

locality.¹¹ This is scarcely surprising in a period in which the development of individual *maniera* was the primary goal of the artist. The degree of religiosity that can be discerned in any artist's work will obviously depend greatly on his own temperament. In this period it might range from the aged Ammannati's repudiation of the 'lascivious nudes' that he had executed in his youth, to Veronese's casual statement that if there was space left in his sacred pictures, he would fill it with whatever ornaments seemed pleasing.¹²

Nevertheless, the success of an artist's religious works at this time was bound to depend to some extent on the attitudes of his patrons. In this context the works of sacred art made for Alessandro Farnese are particularly significant. Not only was he in a key position at the centre of the church's administration, but he commissioned a very large number of such works throughout the period of religious crisis and well into the post-Tridentine era. By reconstructing the pattern of his patronage during these years we can study his response to the changing spiritual climate. What we find is a sudden increase in the number of commissions for sacred art immediately after the conclusion of the Council of Trent. This, and the surprise expressed by contemporaries at the Cardinal's new-found piety, compel one to examine his motives as a patron, and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that a whole-hearted promotion of Counter-Reformation values was but one of several priorities; apparently greater in importance were his pursuit of the papal tiara, pressure from the reigning pope, and a desire for conspicuous display.

A reconstruction of Alessandro's religious patronage also illustrates well the complexities of 'Counter-Reformation art', both stylistically and iconographically, and demonstrates forcefully the difficulties in generalising about the issue. For example, it is clear from his early commissions that his attitude to religious iconography was somewhat casual, but, more surprisingly, this continues after the publication of the Tridentine decrees. Moreover, although he employed one painter, Giovanni de' Vecchi, who has been seen as the embodiment of Counter-Reformation spirituality, he simultaneously patronised artists with very different styles.

Alessandro's religious patronage before 1560

Farnese's religious commissions during the period before the Council of Trent came to an end are remarkably few in number. By contrast, he was at this time commissioning innumerable works of decorative art and some monumental secular works. During the 1530s and 1540s the Cardinal was involved primarily with the political rather than the doctrinal aspects of the Counter-Reformation.¹³ He rarely referred to matters of doctrine in his letters and cannot be regarded as a theologian. Certainly, he did not adopt the severe, dogmatic line of Cardinal Carafa, the 'Theatine' cardinal, and his followers.¹⁴

Alessandro's most important religious commission during the early part of his career was for the decoration of his private chapel in the Cancelleria, the Cappella del Pallio, which was painted by Francesco Salviati. Unfortunately, the chapel's history is very scantly documented, and the condition of the frescoes was until recently very poor. Now, however, a highly successful restoration has resolved

many of the problems of chronology and interpretation, and the history of the commission has been reconstructed in an important study by Patricia Rubin.¹⁵

The unusual qualities of the decoration make the Cappella del Pallio an informative document of Cardinal Farnese's taste. The chapel is very richly decorated, with the frescoes embedded in exquisite stuccowork, whose delicate gilding adds to the sumptuous effect. Such delight in rich textures and minute ornament recalls the Cardinal's enthusiasm for works of decorative art.¹⁶ This remains a feature of many later commissions, above all the frescoes at Caprarola. The complex iconography of the Pallio frescoes is based around subjects appropriate to the patron and his family, as well as to the location of the chapel, in a manner which recalls the choice of imagery for the Sala Paolina (pl. 6): thus St Paul is depicted in allusion to Alessandro's grandfather, and St Lawrence was selected for the wall adjoining Alessandro's titular church, S. Lorenzo in Damaso. The major themes of the programme – the overthrow of idolatry, conversion and the return of the Golden Age – also reflect Alessandro's current Counter-Reformatory concerns. While Vasari's frescoes in the Sala dei Cento Giorni had celebrated the achievement of a Farnese *aureum saeculum* through patronage and diplomacy, so the frescoes of the Cappella del Pallio dwell on the religious aspirations of Paul III's pontificate. Such thematic continuity is reinforced by the unusually large number of images drawn from classical sources in the chapel, which suggest a breadth of taste which is far from the rigid attitudes to religious iconography expressed by some theologians of this time.

According to Vasari, the commission was obtained for Salviati in 1548 by his old friend, Annibal Caro, together with Giulio Clovio, and it was his first major project after returning to Rome from Florence.¹⁷ Salviati's work would of course have been well known to Alessandro from the commissions he had executed during the 1530s for his father.¹⁸ The Cardinal evidently shared Pier Luigi's admiration for Salviati's art. For a short period he was clearly Alessandro's favourite painter, although he was much in demand elsewhere in Rome. He received from Alessandro several commissions for religious works as well as those for works of decorative art, and his style was, as we have seen, highly influential on artists working within the Farnese circle.¹⁹ Despite Salviati's notorious restlessness, Farnese continued to support him until the last years of the painter's life. He assisted him in the negotiations to get the commission for the Sala Regia, preferring him to Taddeo Zuccaro. He was also probably involved in the commissioning of the Sala dei Fasti Farnesiani in Palazzo Farnese with his brother Ranuccio.²⁰ It is possible that Salviati's known ability as a speaker contributed to his success with the Cardinal, as had been the case with Vasari.²¹

The decoration in the chapel was, as Vasari reported, probably begun in 1548, employing some of Perino's *stuccatori*, who had just been working in the Sala Regia.²² Although there are difficulties with Vasari's chronology in his Life of Salviati, he had worked in the Cancelleria in 1546 and would certainly have known if his friend had already worked there. A short break in the execution probably did occur around May 1549, when Salviati undertook to complete the Markgrafen chapel in S. Maria dell'Anima.²³ He must, however, have returned to work in the Cancelleria some time before he completed the Anima frescoes in August 1550, since Cardinal Alessandro ordered the floor to be laid there the previous month,



143. Francesco Salviati, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1548–50, oil on peperino, Rome, Cancelleria, Cappella del Pallio (Photo: Musei Vaticani, Archivio Fotografico).

'because I am certain that Salviati will quickly provide you with the painting'.²⁴ It is possible that Alessandro, always an impatient patron, was exerting pressure to have the chapel finished in time for a visit of Julius III to the Cancelleria later in 1550.²⁵

The history of the altarpiece, which is painted on peperino, is particularly difficult to disentangle, but it seems to have been painted in at least three stages.²⁶ The work shows an Adoration of the Shepherds, with Alessandro Farnese kneeling at one side, and a young St John the Baptist in front of him (pl. 143). The figure of St Joseph bears a portrait of Paul III. It is very likely that the work was not originally intended for the Cappella del Pallio, but was hastily adapted by the artist, who was occupied with numerous commissions at this time. This is suggested not only by Vasari's statement that Salviati painted it 'accommodating' the



144. Francesco Salviati, *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, 1548–50, fresco, Rome, Cancelleria, Cappella del Pallio (Photo: Musei Vaticani, Archivio Fotografico).

145a and b. Francesco Salviati, *Conversion of St Paul*, 1548–50, fresco, Rome, Cancelleria, Cappella del Pallio (Photo: Musei Vaticani, Archivio Fotografico).



146 (facing page). Francesco Salviati, *Beheading of St John the Baptist* (bottom) and *Janus welcomes Saturn to Rome*, 1548–50, fresco, Rome, Cancelleria, Cappella del Pallio (Photo: Musei Vaticani, Archivio Fotografico).



portrait of Alessandro,²⁷ but by visual evidence: the figure of the Cardinal, though it is in Salviati's hand, is on a much larger scale, rather uncomfortably squeezed into the picture, and is painted over an earlier background.²⁸ At a later date the figure of the Baptist and the head of Paul III were added. This must have been done very late in the execution, probably after, and as a result of, Paul's death in 1549. The addition of the portrait is extremely clumsy: the figure on to which it was joined was originally female, and probably represented St Anne. Her head was turned at a different angle, away from the spectator. Had the portrait been painted to correspond with the pose of the rest of the figure, the face would have been invisible. That the altarpiece was accepted in this unsatisfactory form suggests that the fact of having the portrait of Paul was of rather greater importance than its actual appearance. Rubin has offered another explanation, suggesting that decorum was the motive for the alteration: the removal of the apocryphal scene originally depicted there might have been prompted by obedience to Tridentine pressures, but how far Alessandro was concerned to follow such strictures, particularly in his private chapel, remains open to question.²⁹

The greatest problems of the chapel's decoration concern the meaning of its unusual and complex iconography, which was drawn from a wide range of biblical, patristic and classical sources. The overall structure of the scheme is clear: three walls are each dominated by a large *storia*, which announces the general theme of the scenes vertically above it. The three main subjects are: the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* (pl. 144), the *Conversion of St Paul* (pl. 145), and the *Beheading of St John the Baptist* (pl. 146). Above each main subject is a lunette and a small scene, painted in oil on plaster, set into a richly gilded, stuccoed ceiling (pl. 147). The upper images elaborate certain aspects of each saint's life and form a kind of temporal sequence, showing man's development towards the Christian Golden Age. Thus above the *St Lawrence* are two images of the destruction of pagan idols. They were apparently selected because, according to Prudentius, the decline of pagan worship dated from his martyrdom.³⁰ Similarly, the subjects above the *Beheading of the Baptist* emphasise the coming of the new era which he ushered in: one scene apparently illustrates the text of Isaiah, 11: 6–8; the other, Janus welcoming Saturn, whose arrival in Rome heralded the start of the classical age of gold (pl. 146). The *Janus and Saturn* follows the account in Ovid's *Fasti*, but one minor detail was derived from Virgil's *Messianic Elogue*: Salviati paints a group of multi-coloured sheep, following the poet's bizarre suggestion that among the benefits of the coming age would be that flocks would be born with their fleeces already tinted, thereby removing the need to 'lie' with dyes.³¹ Presumably, whoever devised the programme found this piece of Golden Age imagery, so readily translatable into paint, too good to omit. Over the *St Paul* the two scenes apparently dwell on the theme of conversion: in the lunette St Paul celebrates the Eucharist while pagan idols are destroyed.³² The meaning of the scene above, which shows a forge, probably alludes both to Isaiah 2: 3–4 and to the Vulcanalia, a festival celebrated in Roman times just by the Cancelleria.³³ Three prophets are also depicted on the walls. Flanking the *Conversion* are two narrow panels showing Jonah and David. In the corresponding position to David on the altar wall opposite is depicted Isaiah.

The other images on the altar wall follow the same temporal sequence: on the



147. Francesco Salviati, ceiling of the Cappella del Pallio, 1548–50, oil on plaster, Rome, Cancelleria.

ceiling is shown *Moses before the tabernacle*, a highly appropriate subject for this position. Below, in descending order, are a prophet and a sybil, an Annunciation and the altarpiece itself, with the Nativity. The altar wall thus depicts the events that have finally brought about the new Golden Age.

The pervasive themes of the chapel's iconography are expressed through highly sophisticated and learned imagery, which is in every way typical of Annibal Caro, who probably wrote the programme.³⁴ It is entirely suitable for a patron with a taste for *varietà*.³⁵ Such sophisticated iconography is also characteristic of Salviati's fresco cycles, notably the schemes for the Sala delle Udienze in Florence and for Palazzo Sacchetti, which are complex even by Cinquecento standards. Like Vasari, Salviati was evidently partial to such unusual programmes, and one wonders to what extent this taste developed as a result of association with the Farnese circle and with Caro in particular. In the Cappella del Pallio both religious and classical subjects are used to convey the Counter-Reformatory message in a manner that recalls the *Farnese Hours*. As in Clovio's book, this treatment might have seemed indecorous in the chapel of a leading churchman, although the degree of erudition required to interpret the frescoes would have ensured that they were not of a kind that 'any plebeian would understand', as another Farnese iconographer might have remarked.³⁶ It is significant that the Cappella del Pallio was a private chapel, which would have been accessible to only a few of Alessandro's

intimates. None the less, the choice of subjects does suggest that the Cardinal did not share the zealous desire of some of his contemporaries to reform painted religious images.

The increasingly rigid attitude that prevailed after the Council of Trent originated in the 1540s and was doubtless in part a response to Protestant criticism.³⁷ Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* became the focal point of demands for reform in Catholic iconography from the moment it was unveiled in 1541.³⁸ The overwhelming reaction was enthusiastic admiration, but the fresco also aroused intense hostility from the 'Theatine' cardinals, led by Gian Pietro Carafa. They objected to many unorthodox details, such as the beardless Christ and angels without wings, and to the characters from classical mythology, like Minos and Charon. But above all, Michelangelo's critics disliked the display of so much nudity, regarding it as indecorous for so sacred a place.³⁹

There is no evidence to suggest that Alessandro Farnese was particularly in accord with the group who were scandalised by the *Last Judgement*.⁴⁰ On the contrary, he had an engraving of the fresco made in 1546 by Giulio Bonasone.⁴¹ He may also have been involved in the commission of 1549 to Marcello Venusti for a miniature version, now in Naples (col. pl. X). Family patronage was very closely knit at this period, as the commissions to Titian and work on Palazzo Farnese indicate. Although Paul III actually paid for the copy of the *Last Judgement*,⁴² it is tempting to suggest that Alessandro might have taken the initiative in commissioning it: the desire for a miniature Michelangelo is certainly consistent with his taste for small-scale works of art, which is most marked in his patronage of the 'little Michelangelo', Clovio.⁴³

None of Alessandro's private commissions for religious art at this time suggests that he was particularly concerned that his imagery should be theologically correct. That the iconography should be erudite and sophisticated was apparently more important. Unfortunately, we cannot judge how far this attitude was modified with regard to public religious commissions. These are very few in number and difficult to reconstruct. According to Vasari, Salviati frescoed two angels for a chapel in Alessandro's titular church, S. Lorenzo in Damaso, apparently around 1550.⁴⁴ This may be a work in the church, showing a Madonna beneath a baldacchino supported by two angels, although this was painted on canvas.⁴⁵ A *Pietà* with St John and the Virgin by Salviati is also recorded in an inventory, but no trace of it survives.⁴⁶ Vasari informs us that Perino del Vaga also decorated a chapel for Alessandro, but we do not even know where this was.⁴⁷ Apart from these works, the only religious commissions documented before about 1560 are a few devotional miniatures by Clovio, mostly intended as gifts, and some rock crystals engraved with religious subjects.⁴⁸

'Parmi che sia diventato tutto spirituale . . .'

