Sebastiano: un'architettura di Pellegrino Tibaldi nella Milano borromaica', *Annali di architettura X-XI*, 1998–1999, pp. 140–156, esp. p. 141.

10 Gregor Scherf, *Giovanni Battista Aleotti (1546–1636). 'Architetto mathematico' der Este und der Päpste in Ferrara*, Marburg 1997, pp. 82–97.

11 Wolfgang Lotz, 'Die ovalen Kirchenräume des Cinquecento', *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte VII*, 1955, pp. 7–99, esp. p. 70.

12 Ludwig Heydenreich and Wolfgang Lotz, *Architecture in Italy 1400 to 1600*, Harmondsworth 1974, p. 284.

13 Bruschi (note 2), note 160 on p. 421.

14 Pavel Kalina, *Benedikt Ried a počátky záalpské renesance*, Praha 2009, p. 85.