Over the course of the 1560s a remarkable change occurred in the pattern of Alessandro's religious patronage: during this decade he embarked on an impressive programme of ecclesiastical construction, renovation and decoration. This was accompanied, as contemporaries observed, by an almost ostentatious increase in



X. Marcello Venusti, after Michelangelo, *Last Judgement*, 1549, oil on panel, 190 × 145 cm., Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Scala).

his piety. In the rest of this chapter the Cardinal's programme of religious reform will be reconstructed and examined within the general context of post-Tridentine Rome, and his motives as a patron will be considered.

During the years around 1560 the religious climate of Rome changed considerably. Vasari was perhaps exaggerating when he described the changes he found in 1567, after some twenty years; but his complaints evoke vividly the new atmosphere. Rome's former *grandezze* were, he related, 'reduced with the parsimony of life, with the mediocrity of dress and with the simplicity of so many things that Rome has fallen into great misery'.⁴⁹ The systematic reform started by Paul IV (1555–9), formerly Cardinal Carafa, was promoted energetically by his successor Pius IV (1559–65). The Cardinal Vicar of Rome, Giacomo Savelli, received new powers in 1559, the year of Pius's election, and he initiated a series of visits to the city's churches. These were intended to investigate their administration, the performance of divine worship and their state of repair.⁵⁰ Two years later the Pope had extensive restoration carried out in many churches, particularly at S. Giovanni in Laterano. He also urged the cardinals to have their titular churches renovated.⁵¹ Unfortunately, the privileges accorded to cardinals and members of the papal Curia greatly complicated the task of reform in Rome, and results were slow to appear. The reports of the visitations of 1564 make it clear that the vast majority of churches in the city still urgently needed both spiritual reform and physical repair; frequently patrons had ceased to contribute to the upkeep of their chapels, and in some cases it was not even known who the patrons were.⁵²

From about 1563, as the Council of Trent drew to a close, Cardinal Farnese was evidently making many changes in the churches over which he had jurisdiction. He repeatedly referred in his correspondence to the need to implement the decrees of the Council and to be seen to be setting an example. Thus he wrote in 1563 about finding a new archdeacon for his cathedral of Monreale in Sicily: 'My desire is that that church be well served and its jurisdiction maintained in such a way that no one could ever say that it received any harm during my time'.⁵³ The following year he wrote to his mother encouraging her to give sixteen *scudi* towards the newly established seminary in Parma, 'not only so that one should obey the decree of the Council concerning this, as I have already ordered should be done in all the places where I have interests, but also to give an example to the others who ought to do their duty more promptly'.⁵⁴ He ordered all his churches and the other religious foundations under his jurisdiction to be inspected over the next two decades, and numerous reports testify to the many 'disorders' that were discovered.⁵⁵ At his abbey of the Tre Fontane, for example, it was found that the monks, who were described as 'badly governed', had not been celebrating mass even on important feast days.⁵⁶ Alessandro's instructions to his agents clearly demonstrate his anxiety to remedy the abuses, not only in obedience to the Council but to avoid any hint of scandal.

On one occasion it is apparent that he was performing his duty partly at least as the result of papal pressure. Pius V clearly felt that in his elevated position Alessandro should set an example to the other cardinals. Alessandro wrote to his brother-in-law, the Duke of Urbino, in 1568 describing how he had been effectively compelled to visit his cathedral at Monreale:

In these last days Our Lord has let it be known in public and in private that he wishes the cardinals to visit their churches, and to me in particular he has shown his desire that I should be the one to set an example for the others, persuading me with many reasons. I am resolved to go, as much for the reverence that I owe the orders of His Holiness, as for the act itself, which I recognise no less as a duty than as honourable and reasonable.⁵⁷

Clearly in this climate Alessandro had no choice but to be seen to be both reforming and materially embellishing his churches. This does not, however, entirely account for the scale on which he began to commission religious works of art: in addition to the external stimuli of the final decrees of the Council and papal orders, there were apparently other motivations. Firstly, he was extremely ambitious to attain the papal tiara himself. During the seven conclaves following the death of Paul III he played an influential rôle in the election of every pope.⁵⁸ And from at least 1564 he sought to become pope himself.⁵⁹ He was regarded as *papabile* in the conclaves of 1566, 1572 and 1585, but his hopes were repeatedly frustrated by the opposition of Spain and of the Medici.⁶⁰ In spite of this disappointment, from this time Alessandro was awarded many new ecclesiastical dignities, particularly under Pius IV, to whom he was very close.⁶¹

Although the Cardinal's religious patronage had already increased considerably from about 1560, like many others he undertook a special campaign of building and restoration during the early 1570s, largely with the Jubilee of 1575 in view.⁶² Thus in 1574 Aurelio Coperchio wrote to Alessandro concerning the Abbazia delle Tre Fontane:

The Holy Year approaches. I remind you that it would be good to give orders to have completed in time that which needs to be done at the Tre Fontane in the way of repairs and restorations, as well as those vestments that you wanted made.⁶³

Efforts were also made to have the tomb of Paul III installed in time for the Jubilee.⁶⁴

Quite apart from external influences, Alessandro gives the impression of having become much more pious around this period, although how far this was a public façade rather than a genuine increase in spirituality is open to question. In 1564 he was finally ordained as a priest, after some thirty years as a cardinal in minor orders, and at the same time he was consecrated as a bishop. He was certainly not alone in becoming ordained after such a long period: in the same year Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, Cardinal Carafa and Cardinal Gonzaga did the same.⁶⁵ But the *avvisi* concerning this occasion report that Alessandro's devotion and submission gave rise to much comment: 'he is so changed as the day from the night'. It was remarked that he indeed seemed to have become '*tutto spirituale*'.⁶⁶

This new piety coincides with the development of a close relationship with the Jesuit Order. The Farnese had encouraged the Society of Jesus since 1539, when Paul III had authorised its establishment. His grandson employed the Jesuits regularly to inspect his benefices in Rome and elsewhere.⁶⁷ In 1563 he wrote to his suffragan bishop in Monreale, recommending that he cultivate links with them.⁶⁸ The following year he was also instrumental in the founding of a Jesuit college at

Avignon, of which he was Archbishop. He was subsequently to describe it as bringing ‘welfare and consolation daily to the entire area’.⁶⁹ His support of the order is most conspicuously demonstrated by his building for them the largest church to be built in Rome since the Sack, the Gesù, although the sceptical might see this as more an act of monumental self-advertisement than one of genuine piety.

Whether we find Cardinal Farnese’s overnight conversion of 1564 convincing or not, at any rate during the last decade of his career we do find evidence suggesting true spirituality. His association with the Jesuits continued to the end of his life. Indeed, a priest of the order assisted him in performing pious exercises up to the moment of his death.⁷⁰ Another report from Rome of 1586 stated:

It is most true that Cardinal Farnese in everything and through everything has dedicated himself to the spirit. He has the Jesuits at his side continuously, and is concerned only with his wish to cast off these mortal honours [*grandezze*], and with giving alms regally . . . to pious places.⁷¹

The Cardinal had always given alms fairly lavishly, but towards the end of his life the amount rose spectacularly as the result of Jesuit advice: from 1587 he gave away 30–33,000 *scudi* per year, a marked increase on the 1,200 *scudi* he paid in alms in 1569.⁷² A manuscript in the Jesuit archives describes at length how the aged Cardinal, ‘most desirous of his soul’s salvation’, was persuaded by his Jesuit confessor to dispose of a quarter of his revenues from the Church for charity.⁷³ This evidence suggests a serious piety, which apparently contrasts with the Cardinal’s attitudes in earlier years, during which we must consider other motives than the strictly spiritual as dictating the course of his religious patronage.

S. Lorenzo in Damaso

When, in 1561 Pius IV encouraged his cardinals to restore their titular churches, many had already begun such work: St Carlo Borromeo, for example, had S. Prassede extensively remodelled between 1560 and 1565.⁷⁴ Cardinal Truchsess had the mosaic at S. Sabina replaced with a fresco by Taddeo Zuccaro in 1560;⁷⁵ the Cardinal of Portugal gave a magnificent wooden ceiling to SS. Quattro Coronati; and Cardinal Borromeo, again, paid for another at S. Martino ai Monti.⁷⁶ The English Jesuit Gregory Martin, who visited Rome between 1576 and 1578, in a chapter of his book *Roma sancta* entitled, ‘Their daily buildinge of new churches and garnishing the old’, exclaimed:

Whom would it not delight to see the Cardinals so renew and beautifie the Churches of their titles. Borromaeo, the Church of S. Praxedes: Sainctes, the Church of SS. Thom. and Paul. Grandvile, Petri ad vincula and so others more or lesse?⁷⁷

Cardinal Farnese was not slow to follow papal suggestion or to adopt the practice of his fellow cardinals. The patronage that he rapidly bestowed on his titular church, S. Lorenzo in Damaso, provides a characteristic example of the way in

which he would physically refurbish and redecorate his churches at the same time as attending to their religious reform. Before the 1560s S. Lorenzo had not received much attention from Alessandro, as his patronage had been concentrated almost exclusively on secular works and buildings. Salviati's *Madonna with angels* is the only known example of his patronage there before this period. During this decade, however, there was a notable increase in his commissions for this church.

In July 1563 Bishop Cesarino, the suffragan Bishop of Rome, sent the Cardinal certain orders for approval, which had been drawn up by the vicar of S. Lorenzo, apparently in response to papal demands, 'so that S. Lorenzo may set the standard for all the other churches in Rome'.⁷⁸ At the same time Alessandro employed the Jesuits to visit the forty or so dependent parishes of the church.⁷⁹ His continuing concern for the spiritual welfare of his parishioners is reported in many letters.⁸⁰ It was particularly important, as he repeatedly stressed, to appoint good preachers.⁸¹ Alessandro's reform of S. Lorenzo in Damaso is described at length in an eighteenth-century manuscript, now in the church archives, which is based on contemporary documents. This mentions that in June 1568 the Cardinal provided a permanent curate 'for the spiritual good of the parishioners'. The importance of such a gesture is apparent from the fact that when, in 1571, Alessandro asked Pius V to confirm this appointment, the Pope followed his lead and nominated twelve more such curates for other parishes in Rome.⁸² In 1576 Farnese also established a Collegio dei Beneficiati, 'for the greater dignity of Divine Worship'.⁸³ Further efforts were made to improve religious devotions within the church and, as so often, to be seen to be setting an example. Patrons of chapels in S. Lorenzo were urged to undertake reforms in their religious practice. For example, Alessandro wrote to the Bishop of Aleria in 1568, rebuking him for the infrequency of service in his chapel. Both the decline in proper observance and Farnese's concern that S. Lorenzo should be the 'norm' for other churches emerge from his instructions to the neglectful Bishop that in future mass should be said at least three times a week, in addition to Sunday, 'so that one may provide better for the worship of God and so that you may set an example to the rest who should be doing the same'.⁸⁴

Some restructuring work had already been started at S. Lorenzo in 1559, but the documents suggest that the initiative was taken by the canons and the Fabbrica, rather than by the Cardinal. His architect, Vignola, was commissioned to direct the alterations, but this may have been a move to get Alessandro to pay for the renovations, as was the case when the Oratorio del Crocefisso tried to employ his painter, Giovanni de' Vecchi.⁸⁵ The most important changes were intended to increase the amount of light in the church and involved adding windows and painting the interior white, following the example of other churches in Rome.⁸⁶ It was also proposed to move the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit to the high altar, once more in accordance with post-Tridentine practice, but this led to a serious dispute with the Compagnia del Sacramento, in whose chapel it was located.⁸⁷

Alessandro himself apparently took no part in the renovation of his titular church for several years. However, in the mid-1560s he had structural work carried out prior to decorating the nave and tribune, the most prestigious areas. He began in 1567 by having a new roof constructed, since he already had plans to install a coffered wooden ceiling. This was an extremely fashionable form of church patronage at this time, although the ceiling at S. Lorenzo was not to be

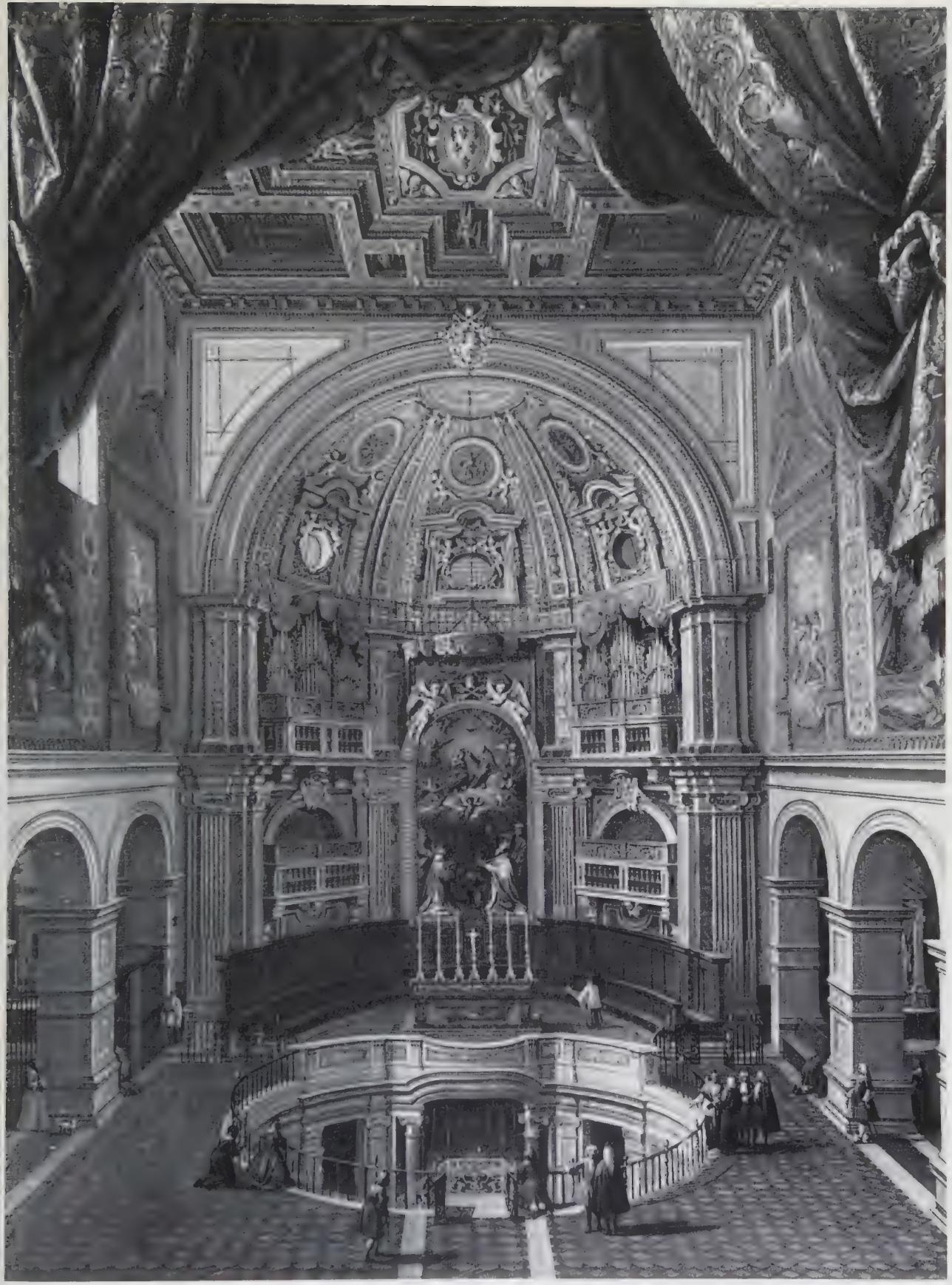
installed for some twenty years.⁸⁸ At the same time a new *campanile*, which had been planned for some years, was built at the request, and partly at the expense, of the parishioners. A new door, designed by Vignola, (pl. 148) was contributed by the Cardinal.⁸⁹

Around this time Alessandro commissioned a new altarpiece for the high altar from Taddeo Zuccaro. This must have been ordered shortly before the painter's death in September 1566, since four late drawings by Taddeo are known. These show alternative schemes of the Martyrdom of St Lawrence and the Virgin and Child adored by St Lawrence and St Damasus.⁹⁰ The commission, like that for Caprarola, was inherited by Taddeo's brother Federico and executed during 1567–8 (pl. 153). In April 1568 Alessandro was advised that the work would be finished on his return from Sicily, and that it would be 'such a beautiful work that there will be nothing like it in Rome'.⁹¹ The resulting altarpiece, however, seems over-elaborate and incoherent, an unhappy compromise, since Federico first conflated the two subjects sketched by Taddeo (pls 150–1), and then substituted for the simpler composition of the Madonna and Child the more elaborate Coronation of the Virgin (pl. 152). It is not clear whether this change in iconography was made at the request of the patron (or one of his advisers) or whether Federico himself altered it in an attempt to solve an artistic problem: the variations between Taddeo's designs suggest that he had not achieved a fully satisfactory means of filling the central area of the altarpiece. If Federico was responsible for changing the subject, this would be a rare example of iconographic freedom being given to a Farnese artist.⁹²

After the altarpiece was completed, some fifteen years were to elapse before Alessandro had any further decoration commissioned for S. Lorenzo. The long-awaited ceiling was installed in 1587. Though now destroyed, it is partially visible in an eighteenth-century view of the church's interior by Giuseppe Valeriani (pl. 149). An early seventeenth-century description relates that it was carved with a figure of St Lawrence and four scenes from his life.⁹³ The Farnese arms were prominent, and an inscription dated 1586 further commemorated the patron.⁹⁴ A letter of Cardinal Farnese to his agent, Giulio Folco, who was simultaneously overseeing work at the Gesù, informs us that the craftsmen were pupils of one 'Maestro Marco, carpenter'.⁹⁵ The ceiling was not unveiled until the following year, when Don Vincenzo Lodetto wrote to Alessandro to describe how its splendour had impressed the populace of Rome, who flocked to see it.⁹⁶



148. Jacopo Vignola, doorway to S. Lorenzo in Damaso, 1567 (Photo: Author).





150. Taddeo Zuccaro, *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, 1566, pen and brown wash, 24.8 × 20.6 cm., Oxford, Ashmolean Museum (Photo: Ashmolean Museum).



151. Taddeo Zuccaro, *Virgin and Child in Glory with Sts Lawrence, Damasus, Peter and Paul*, 1566, pen and brown wash with black chalk underdrawing, 54.0 × 36.0 cm., Oxford, Ashmolean Museum (Photo: Ashmolean Museum).

It is unlikely that Alessandro planned any additional adornment for S. Lorenzo before the 1580s, since it was usual for Roman churches built or refurbished after the Sack to have a plain white nave, with coloured decoration restricted to the apse and altarpieces of chapels.⁹⁷ During this decade a new fashion arose for painting narrative subjects in the nave in the area above the entablature. This revolution in church decoration was started in the Madonna de' Monti. It may be significant that this was built between 1580 and 1582 under the patronage of Alessandro's friend Cardinal Sirleto and designed by Alessandro's favourite architect at this date, Giacomo della Porta.⁹⁸ Alessandro was not slow to take up this development, and the nave of S. Lorenzo was frescoed in 1587. Another slightly later example may be seen at S. Prassede. The frescoes commissioned by Alessandro were destroyed during the nineteenth century, together with the ceiling, but their appearance can be partially reconstructed from copies, preparatory drawings and contemporary descriptions.



152. Federico Zuccaro, modello for the S. Lorenzo in Damaso high altarpiece, 1568, pen and brown wash, with white heightening on blue paper, 42.2 x 23.6 cm., Paris, Louvre, no. 4434 (© Photo R.M.N.).



153. Federico Zuccaro, *Coronation of the Virgin with Sts Lawrence, Damasus, Peter and Paul*, 1568, oil on slate, Rome, S. Lorenzo in Damaso (Photo: I.C.C.D.).

Three artists were employed at S. Lorenzo: Giovanni de' Vecchi, Niccolò Circignani and the young Giuseppe Cesari. The frescoes about which we know most are those by Cesari, the future Cavaliere d'Arpino, who decorated the right-hand side of the nave with scenes of *St Lawrence tending the poor and sick* and *St Lawrence accompanying St Sistus to martyrdom*.⁹⁹ The corner of the former can be seen in Valeriano's view of the church (pl. 149). There exist later versions of both paintings on canvas, in Cesari's own hand and dating from about 1620, as well as a *bozzetto* for *St Lawrence tending the poor and sick*.¹⁰⁰ These show crowded compositions in Cesari's characteristically graceful, if vapid, style. He also painted a *Glory of angels* above the organ (pl. 154), which remains *in situ*.¹⁰¹ Of Circignani's frescoes Baglione tells us that the subjects were *St Lawrence before the judge* and the *Beating of St Lawrence*.¹⁰² The only visual evidence is Valeriano's painting which shows one *repoussoir* figure, somewhat reminiscent of the figure on the right of Circignani's *Cosroe and Heraclius* in the Oratorio del Crocefisso.¹⁰³ Alessandro as



154. Giuseppe Cesari, *Glory of Angels*, 1587–9, fresco, Rome, S. Lorenzo in Damaso.

protector of that confraternity would certainly have known this work, and it may have been influential in his decision to employ Circignani.

Giovanni de' Vecchi, on the other hand, had already worked for the Cardinal on several occasions, and was indeed preparing cartoons for the Gesù altarpiece at the same time.¹⁰⁴ According to Baglione, Giovanni painted a *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* on the end wall of the church opposite the high altar.¹⁰⁵ The claustrophobic composition is almost certainly recorded in a copy on alabaster (pl. 155), which shows the saint on the grate with arms stretched out towards a statue of the Virgin and flanked on the right by soldiers. Two figures on the left stoke the fire, while two child angels hover over the saint.¹⁰⁶ The saint's pose corresponds closely to that worked out in three nude studies in the Uffizi (pls 156–7).¹⁰⁷ It has also been suggested that a large study by de' Vecchi for the decoration of an apse, now in Christ Church (pl. 158), may have been a project for S. Lorenzo in Damaso, since St Lawrence is prominent among the saints there depicted. If, as is likely, Alessandro had any plans for the apse, they were presumably terminated by his death in 1589.¹⁰⁸

A striking feature of the decorative scheme of S. Lorenzo in Damaso is the number of scenes of torture and martyrdom; St Lawrence himself was depicted roasting on the grate three times. Such scenes were very much in vogue at this date, most notably in the Jesuit churches, and it is conceivable that their appearance here may reflect Cardinal Alessandro's close links with the order.¹⁰⁹ Realism in the depiction of Christian suffering was, however, also a quality praised in the post-Tridentine treatises on painting.¹¹⁰

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155 (above). After Giovanni de' Vecchi, *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, oil on alabaster, 17.1 × 22.2 cm., New York, Sotheby's, 7 June 1978 (Photo: courtesy of Sotheby's).



156. Giovanni de' Vecchi, *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, 1587, black chalk on blue paper, 27.4 × 41.7 cm., Florence, Uffizi, 13961F.



157. Giovanni de' Vecchi, *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, 1587, black chalk on blue paper, 23.6 × 42.0 cm., Florence, Uffizi, 7377F.



158. Giovanni de' Vecchi, *Christ in Glory with the Virgin, St John the Baptist, Sts Peter, Paul, Stephen and Lawrence*, c.1589, pen and brown wash and watercolour with bodycolour over black chalk, 38.7 x 49.0 cm., Oxford, Christ Church (By permission of the Governing Body, Christ Church).

Medieval churches: Grottaferrata, Monreale, Farfa

The pattern discussed above, of extensive ornamentation and restoration in conjunction with spiritual reform, is one that is echoed in a number of Alessandro's other churches. The particular forms of patronage preferred by him are also repeated. Most notable among these are his commissioning carved wooden ceilings and reserving for himself the decoration of tribune and nave, thus ensuring that his commissions were located in the most visible and prestigious parts of the church. The concern for impressive façades and piazzas in front of his churches, which we shall see several times, is another aspect of this pattern, which suggests that his religious patronage was not simply motivated by piety. Many similarities may be found in Alessandro's renovation of three medieval churches: the abbeys of Farfa and Grottaferrata, not far from Rome, and the cathedral of Monreale in Sicily. His patronage here also reveals a more positive attitude to medieval art than one might have expected. This in some respects anticipates the antiquarian revival of interest in the early Church and especially in mosaic begun by Cardinal Baronius in which Alessandro was also involved.¹¹¹ In these three churches Alessandro, while under-

taking major restoration, insisted on preserving their medieval appearance to a considerable degree, explicitly rejecting the possibility of adapting them to new Counter-Reformation trends.

When he took possession of the abbey of Grottaferrata in 1564, Alessandro found it in great need of repair, ‘not only in its exterior structure, but also internally’.¹¹² It had already been threatened with suppression.¹¹³ The Cardinal’s first proposal was to increase the number of monks: the monastery still used the Greek rite, and it was difficult to find monks with sufficient knowledge of the language. He then turned to the fabric of the monastery: in 1567 the abbot’s palace was enlarged and a new loggia built. This was frescoed with subjects appropriate to the location, scenes from the history of Tusculum. The artist is not known, but it has been plausibly suggested that he belonged to the Zuccaro workshop, which was simultaneously working for Alessandro at Caprarola.¹¹⁴ At the same time a fountain was built in the abbey’s grounds and probably the aqueduct that still supplies the monastery.¹¹⁵ No documents name the architect responsible for these projects, but it is hard to imagine that it was not Vignola, who was charged by the Cardinal with even the most minor architectural commissions at this date.

Somewhat later, in 1577, Alessandro had the abbey church of S. Maria at Grottaferrata restored and partially reconstructed: the apse was demolished and a new choir built. Once again the architect is unknown, but Giacomo della Porta is the most likely candidate. He had by this time taken over Vignola’s position as Farnese’s architect and was already in charge of the reconstruction of the monastery at Farfa.¹¹⁶ A coffered wooden ceiling was installed at Grottaferrata in 1577. This was carved with the *stemme* of the abbey and of the Cardinal, and its inscription recorded Alessandro’s munificence, just like that at S. Lorenzo in Damaso.¹¹⁷

Interestingly, the medieval mosaics were left intact. In this respect Alessandro’s attitude may be contrasted with that of Cardinal Truchsess at S. Sabina: he had the mosaic there replaced with a fresco of the same subject, but whether this was done in a spirit of modernisation or because the mosaic was damaged is not clear.¹¹⁸ At Grottaferrata the mosaics were preserved at Alessandro’s express request when his majordomo, Bishop Rufino, suggested that the nave, apart from the mosaics, should be whitewashed, partly for the sake of economy and partly for ‘bellezza’.¹¹⁹ The fate of the medieval frescoes was, however, less happy: some were covered up by the new ceiling, some were destroyed in the remodelling of the apse, and the remains were repainted.¹²⁰

In his earlier restoration, begun in 1561, of the twelfth-century cathedral of Monreale, Alessandro had similarly retained some original decoration: on this occasion he had had the wooden ceilings restored and a new marble pavement laid, whose pattern took up their principal motifs.¹²¹ Both cases may reflect a taste on Alessandro’s part for medieval art, though it is difficult to know how much influence he exerted over the Monreale restoration, given that he visited the cathedral only in 1554 and 1568.¹²²

At both Monreale and Grottaferrata many of the old altars that had stood in the nave were removed, increasing the space for the congregation. According to the suffragan at Monreale, this was partly necessitated by the fact that the winds made it too dangerous to celebrate in the nave, but he also commented that the

alteration added considerably to the ‘ornament and beauty’ of the basilica.¹²³ It is questionable whether in this case Alessandro would have agreed with him. Bishop Rufino removed the altars at Grottaferrata under the misapprehension that his patron wished this to be done and, as he explained, in accordance with current trends: ‘Having seen similar changes made in so many important churches in Rome and outside, all for the greater ornament of divine worship and the increase of popular devotion’.¹²⁴ Cardinal Farnese was, however, extremely angry at this alteration, as we learn from the unfortunate Rufino’s later letters.¹²⁵

A very similar pattern of patronage to that for Grottaferrata recurs in Alessandro’s contemporary restoration of the abbey at Farfa, where he replaced his brother Ranuccio as commendator in 1563.¹²⁶ A fountain (pl. 159) and a mill were started by Vignola in 1568, but their construction was not completed until after the architect’s death.¹²⁷ They were presumably finished by Giacomo della Porta once more. The *fontanone* had an inscription, as usual, to record Alessandro’s generosity; now much overgrown, it was composed by Fulvio Orsini.¹²⁸ Della Porta also designed the new buildings when the monastery was rebuilt in 1578.¹²⁹

Unlike Grottaferrata and Monreale, the basilica at Farfa was much more recent, dating from the late Quattrocento, although the foundation of the monastery was very ancient.¹³⁰ Ranuccio had already begun some decoration inside the basilica, commissioning Hendrick van den Broeck, also known as Arrigo Fiammingo, to fresco the magnificent *Last Judgement* on the entrance wall in 1561.¹³¹ Somewhat later, in 1586, Alessandro had frescoes painted throughout the nave (pl. 161), and these are usually attributed to the Zuccaro circle.¹³² Between the

159. Jacopo Vignola and Giacomo della Porta(?), fountain, 1568–after 1573, Farfa (Photo: Author).



160. Attr. Giovanni Garzoni da Viggiù, gateway to the Abbot's Palace, Poggio Mirteto, 1577 (Photo: Author).





161. Follower of Federico Zuccaro, *Benedictine popes and saints*, 1586, fresco, Farfa Abbey (Photo: Author).

windows of the clerestory, prophets are shown in painted niches, and beneath the window openings are the doctors of the church. Various Benedictine popes are painted in roundels between the arches. Over the central arch leading to the presbytery is depicted the Annunciation, with Sts Benedict and Scholastica below. The rest of the surfaces in the central nave are decorated with unusual and rich painted intarsia work. The programme, though not particularly novel, is entirely appropriate for a Benedictine foundation. The rest of the decoration, the late-Mannerist grotesque work in the lateral naves and in the apse, and the paintings in the side chapels by the young Orazio Gentileschi date from after Alessandro's commendatorship.¹³³

Alessandro encouraged further religious building on the lands belonging to Farfa. A new monastery was built at nearby Fara Sabina, for which the community begged the loan of his architect in 1584, so as not to build something 'without design and perhaps without proportion'.¹³⁴ At Poggio Mirteto a gateway to the abbot's palace was erected in 1577 (pl. 160). It is decorated with Farnese lilies and an inscription, commemorating Alessandro's patronage.¹³⁵ In addition, between 1585 and 1587 Alessandro had the fifteenth-century palace restored and expanded in order to be able to visit the monastery more often.¹³⁶ The work was directed by one 'Giovanni Antonio architetto'.¹³⁷ He is probably to be identified with Giovanni Antonio Garzoni da Viggìù, who took over at Caprarola on



162. Giacomo della Porta, Bishop's Palace, Velletri, 1581–8 (Photo: Paul Davies).

Vignola's death.¹³⁸ Structural work was carried out which, according to the documents, involved building a new staircase and several rooms.¹³⁹ The present building was somewhat altered when it was turned into a seminary in the nineteenth century, and it is now difficult to determine exactly where Alessandro's additions to the building were made.

In the early 1580s Alessandro also decided to build a new episcopal palace at Velletri (pl. 162), of which he had become bishop in 1578. This was designed by Giacomo della Porta.¹⁴⁰ The work was at least partly financed by the community, as at Poggio Mirteto, and difficulties with money as well as with the builders, and their inability to understand the architect's design in his absence, all led to many delays, so that it was not finished before 1588.¹⁴¹

Church-building: the confraternities

Still more important than Alessandro's programme of restoration of the religious foundations under his jurisdiction is the number of churches that he had built *de novo*, or to whose construction he contributed substantially. A close examination of the ample documentation surrounding these commissions is, moreover, most revealing about Alessandro's views on architecture and his attitudes as a patron. The list of new churches in whose building and decoration he was instrumental is impressive: the Gesù, the Oratorio del Crocefisso, the Oratorio del Gonfalone, S. Chiara al Quirinale and S. Maria Scala Coeli. No other patron in Rome could compete with this extraordinary display of ecclesiastical munificence.

Very few new churches were begun in Rome during the three decades after the Sack. This seems to conform to a trend throughout Italy. Thus Sebastiano Serlio, writing in 1540, lamented the lack of enthusiasm for church architecture:

But since, either because of lack of devotion, or because of men's greed in our time, no more sizeable churches are begun, nor are those already started finished, I shall set out these churches of mine as small as possible, so that they can be completed with less expense and in the minimum time.¹⁴²

Whether or not Serlio was correct in asserting that it was simply motives of greed and lack of piety that brought this about, it is certainly true that until Alessandro Farnese undertook the commission for the Gesù in 1561, all the churches built in Rome after the Sack were relatively small ones. A more immediate cause, however, was surely the scale of the devastation and the depression of the Roman economy caused by the imperial invasion.

Before 1527 most new churches were built as national foundations for visiting foreigners. These new national churches include some of the most important and ambitious Cinquecento churches in Rome, such as S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini (begun 1520), S. Luigi de' Francesi (from 1518), S. Maria di Monserrato (the church of the Aragonese and Catalans, also from 1518) and Trinità de' Monti (the French pilgrims' church, 1502–85). The trend for national churches continued almost throughout the century, notably with S. Girolamo degli Schiavoni (begun 1588). That there was greater wealth available before the Sack is also suggested by the building of the important confraternity church, S. Eligio degli Orefici (begun 1516) for the guild of goldsmiths.

Most of the churches begun in Rome after the Sack were constructed on a small scale, with only modest decoration. They were built almost exclusively for confraternities rather than as the result of private patronage. The number of confraternities in Rome grew rapidly during the sixteenth century, and they served a number of varied functions, including providing charity for members of a particular guild, assisting pilgrims, converting prostitutes and acting as centres for particular forms of devotion.¹⁴³ They operated in almost all cases with strictly limited funds, the more so since such money as they did have would be spent on pious works rather than on the fabric of their buildings. Inevitably their churches tended to be small and architecturally rather simple. Confraternity patronage certainly accounts for the vast majority of churches founded in Rome throughout the sixteenth century, including S. Giovanni Decollato (1534–5), S. Marta al Vaticano (1538), the Oratorio del Gonfalone (1544–7), S. Marta al Collegio Romano (1546–56), S. Eligio de' Ferrari (1562), S. Angelo al Corridoio (1564–5), S. Anna dei Palafrenieri (1565/6–72), S. Maria dell'Orto (1566), S. Andrea in Vincis (completed 1572), S. Maria dell'Orazione e Morte (1575) and S. Giuseppe dei Falegnami (1583).¹⁴⁴

As this list suggests, the end of the Council of Trent provided a major impetus in the new enthusiasm for church-building and decoration. As Armenini commented, in striking contrast to Serlio, 'since the publication of the sacrosanct and universal Council of Trent, it seems that throughout Christendom there is almost a competition in the building of most beautiful and sumptuous churches, chapels and monasteries'.¹⁴⁵ Up to this time, certainly, very few individuals had undertaken

the construction of an entire church. An exception is the tiny church of S. Tomaso de' Cenci, built between 1559 and 1562 by Cristoforo Cenci.¹⁴⁶ That the cardinals neglected to have churches built is probably primarily the result of their having their own titular churches on which to bestow their patronage. From the 1560s, however, several patrons financed entire churches. Two built during this decade are particularly relevant with regard to Cardinal Farnese's patronage. The first is S. Lorenzo in Panisperna (pl. 163), which was built around 1565 by Cardinal Sirleto, who was also responsible for building the Madonna de' Monti in 1581.¹⁴⁷ Sirleto had influential connections with Alessandro, and his patronage of S. Lorenzo may have given a fillip to Alessandro when he was hesitating over the Gesù. However, S. Lorenzo in Panisperna, being very modest in design, cannot have exerted any architectural influence. The second important church for Alessandro, S. Caterina de' Funari, was constructed between 1560 and 1564 for Cardinal Federico Cesi. This church, as we shall see, provided not only an architectural model in certain respects for Alessandro's Gesù, but also a model and indeed a rival in terms of patronage. Other cardinals had churches built during the early 1570s, probably in part under the spur of the approaching Holy Year. These included S. Maria in Trivio, built from 1571 by Cardinal Cornaro, and the Cardinal of Norfolk's S. Tomaso di Canterbury (1575). S. Atanasio de' Greci was built by Gregory XIII between 1580 and 1583, but under the supervision of Cardinal Santa Severina, patron of the Greek College.¹⁴⁸

The first new church in whose erection Alessandro was involved was the Oratorio del SS. Crocefisso di S. Marcello (pls 181–2). His dealings with the confraternity for whom it was intended, the Compagnia del SS. Crocefisso, are particularly informative about his motives as a patron. He was the major protector of a number of other confraternities, including the Compagnia del Gonfalone, the confraternity of the Corpo di Nostro Signore, that of the Concettione della Beata Vergine, and the Compagnia della Morte.¹⁴⁹ The last three were founded in S. Lorenzo in Damaso during the sixteenth century, so it was only to be expected that Alessandro should become their protector.¹⁵⁰ The protectorship of the Gonfalone evidently resulted from his having been archpriest of S. Maria Maggiore.¹⁵¹ It is worth enquiring whether there is any significance in the fact that Alessandro was responsible for two of only three confraternities in Rome to have extensive fresco decoration in their oratories, and if so, one might consider



163. Attr. Francesco da Volterra, S. Lorenzo in Panisperna, façade, c.1565 (Photo: Author).

whether this is the result of Farnese taste. But, as we shall see, this is difficult to establish because Alessandro was never prepared to take full responsibility for the building and decoration of these oratories. Just as the congregation of S. Lorenzo in Damaso had initially to bear much of the financial burden for improvements to their church, so, too, in both the Crocefisso and the Gonfalone, Alessandro required the confraternity to fund much of the construction and painting, while reserving the right to intervene in certain aspects.

The Oratorio del Crocefisso was constructed as the result of concerted family patronage. It was begun in 1561, while Ranuccio Farnese was protector of the confraternity, and Ottavio also contributed to the costs of the building at this time.¹⁵² The simple box-like structure was soon usable but, as so often with the new confraternities, funds were lacking for the completion of the façade.¹⁵³ As at Farfa, Alessandro inherited the protection of the company after Ranuccio's death in 1565, and he rapidly put pressure on them to have a square created in front of the oratory. They had already tried to acquire the land but, like the Jesuits, had encountered resistance from the owners.¹⁵⁴ In 1567, however, Alessandro gave them one hundred *scudi*, which were used to purchase the necessary site.¹⁵⁵ He then began to urge the confraternity to have the façade finished. The records of their meeting of 23 November 1567 state: 'Our most illustrious protector reminds us every day that the façade of the oratory does not look good [*non sta bene*], and that he thinks it should be finished.'¹⁵⁶ Some of the lower part of the façade had already been built, but the payments indicate that the greater part of the work was done between 1567 and 1568, after the Cardinal's intervention.¹⁵⁷ Even with this assistance, the confraternity had to have the façade finished in stucco, apart from the travertine plaque recording the support of Ranuccio and Alessandro, a revealing fact about the Cardinal's priorities (pl. 182).¹⁵⁸ The architect was the young Giacomo della Porta, and, as we shall see, the façade of the oratory was, like the piazza, to provide an important precedent for the Gesù. On this occasion Alessandro was evidently content to continue with the design established under Ranuccio's commendatorship, which was shown on a medal of 1562 (pls 164 and 181).



164. Anon., *Ranuccio Farnese* (obv.) and *Oratorio del SS. Crocefisso di S. Marcello*, 1562, medal, London, British Museum (Photo: Warburg Institute).

Alessandro contributed also to the decoration of the interior: he paid for a wooden ceiling, which was begun by Flaminio Boulanger in 1573 but not finished until 1584.¹⁵⁹ Not before 1578 were artists engaged to paint the walls with the cycle of the legend of the True Cross. At that point the confraternity evidently hoped that by appointing Farnese's favourite painter they could persuade their protector to subsidise the decoration, 'with the intention that the Cardinal should pay the entire expense'.¹⁶⁰ Unfortunately for them this plan did not succeed, but Giovanni de' Vecchi did, somewhat later, paint two *storie* – *St Helen ordering the destruction of idols* and the *Finding of the True Cross* – together with the adjacent prophet and sybil (pl. 165).¹⁶¹

Another artist who was employed in the Oratorio was Niccolò Circignani, shortly to work alongside de' Vecchi in S. Lorenzo in Damaso.¹⁶² The Oratorio del Crocefisso seems thus to have been influential for Alessandro's subsequent choices of architect and artists. Interestingly, his great rival as a church patron, Federico Cesi, seems to have stepped in to support some of the decoration after Farnese's refusal to do so: Cesi's arms are to be found below the second *storia* painted by Circignani, *Heraclius barefoot before Jerusalem*.¹⁶³

Although Alessandro's responsibility for the decoration seems to have been very limited, the decorative system has significant connections with the scheme for the Oratorio del Gonfalone, which was executed partly under the Cardinal's patronage during the early 1570s.¹⁶⁴ He was elected protector of the confraternity in 1565, succeeding Federico Cesi.¹⁶⁵ The precise rôle played by him in the Gonfalone commission is difficult to determine, but the evidence suggests a rather high-handed treatment of the confraternity with, once again, only lukewarm support which would be suddenly withdrawn.¹⁶⁶ In both the Gonfalone and the Crocefisso Alessandro seems to have acted more as an artistic consultant who gave occasional financial assistance, rather than as a patron in the usual sense.

The decoration of the Gonfalone's interior forms an important artistic model for that of the Crocefisso. The Gonfalone, like the Crocefisso, has an elaborately carved wooden ceiling which includes Alessandro's arms, along with those of Cardinal Otto Truchsess, whose patronage of the confraternity remains rather obscure.¹⁶⁷ There is no documentation to indicate that Alessandro had anything to do with the commission for this work, which appears merely to record his rôle as the confraternity's protector.¹⁶⁸

A number of artists connected with Alessandro also worked in the Gonfalone. It is likely that he recommended Bertoja, who was the first to work on the decoration.¹⁶⁹ The Parmesan artist executed the *Entry into Jerusalem* (pl. 166) in 1569, and established the decorative system for the rest of the walls. Bertoja would scarcely have been known outside his native city at this time; indeed, how much Alessandro would have known of his work then is uncertain, but he may have heard good reports from his brother Ottavio and summoned the artist, so that Federico Zuccaro might not, at this point, be distracted from his work at Caprarola. Possibly the confraternity applied to the Cardinal to suggest a painter in the hope, like the Compagnia del SS. Crocefisso, that Alessandro would also contribute to the expenses of the decoration. That they succeeded in this instance is indicated by the fact that Alessandro continued to pay Bertoja a monthly stipend while he was painting in the oratory.¹⁷⁰ This, however, also meant that the



165. Giovanni de' Vecchi, *St Helen ordering the destruction of idols*, 1578, fresco, Rome, Oratorio del SS. Crocefisso di S. Marcello (Photo: I.C.C.D.).



166. Jacopo Bertoja, *Entry into Jerusalem*, 1569, fresco, Rome, Oratorio del Gonfalone (Photo: I.C.C.D.).

Cardinal retained the right as the painter's chief patron to withdraw Bertoja at short notice, as he did on Zuccaro's dismissal, much to the confraternity's dismay. Evidently Alessandro regarded the completion of his villa as a greater priority.

It has been plausibly suggested that Raffaellino da Reggio may have been offered to the confraternity in 1575 to make belated amends for the removal of Bertoja, but also as a convenient solution to the jealous rivalry between him and Giovanni de' Vecchi at Caprarola.¹⁷¹ Another apparent case of a Farnese artist's involvement with the Gonfalone concerns the *Agony in the Garden* of 1571. This has been attributed to Giovanni de' Vecchi and would, if he were the author, be the first known occasion on which the artist worked on a Farnese-connected commission. But this attribution has more recently been rightly rejected.¹⁷²

Not only does the pattern of Alessandro's patronage of both confraternities reveal striking parallels, but the decorative systems employed in the two oratories also show many affinities. The Gonfalone scheme, devised by Bertoja, is arranged in two bands above the choir stalls. The central part of the wall contains



167. Francesco Salviati, *Visitation*, 1538, fresco, Rome, Oratorio di S. Giovanni Decollato (Photo: I.C.C.D.).

a series of narrative *storie* opening, like theatre sets, between pairs of painted Salomonic columns. Above runs a frieze decorated with swags of fruit, with small illusionistic tabernacles containing allegorical figures, set over the columns. Between these tabernacles on the upper band are seated figures of prophets and sybils.¹⁷³

The decorative system established by Giovanni de' Vecchi in the Oratorio del Crocefisso is a complex variant of this scheme (pl. 165). Here the *storie* are set between prophets and sybils seated in tabernacles on the lower band. The *storie* open behind tabernacles alternating with broken segmental pediments and baldacchinos. The upper zone above the narratives is occupied by seated *igmudi* holding swags, angels adoring the cross, and personifications. The narratives are treated as stage-sets in a manner that also recalls the Oratorio del Gonfalone. More generally, the layout of the walls resembles markedly that found in a number of other Farnese commissions, notably Salviati's Sala dei Fasti and Vasari's Sala dei Cento Giorni. It is therefore tempting to speculate whether the decoration of these two oratories might not exemplify a specific Farnese style, which was perhaps used in a calculated attempt to appeal to the Cardinal's taste and thereby to his generosity. This is, however, difficult to demonstrate. It is important to relate the decoration also to the scheme for the Oratorio di S. Giovanni Decollato (pl. 167), and in particular to the theatrical treatment employed there by Salviati.¹⁷⁴ This was the only other oratory in Rome with extensive decoration and is likely to have been an influential model, although the scheme there, presented in only one band, is somewhat simpler. Moreover, theatrical representation was important for

the Gonfalone as part of the confraternity's devotion, making such treatment of the wall space particularly apposite. We must therefore conclude that artistic influences, and especially the inspiration of Salviati, were more significant in the evolution of the decorative scheme than any patronal concerns.

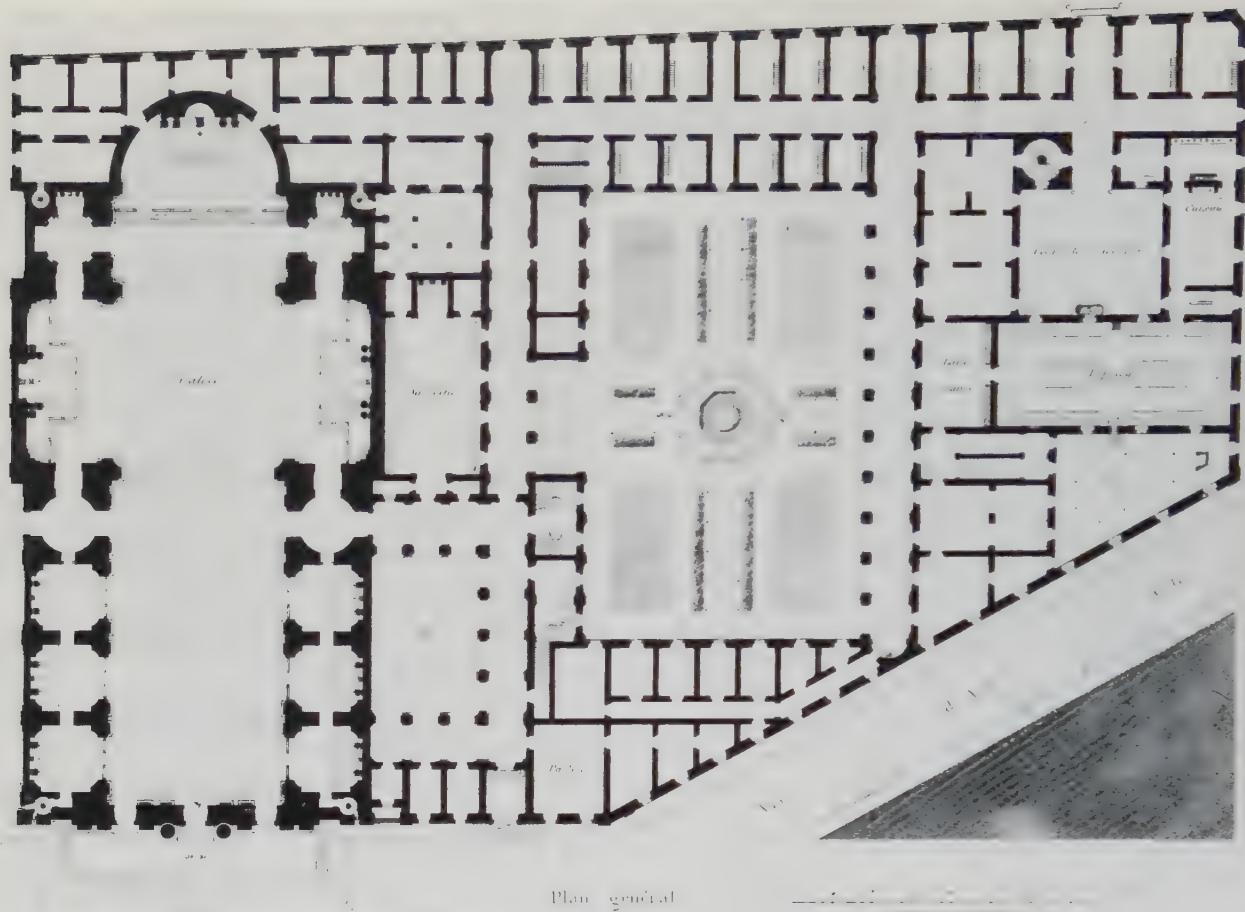
Support for the building of one further confraternity church in Rome may have resulted from Alessandro's patronage of the Oratorio del Crocefisso. In 1574 the confraternity decided to have built a new nunnery for poor but noble virgins, S. Chiara al Quirinale, which is now destroyed.¹⁷⁵ The Duchess of Tagliacozzo donated a *vigna* for the site. Alessandro was kept closely informed of the progress of the building, but it is not known whether he made any contribution to its construction or decoration.¹⁷⁶ The foundation of the convent is recorded in a fresco by Cristoforo Roncalli on the entrance wall of the Oratorio del Crocefisso, which may include a portrait of Alessandro witnessing the event.¹⁷⁷

Il Gesù

Unquestionably Alessandro's single most significant ecclesiastical commission was the church of the Gesù in Rome, designed by Vignola, with the façade and dome completed by Giacomo della Porta. The importance of this project can scarcely be exaggerated (pls 168–9, 183). Although there had been much restoration, and important architectural developments had been made in minor churches, this was the first large church to be constructed in Rome after the Sack. Indeed, it was at this date the largest church in the city apart from St Peter's, and it was to provide a most influential model for future churches, most immediately for S. Andrea della Valle and the Chiesa Nuova, both of which belonged to new orders, the Theatines and the Oratorians respectively. It also set the pattern for countless Jesuit churches all over the world.

The Gesù embodies all the features that we regard as characteristic of the Counter-Reformation church, although it is hard now to imagine its appearance in the mid-sixteenth century, stripped of its later Baroque encrustations. Since preaching was becoming increasingly important for the new orders, the church was built with a single wide nave, to hold a capacious congregation. The nave was conceived as an essentially self-sufficient space, distinct from the side chapels and from the chancel and crossing, to emphasise the liturgical functions of the different spaces. A large number of side chapels were provided so that many masses could be celebrated at the same time, the result of Tridentine emphasis on the Eucharist. These were linked by interconnecting passages, so that the priests could move towards the high altar without disturbing those in the nave. The separation of the various spaces of the church was emphasised by the decoration, as we can see from seventeenth-century prints and paintings (pl. 169 and col. pls XI, XII), with paintings restricted to the side chapels, high altar and crossing.¹⁷⁸

The essentials of the Gesù's architectural history are well established, notably through the studies of Pirri and Pecchiai.¹⁷⁹ Some new documentation, however, enriches our knowledge of Alessandro's rôle in the building of the church. The Gesù also raises issues that illuminate his religious patronage and his relations with other patrons more generally. There are two especially striking characteristics of

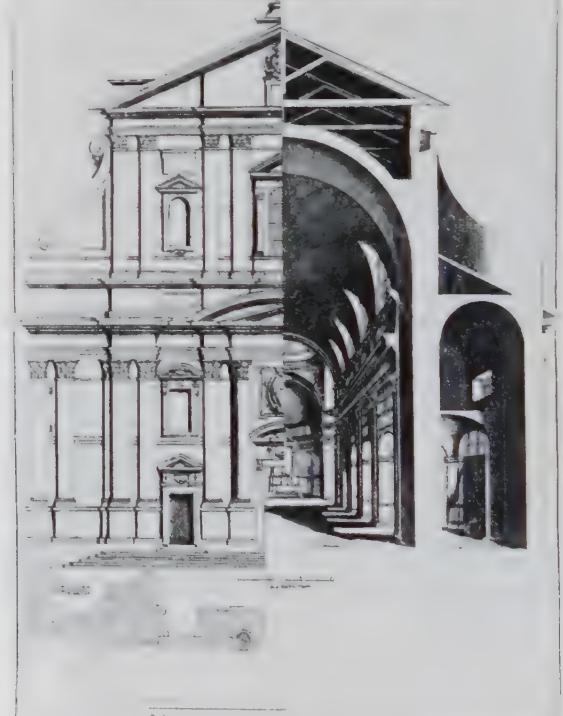


Plan général

168 (above). P. Letarouilly, *Ground plan of the Gesù and Casa Professa*, from Letarouilly, *Edifices de Rome Moderne*, 1868–74, pl. 198 (Photo: Warburg Institute).

EX EXPOSITA VV. PROSPECTU INFERIORIS TEMPLI AB ALEXANDRO
CARDINALI FARNESIO SC. IESV ADIFICATI

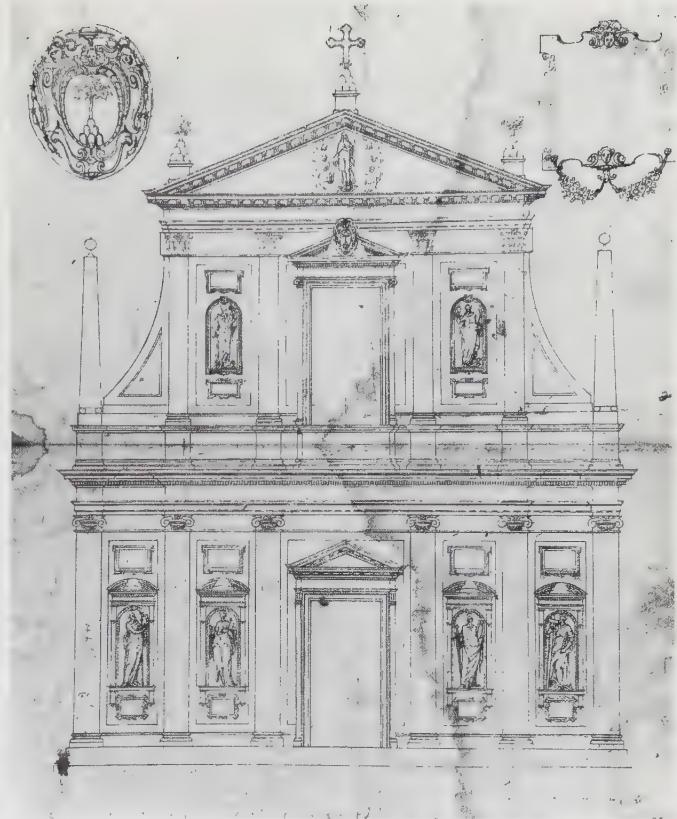
PART. EXTERIOR. Secundum Prosp. Exposit. Part. INTERIOR. Secundum Prosp. Exposit.



169. V. Regnartius, interior of the Gesù, engraving.



170. G. Guidotti, façade of S. Caterina de' Funari, 1564 (Photo: Author).



171. Martino Longhi the Elder, project for the façade of the Chiesa Nuova, 1581–6, pen and ink over black chalk, 48.6 × 40.1 cm., Milan, Ambrosiana.

the commission. The first is the Cardinal's possessive attitude towards the church: he seems, in fact – as his boast about owning the three most beautiful things in Rome indicates¹⁸⁰ – to have regarded the Gesù as entirely his own. Also revealed by the enterprise is his competitiveness with regard to other patrons who were building new churches. It is possible that Alessandro, with his concern to keep up appearances of reform, was initially prompted to build the Gesù by Cardinal Federico Cesi's starting the nearby church of S. Caterina de' Funari in 1560, which was a Jesuit-sponsored enterprise. Cesi had much in common with Alessandro as patron and collector. Both were wealthy and collected antiquities avidly, both were close to the Jesuits at this period and, as we have seen, both were involved with the Oratorio del Gonfalone and the Oratorio del Crocefisso.¹⁸¹ Alessandro's decision to build an even bigger and better Jesuit church seems to have initiated a keen rivalry between the two families in patronage. This became quite explicit when Federico's heir, Pier Donato Cesi, decided to support the building of the Oratorians' new church, the Chiesa Nuova, and planned to have its façade built in an almost identical manner to that of S. Caterina de' Funari (pls 170–1), so that Farnese's church would be sandwiched between two recognisably Cesi churches.¹⁸² This explains Alessandro's attempts to delay the Oratorians' acquisition of their site which, conveniently for him, fell within the parish of S. Lorenzo in Damaso.¹⁸³ That his motives in having the Gesù built were not altogether

otherworldly is suggested by the condition he imposed before construction began that the Jesuits should not accept aid from any other patrons.¹⁸⁴ It is unlikely that Alessandro would have had any desire to share the credit for the Gesù with anyone else.

Moreover, he intended the church to stand as a future Farnese sepulchre, and to this end he reserved for himself and his descendants the area immediately in front of the high altar.¹⁸⁵ Similar intentions had probably dictated his enlarging, and possibly decorating, the church of S. Giacomo and S. Cristoforo Martire at Isola Bisentina in 1562.¹⁸⁶ This had been constructed for Ranuccio Farnese in 1431, and Alessandro's parents were buried there, as was his brother Ranuccio on his death in 1565, his body being interred immediately above that of his eponymous ancestor.¹⁸⁷ Alessandro later had a memorial to him erected in S. Giovanni in Laterano, designed by Giacomo della Porta and with an inscription by Fulvio Orsini.¹⁸⁸ In the meanwhile Alessandro decided to bestow on future generations a far grander monument. He himself was the first member of the family to be buried in the Gesù: his tomb is strikingly simple – a plain marble slab with a short epitaph, once more by Orsini, composed according to the 'forms used by the ancients'.¹⁸⁹

* * *

Cardinal Farnese first offered to meet the expense of a new church for the Compagnia di Gesù in 1561.¹⁹⁰ His assistance must have been most welcome, since their original church of S. Maria della Strada was tiny and desperately overcrowded.¹⁹¹ The Jesuits had already had a plan made by Nanni di Baccio Bigio in 1550, which they had been unable to execute for lack of funds.¹⁹² Even after Alessandro had offered to pay for the church, there were protracted delays before construction got underway. These were the result partly of his dilatoriness in producing the money, and partly of difficulties in acquiring the land for the church.¹⁹³ As late as March 1568, only months before building began, it was apparently not certain that Alessandro would keep his word: his agent Giulio Folco wrote to him at that date to inform him that he had arranged to purchase a particular piece of land, 'in the event that you wish to build the church'.¹⁹⁴

During the negotiations, as is well known, Alessandro made it very clear that it was he who would take the decisions about the church's architecture. He wanted something more modern and more imposing than Nanni's project, and it was to be designed by his architect, Vignola. Early in 1562 Padre Polanco, the Company's secretary, wrote rather despairingly,

Perhaps [the delay] is because Cardinal Farnese cannot begin it immediately for lack of funds, or because Hieronimo Altieri is putting up great resistance to giving up his house . . . The truth is that he [Alessandro] is determined to build this church by himself, and he sent his architect one day to measure and consider the site. May God do what is best . . .¹⁹⁵

As far as the architecture was concerned, the Jesuits were indeed permitted little say. They did maintain their own architect, Giovanni Tristano, who had designed

a number of the order's churches outside Rome. It has been argued that Tristano contributed significantly to the form of the Gesù, but Ackerman has rightly dismissed this idea: documentary evidence suggests rather that Tristano's rôle was limited to executing Vignola's ideas.¹⁹⁶ In the early stages the Jesuits were only too happy to accept their patron's wishes. For example, Francisco Borgia, then General of the Company, wrote to Alessandro in 1563:

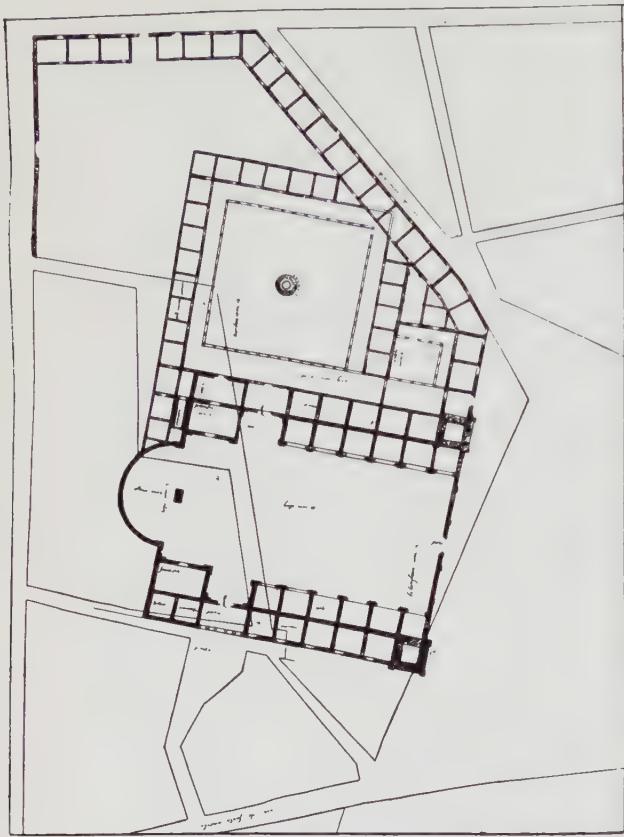
In accordance with your orders to Padre Polanco in person, and to me by letter, the design of the church was given to Messer Jacopo Vignola, who has adapted it to your wishes, as he himself states. And his design seems good to us too. I am sending our Master Giovanni [Tristano] with him, so that he may understand your latest resolution and bring it to us.¹⁹⁷

But after construction had started in 1568 tensions arose because the Cardinal wished to impose certain architectural features on 'his' church, which the Jesuits were reluctant to accept. Until late in the summer of that year the final plan was not settled, although work on the foundations had begun. At this point the Company was still expressing its desire to concur with Alessandro's wishes. Thus on 18 August Giulio Folco reported: 'it will be in your power to make the church large or small, and with as many naves as you wish, because nothing has been done, or will be done, to impede your will'.¹⁹⁸ Folco's next letter reveals more about the designs being considered by the Jesuits. Five days later, on 23 August, he wrote:

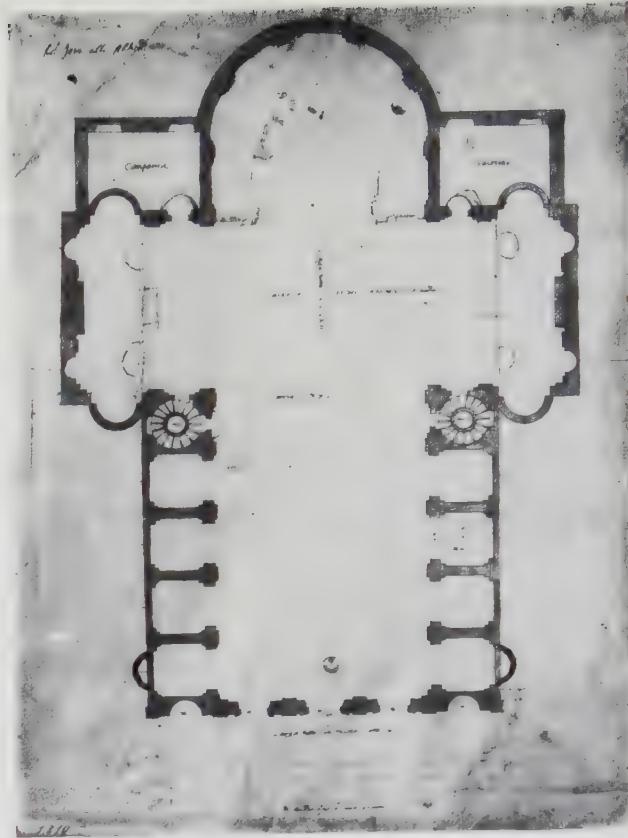
Many congregations have been held concerning the design of the church. The common view was that something should be built which would not cost more than the 25,000 *scudi* which you did not wish to exceed, and which could be finished in a short time. Maestro Nanni made a design of three naves with columns, highly costly and time-consuming. Messer Pirro made another, with only one nave, and about thirty *canne* long. The fathers have had one of twenty-five *canne* made, according to their wishes, though submitting to your will in everything. And because Messer Pirro writes at length in his design, I shall say no more.¹⁹⁹

Two drawings have previously been associated with Nanni's 1550 project. One is a plan of the complex of the church and an adjoining cloister, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, which is generally taken to be by the Florentine architect, although almost nothing is known about his draughtsmanship (pl. 172).²⁰⁰ This shows an open church with a single nave in what Ackerman has termed the 'box style', a *retardataire* style that accompanied religious reform in the years after the Sack of Rome. Ackerman has also plausibly suggested that the amateurish qualities of the design may be the result of Jesuit suggestions.²⁰¹

The second design that has been connected with this project is in the Uffizi (pl. 173) and was once attributed to Michelangelo, who had agreed to make drawings for the Gesù in 1554.²⁰² Nothing, in fact, came of this, and Michelangelo is certainly not the author of the Uffizi sheet, although the red chalk corrections on it could be by him. The drawing shows a variant on the Paris project, with a single nave and a total length of about 25 *canne*. It has generally been assigned to Nanni,



172. After Giovanni Tristano(?), project for the Gesù, before 1568, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale (from Pirri, 1941; Photo: Warburg Institute).



173. Giovanni Tristano(?), project for the Gesù, before 1568, Florence, Uffizi, 1819A.

because of its relationship to the Paris drawing.²⁰³ In the light of Folco's letter, however, both drawings must reflect the Jesuit-commissioned design for a church of 25 *canne*, and not Nanni's elaborate scheme, which we now know to have had three naves. It is tempting to suggest that these designs might have been produced by a Jesuit architect, possibly Giovanni Tristano.

The single wide nave which would permit preaching to large crowds, of which the Gesù is the first example on a grand scale in Rome, is usually regarded as a specifically Counter-Reformation development, and has been particularly associated with the new religious orders. Indeed, as another of Alessandro's advisers, Bishop Garimberto, wrote on 15 September 1568, this type of design was 'well divided, adorned and adapted to the purpose of those fathers for whose needs a church with a single nave is very well suited'.²⁰⁴

In this important letter Garimberto went on to criticise the three-nave design as being too expensive to build and requiring too much time, not to mention the fact that the available site was too small for such a church. These are the same objections that Folco had reported, and it may be significant that these were largely practical rather than liturgical, implying that the Jesuits were not strongly

committed to a particular style but merely wanted their church to be built as soon as possible.²⁰⁵ On the other hand, if the Paris and Uffizi drawings really represent the Jesuits' wishes, one must conclude that the single nave was an important priority for them, and that Nanni had considerably misunderstood their needs.

Folco's letter of 23 August also introduces the name of another architect who has not hitherto been associated with the planning of the Gesù. Pirro Ligorio was more or less at the end of his Roman career in 1568, following his success under Pius IV.²⁰⁶ Unfortunately, no trace of his design for the Gesù has survived; the explanation that accompanied it would be a valuable document. It is not, however, altogether surprising that Alessandro did not favour Ligorio's plan. Although the Cardinal had employed him as an antiquarian, his flamboyant style of architecture was not particularly in accord with Alessandro's rather more austere taste, as evidenced by his continuing patronage of Vignola.²⁰⁷

Our knowledge of Vignola's earlier plans for the Gesù is limited. In 1563 he adapted the design in the Jesuits' possession, which was presumably the Uffizi-Paris project.²⁰⁸ Subsequently he produced two radically different schemes of his own – not only that which was ultimately executed, but also a design with an oval ground-plan, a form particularly favoured by Vignola. In 1955 Lotz published a copy after Vignola by Oreste Vannocci Biringucci of a scheme for an oval church (pls 174–5).²⁰⁹ Since then there has been some controversy as to whether it could indeed be for the Gesù. Both Lotz and Ackerman have argued that the oval plan is closely related to the foundation medal of June 1568 (pl. 176).²¹⁰ This is, in fact, confirmed by the letter of Garimberto, already quoted. After praising the final design approved by the Cardinal, he mentioned his own preference for an alternative plan by Vignola: 'I saw earlier a design of the said church in oval form, which infinitely increased the desire I had before to see this building in this form.'²¹¹

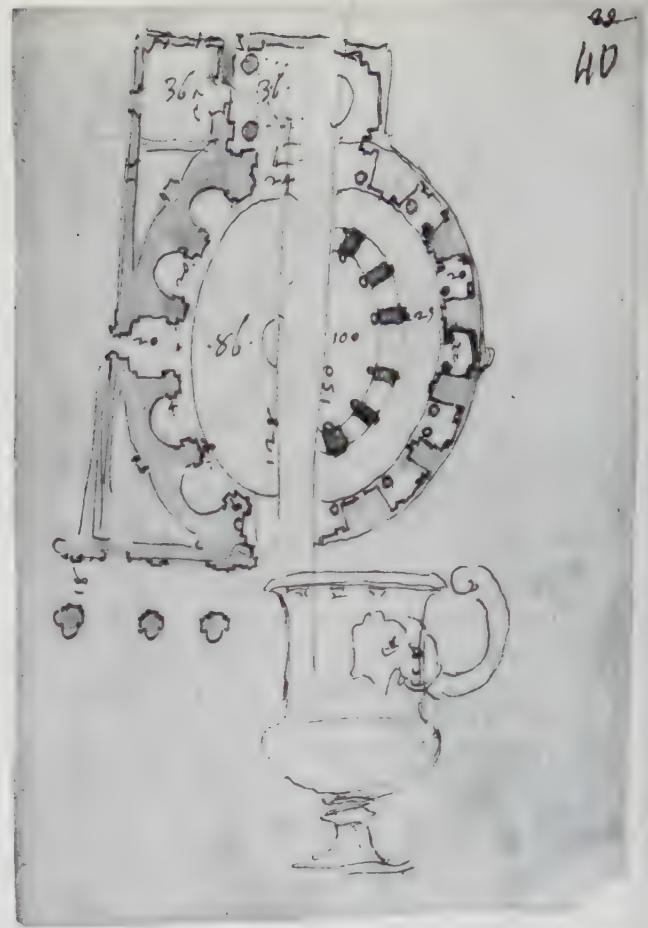
The oval ground-plan was one of Vignola's keen interests at this period. He was the first Italian architect to build such a church, although the form had already appeared in drawings by Peruzzi and Serlio. He had previously experimented with it in the oval dome of S. Andrea in Via Flaminia, and in a number of chapel plans. He seems to have been toying with such a plan for S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini at this time and was shortly to build a major oval church, S. Anna dei Palafrenieri.²¹² In the event, the oval design for the Gesù may have been rejected either as too expensive, or perhaps too radical for the Jesuits' intentions.

Not before August 1568 did Vignola produce the definitive plan for the church. On 26 August, three days after Folco had written to Alessandro about the schemes being considered by the Company, a meeting was held at Caprarola between the patron, Polanco and Tristano. On this occasion Alessandro insisted on certain features that were to be included in the plan whether the Jesuits wanted them or not. The discussion was reported to Vignola in a celebrated letter:

I have wished to write what occurs to me, which mostly conforms to what we have discussed and deliberated on other occasions, namely that, bearing in mind that the total sum that I wish to spend on the church is 25,000 *scudi*, the design shall be such that without exceeding this amount, it shall be well proportioned, according to the good rules of architecture. The church shall not have three



174. Oreste Vannocci Biringucci, after Jacopo Vignola, project for the façade of the Gesù, Siena, Biblioteca Communale (Photo: Roberto Testi, Siena).



175. Oreste Vannocci Biringucci, after Jacopo Vignola, ground plans for two oval churches, Siena Biblioteca Communale (Photo: Roberto Testi, Siena).

176. G. Bonsegni, reverse of the Gesù foundation medal, 1568, diameter 3.9 cm., London, British Museum (Photo: Warburg Institute).



177. Jacopo Vignola, Façade of S. Maria dell'Orto, begun 1567 (Photo: Author).

naves, but only one with chapels on both sides. I particularly wish the site of the church to fall... with the façade towards the street and the house of the Cesarini. The church is to be covered with a vault, and not otherwise, even though [the Jesuits] are creating difficulties on account of the preaching. They think that the voice will resound unintelligibly because of the echo... which does not seem very probable to me from the example of other churches of even greater capacity. Provided that you observe these things principally, that is, the cost, the proportion, the site and the vault, I leave the rest to your judgement.²¹³

Alessandro here stresses particularly the amount he wished to spend on the church. It is difficult to acquire information on the expenses of building other churches in Rome at this time, although Antonio da Sangallo's model for St Peter's cost, according to Vasari, 4,184 *scudi*, which was said to have been as much as a small church.²¹⁴ But Alessandro's limit of 25,000 *scudi* seems to have been unrealistic. Writing in 1627, his majordomo stated that he spent 100,000 *scudi* on the Gesù. The surviving household accounts inform us that the church was financed, at least in part, out of Alessandro's revenues from the priorship of Venice.²¹⁵ Between 1568 and 1570 he actually spent just over 8,000 *scudi*, but presumably the later costs of building the dome and the travertine façade would have been considerably greater.²¹⁶

The features over which Alessandro seems to have been at odds with the Jesuits are the substitution of a vault for a flat ceiling and the orientation of the church to give a grander impression. That he should insist on a vault, instead of a flat ceiling, is at first sight unexpected, since he was to commission so many wooden ceilings for other churches. But these were all either for existing churches, or for small structures, where a more monumental effect would have been inappropriate. The idea may well have come from Vignola, who had been exploring the potential of vaulted ceilings from as early as 1551, with S. Andrea in Via Flaminia. He may have convinced the Cardinal that the prevailing acoustical arguments for flat ceilings were mistaken. In the event, Vignola's success with the Gesù led to a rapid decline in the popularity of flat ceilings in churches built in Rome after this period.²¹⁷

A desire that the church should appear imposing was certainly the motive for Alessandro's decision about its orientation. He wrote to Francisco Borgia, probably on the same day that he wrote to Vignola, insisting that the Gesù should be built with the high altar towards Palazzo Venezia and the nave parallel to what is now Via del Plebiscito (pl. 178). The church would then face into the existing piazza, ensuring that the façade could be properly seen.²¹⁸ The previous church on the site, S. Maria della Strada, apparently ran at right angles to this, with its main length along the piazza (pl. 179).²¹⁹ One reason why the Jesuits may have been reluctant to change the orientation is the persistent difficulty that they had found in their attempts to acquire a sufficiently large site.²²⁰ Giulio Folco, on the other hand, did all he could to encourage the Cardinal to regularise and develop the piazza: in his letter of March 1568 he wrote about the acquisition of the Altieri's land: 'It seemed necessary to me to have this house to ensure that the church should have a more beautiful piazza, streets and site... And if this does not please you, I shall willingly pay for it myself.'²²¹ Fortunately, as the letter to Vignola



178. Detail of a map of Rome by M. Cartaro, 1576 (Photo: Warburg Institute). The Gesù is no. 27 in the Platea Altieriis, top right corner.

179. Detail of a map of Rome by L. Bufalini, 1551 (Photo: Warburg Institute). S. Maria della Strada is labelled S. Maria Alteriorum, in the Forum Alteriorum, bottom left.



indicates, Alessandro was wholly in accord with his agent's view. Negotiations with the Altieri dragged on for many months, and only after September 1568, when Pius V appointed Cardinal Ricci to arbitrate, was their house finally obtained for the Jesuits.²²²

Alessandro's concern with a suitable approach to the Gesù, not only with regard to the piazza, but also to the façade of the church, recalls his instructions to the Compagnia del SS. Crocefisso. It was a common concern among patrons who were singly responsible for the building of a church. His words are remarkably like those of Cardinal Cesi concerning the building of the Chiesa Nuova, though in this case rivalry with the Gesù must have increased Cesi's desire for a grand and beautiful façade.²²³ Farnese's reasons for dropping Vignola's projects for the Gesù façade and appointing Giacomo della Porta as architect have been the subject of much discussion. As Lotz has emphasised, Vignola was given many chances to satisfy his patron and he produced several designs.²²⁴ His first series of designs seems to be recorded on the foundation medal and in the Biringucci drawings for oval churches (pls 174–5).²²⁵ Two models by him are documented before January 1570, but we do not know what they looked like. In the Biringucci drawings and on the medal, he designed a very un-Roman façade, with a colossal order topped by a low attic, and a pediment crowning the central three bays. This shows the influence not only of Michelangelo's San Lorenzo project, but of Galeazzo Alessi.²²⁶ These designs differ in that Biringucci records bell towers at either end of the façade, while the medal shows a long attic, crowned with obelisks, recalling Vignola's façade for S. Maria dell'Orto (pl. 177), as well as statues of angels and the risen Christ in the centre.²²⁷

Alessi's influence is not surprising since he, too, was invited to submit designs for the façade in January 1570. This may indicate that Alessandro was not satisfied with Vignola's work thus far, but it also recalls Paul III's behaviour over major architectural projects, setting up competitions to put his favourite architect on his mettle. Alessi did not actually visit Rome to see the Gesù site, but sent two drawings. One design used two orders, in keeping with contemporary Roman practice, rather than employing the single giant order favoured by Vignola at this time. Alessi's other façade was more elaborate: as he explained in a letter, it included a Doric order because this was appropriate to a church dedicated to the Redeemer, and a Corinthian one, because this was suitable for the Virgin, but between he had inserted an order with sculpture to give 'marvellous beauty' to the façade.²²⁸ Two orders were introduced into Vignola's final design and this may have been at the Cardinal's specific request.²²⁹ After Alessi's designs were submitted, more payments to Vignola for drawings, apparently for the façade, are recorded, but eventually in November 1571 the architect was awarded 40 *scudi* in compensation, because the Cardinal had decided to adopt a scheme by Giacomo della Porta.²³⁰

Vignola, or his son Giacinto, seems to have felt a sense of injustice at the rejection of his design (pl. 180), even though he had been given so many chances to produce a satisfactory scheme. In 1573 an engraving of his final project was published. The evidence points to its having been executed after the architect's death. The preparatory drawing for the engraving has been tentatively attributed to Giacinto by Lotz and Ackerman, and a copy of the engraving was sent by

180. Giacinto Vignola, after Jacopo Vignola, design for the façade of the Gesù, 1573, pen and ink, 39.2 × 38.2 cm., Kunstabibliothek, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (Photo: Paulmann-Jungeblut, Berlin).



182. Detail of pl. 181.

181. Giacomo della Porta, façade of the Oratorio del SS. Crocefisso di S. Marcello, 1561–8 (Photo: Author).



183. Giacomo della Porta, façade of the Gesù, 1571–2 (Photo: Author).

Fulvio Orsini to the Cardinal in September 1573, two months after Vignola's death.²³¹ Giacinto may have felt that his father's reputation should be vindicated, but, as Casotti has rightly stressed, the fact that Alessandro refused the façade design does not mean that Vignola was dropped entirely from Farnese service, as has sometimes been suggested. He in fact continued to work for Alessandro right up to his death.²³²

Vignola's final design more closely resembles standard Roman church façades in that a wide lower order is crowned by a much narrower one. He retained some features from his earliest designs, including the central portal and the elaborate use of sculpture above the pediment. The main entrance is better emphasised by the narrower upper storey and by moving the two flanking doors inwards so that they now enter the nave. Despite the elegance of the design, a possible disadvantage may have been that the amount of sculpture would have meant that it would have been more time-consuming and more costly to build.

Alessandro's experience of della Porta's work at the Oratorio del Crocefisso had evidently impressed him. To understand how Alessandro's taste was developing it is instructive to compare Giacomo's two façades (pls 181, 183). They were, of course, conceived for quite distinct types of building, and there is an obvious difference in scale between the monumental Gesù and the humbler oratory. Allowing for this, stylistic affinities may be found: both façades show the same austere restraint, with a simpler, clearer arrangement of the architectural members, which makes the church appear more imposing and which contrasts with Vignola's grandiose but more elaborate scheme. The della Porta façades share a strong vertical accent, which makes for greater clarity and is particularly characteristic of his style.²³³ This greater verticality was achieved in the Gesù primarily by pairing the pilasters, so that the eye is drawn towards the centre.²³⁴

That a taste for simplicity may have been the motive behind the rejection of Vignola's scheme is suggested by the correspondence about the cartouche with the emblem of the Jesuits which was to be placed on the façade. In 1573–4, while the façade was being completed, Bartolomeo Ammannati, who was at that time engaged in designing the Jesuit College in Florence, was invited to submit drawings and a model for the cartouche. Eventually a design by della Porta was adopted, although it had to be modified.²³⁵ On this occasion Cardinal Farnese apparently took the advice of Bishop Garimberto, who recommended that della Porta's *modello* should be simplified: Giulio Folco reported that the cartouche would be executed without angels, 'since simple things please you'.²³⁶ This decision may reflect Jesuit influence, since the General of the order, Claudio Acquaviva, made very similar modifications to Ammannati's Florentine façade in 1590.²³⁷

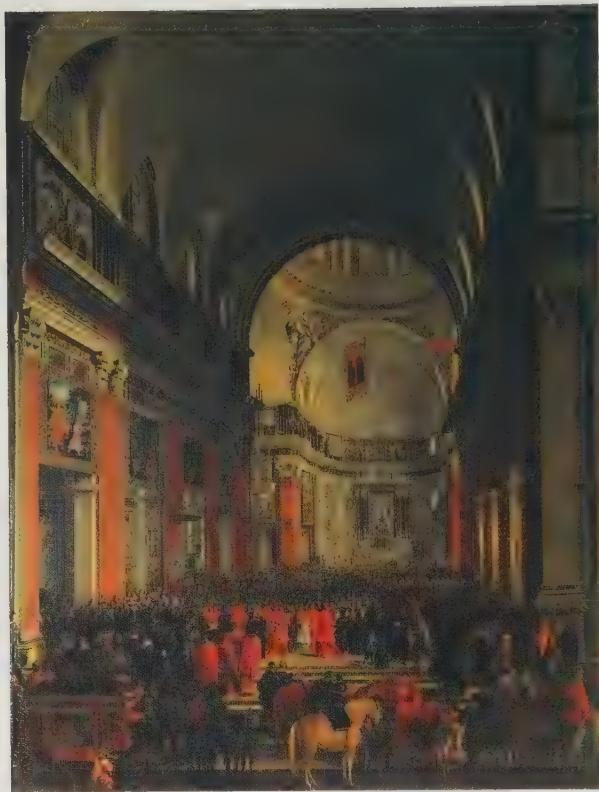
When it came to the decoration of the Gesù, the Jesuits evidently exercised greater control – particularly over the choice of subjects – than they had been able to do over the architecture. Alessandro took responsibility for the adornment of the tribune and the cupola, the most prestigious areas of the church, while the subsidiary chapels were allocated to other patrons, and their ornamentation was achieved only over many years. None the less, it is quite clear that there was an overall iconographic programme, with chapels paired across the nave illustrating the heavenly hierarchy and the life of Christ. This was evidently planned from the beginning, and the Jesuits ensured that the scheme was maintained.²³⁸



184. Giacomo della Porta and Giovanni de Rosis, tabernacle, 1589–99, Thurles cathedral (Photo: E. A. Southworth).

As at S. Lorenzo in Damaso, Alessandro's contributions to the decoration of the Gesù are mostly lost. The high altarpiece survives, though no longer *in situ*, as does the tabernacle designed for the high altar by Giacomo della Porta. This work, which aroused the admiration of Gregory XIII, has now found a home in Thurles cathedral (pl. 184).²³⁹

In 1583 work began on frescoing the lantern of the cupola. Giovanni de' Vecchi painted this with, according to Baglione, 'diverse ornaments and putti'.²⁴⁰ In the drum below, Andrea Lilio frescoed the four Evangelists. These are visible in Andrea Sacchi's painting of the *Centenary of the Jesuit Order* of 1639 (col. pls XI, XII).²⁴¹ De' Vecchi was also asked to paint the four Church Fathers in the pendentives below the dome, and these, too, can be seen in Sacchi's picture. By September 1573 he had completed two of these figures.²⁴² The success of Giovanni's frescoes was short-lived: according to Bellori, Odoardo Farnese already had plans to destroy them by the first decade of the next century because of their old-fashioned style.²⁴³



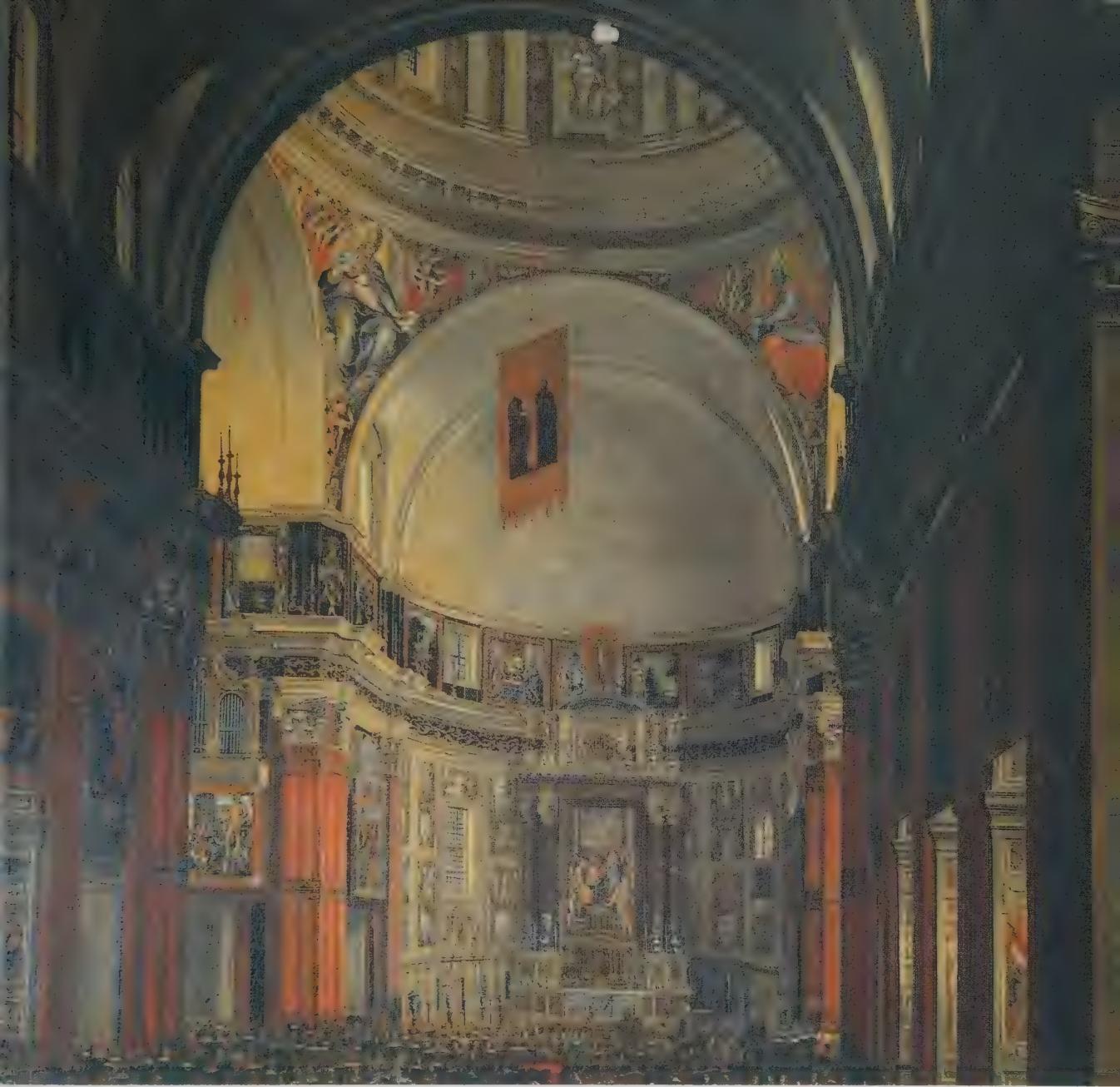
XI. Andrea Sacchi, *Centenary of the Jesuit Order*, 1639, oil on canvas, 336 × 247 cm., Rome, Museo di Roma (Photo: Museo di Roma).



185. Girolamo Muziano, *Circumcision*, 1589, oil on panel, Rome, Gesù.

Besides these frescoes, Giovanni apparently received the initial commission for the high altarpiece, for which he made cartoons. The reason why these were not ultimately used is not known, but the artist seems to have been deeply upset with his treatment by Alessandro's subordinates.²⁴⁴ Instead, the altarpiece depicting the Circumcision was assigned to Girolamo Muziano, whose services Alessandro had unsuccessfully tried to obtain for Caprarola many years before (pl. 185).²⁴⁵ The *Circumcision* was completed and dedicated in 1589, some months after Alessandro's death.

The rest of the Cardinal's plans for the Gesù were abruptly terminated by his death. He had intended to have the apse covered with mosaic, and possibly to have the vault of the nave painted, but his heirs resisted the appeals of the Jesuits to continue his patronage. Not until 1679, ninety years later, was the Gesù's decoration finished with the magnificent ceiling by Gaulli.²⁴⁶

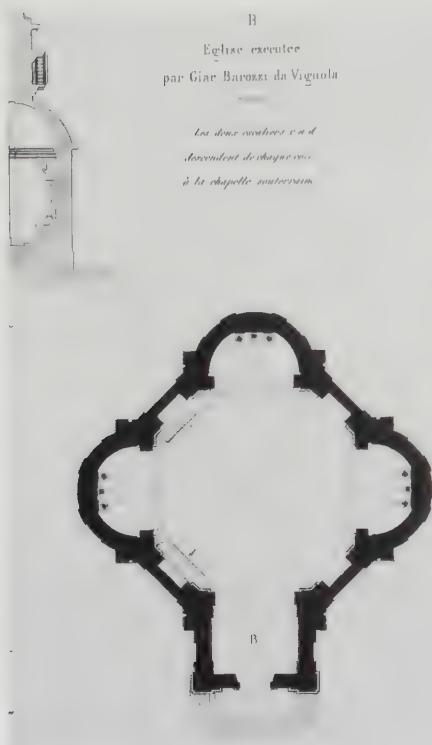


XII. Detail of pl. XI.

S. Maria Scala Coeli

The apparent interest in medieval art that Alessandro displayed in his patronage at Grottaferrata and Monreale found expression also in the decoration of the last church he built, that of S. Maria Scala Coeli (pls 186–8). This, together with the church of SS. Vincenzo and Anastasio and that of S. Paolo, formed part of the Abbazia delle Tre Fontane, which was built on the traditional site of St Paul's execution. The commendatorship of the abbey was customarily assigned to the

187 (right). Giacomo della Porta, façade of S. Maria Scala Coeli, 1582–4 (Photo: Author).



A PORTE S. PAOLO. Plan de l'Eglise S.M Scala celi



186 (above left). P. Letarouilly, groundplan of S. Maria Scala Coeli, from Letarouilly, *Edifices de Rome Moderne*, 1868–74, pl. 338 (Photo: Warburg Institute).

188. N. van Aelst, *View of the Abbazia delle Tre Fontane*, 1600, engraving (Photo: Trustees of the British Museum).

papal nephew. It was granted to Alessandro by Paul III in 1536, although from 1544 to 1565 he was forced to cede it to his younger brother Ranuccio.²⁴⁷ When the church that stood on the site was suddenly struck by lightning in 1582, Alessandro had a new one built on the foundations. Designed by Giacomo della Porta, it was constructed between 1582 and 1584.²⁴⁸

The centrally planned church is octagonal in form and is entered by a deep portico on the north side (pl. 186). Three apses, which open out from the central nave area, are reached up three shallow steps. The ground-plan is based on that of S. Maria della Pace.²⁴⁹ The octagon is crowned by a cupola with a small lantern, which formerly contained an inscription recording Alessandro's patronage.²⁵⁰ The brick and travertine façade of the portico is dominated by a large pediment topped by obelisks and a cross (pl. 187). This is supported by a plain entablature and doric pilasters which frame a travertine arch containing a circular window and a coat of arms, which is now difficult to read, on the keystone. Within the arch is a doorway which mirrors the shape of the entire façade and bears the inscription SCALA COELI, flanked by two Farnese lilies on the frieze.

Alessandro also planned some interior decoration. The half-dome of at least one of the apses, and possibly all three, was to be decorated with mosaics by Francesco Zucchi, on cartoons by Giovanni de' Vecchi (pl. 189).²⁵¹ In the event, only one mosaic was completed, that in the east apse, the oldest part of the site, where the high altar of the previous church had been.²⁵² The unusual positioning of the altar on the transverse axis can be explained by the architect's need to keep it over the

189. F. Zucchi, after a design by Giovanni de' Vecchi, *Virgin and Child with Sts Anastasius, Bernard, Zeno and Vincent, with Pope Clement VIII and Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini*, 1589–99, mosaic, Rome, S. Maria Scala Coeli (Photo: I.C.C.D.).



most sacred spot in the church and also by the desire to place the entrance to the church where it would immediately be seen by pilgrims entering the abbey (pl. 186).²⁵³ Unfortunately, Alessandro died before work could have advanced very far, and the mosaic, which depicts the Virgin and Child with Sts Anastasius, Bernard, Zeno and Vincent, was completed under the patronage of his successor as commendator, Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, who added donor portraits of himself and his uncle, Clement VIII.²⁵⁴ Alessandro's portrait was given to one of the saints, and his patronage was alluded to likewise in the frieze of Farnese lilies that runs round the inside of the arch. The Jesuit Simone Bartolo wrote a lengthy appeal to Alessandro's heirs, urging them to complete the decorative project rather than let Aldobrandini take over, but, as with the Gesù, they refused.²⁵⁵

The use of mosaic in the church was intended to recall the decoration of the earlier church. As Bartolo remarked:

Because the tribune of the high altar of the [former] church was decorated in mosaic, the Cardinal had had started paintings and ornaments in mosaic in the new tribune, even more beautiful than those that were there before.²⁵⁶

Alessandro had long been interested in mosaic, having intended at one stage to decorate part of the tomb of Paul III with it, and also the tribune of the Gesù.²⁵⁷ Such interest is entirely consistent with the taste for 'treasure' that is indicated by his patronage of the decorative arts. Mosaic had come back into more general fashion with the decoration of the Cappella Gregoriana in St Peter's in 1578,²⁵⁸ a commission with which Alessandro may have been involved to some extent, since he was then archpriest of the basilica and was frequently consulted about artistic and architectural matters there.²⁵⁹ The apse at S. Maria Scala Coeli was particularly influential in the growth of the vogue for mosaic at this time, which culminated in the decoration of the cupola of St Peter's.²⁶⁰ Some of the cartoons for this project were, in fact, designed by Giovanni de' Vecchi, who became one of the most fashionable painters in Rome under Clement VIII, perhaps as the result of his success at the Tre Fontane.²⁶¹

De' Vecchi also painted an altarpiece for the high altar of S. Maria Scala Coeli in 1592 for Cardinal Aldobrandini. Its subject was a vision of St Bernard, in which, while he was celebrating mass on the site of the church, he saw a ladder on which souls were ascending to heaven. It was this miracle that had caused the church to be built.²⁶² We do not know whether Alessandro had plans for altarpieces for his new church. It is tempting to suggest that a fairly late drawing by de' Vecchi now in the Uffizi might be a project for one of the subsidiary altarpieces (pl. 190).²⁶³ This is certainly a study for an altarpiece for a Farnese cardinal and must, therefore, date from before 1589, since Alessandro's heir, Odoardo never commissioned work from Giovanni and was, in fact, keen to remove his frescoes in the Gesù.²⁶⁴ The Virgin and Child are shown seated on a raised throne with two Farnese lilies on the arms and Alessandro's *stemma* on the base. On either side are two flaming torches and the composition is framed by swags of drapery. Before the Virgin kneel two figures in ecclesiastical habits. The simple, hieratic style has something in common with that of the mosaics at S. Maria Scala Coeli, but in the absence of further evidence any association with an altarpiece there must remain hypothetical.