

## Baroque in the Vatican – Art and Culture in Papal Rome II

Papal Rome in the late 16th and 17th century was a focal point for the religious, artistic and scientific currents of the day. Popes and their Cardinals, the major Orders, and the Roman noble families all systematically and successfully used the arts and sciences to glorify a reformed and renewed Catholic Church, and to provide a stage for their temporal and spiritual aspirations. In Papal Rome, the Vatican's unique political structure – then, as now, an elected monarchy -, led the arts in particular to have a crucial role in legitimating respect and power. As each new election shifted the complex power relations between Pope, Cardinals, the Roman nobility, and the influential Orders, new pontiffs turned to the arts and sciences as a way of publicly stating their own position, in the field of tension between spiritual and political power, and securing it beyond their death. The worldwide network of relations created by the missionary Orders also played their part in making 17th century Papal Rome a leading centre for scientific learning. True to the Baroque theory of art, both science and the arts sought to evoke similar feelings in the viewer: *stupore* (amazement) and *meraviglia* (wonder).

## New St. Peter's

Around 320, the Roman Emperor Constantine had the largest early Christian church built to house the tomb of Saint Peter. In 1506, during the pontificate of Julius II, work started on the new Basilica of St. Peter. Under the architect Donato Bramante, the old Basilica was totally demolished and replaced, with only St. Peter's tomb left untouched on its original site.

Bramante's new design foresaw a centrally planned church, structured as a Greek cross, with five cupolas, and a domed, multi-aisled nave. Despite the large number of architects involved over the years and the changes made to the plans, this basic form still determined the shape of the new Basilica. After Bramante's death, the work was overseen by a succession of renowned artists, including Raffael, Antonio da Sangallo, Michelangelo and Pirro Ligorio. Antonio da Sangallo tried unsuccessfully to force through his preference for a Latin cross design, even constructing a wooden model to guide the next generation of builders. But after da Sangallo's death in 1546, Michelangelo Buonarroti, the newly appointed architect of St Peter's, returned to Bramante's design. Michelangelo left a central structure and an immense, unfinished dome – but he also left a wooden model showing how it should look when finished. Finally, in 1590, during Sixtus V's pontificate, Giacomo della Porta completed the dome and under Paul V and architect Carlo Maderno, Michelangelo's main structure was connected to a nave. In 1612, the façade was finished and, in 1615, all the construction work completed. Gianlorenzo Bernini's later attempt to add bell towers to the façade proved misguided and was abandoned. Under Alexander VII, Bernini was commissioned to design the piazza and, in 1657, created the renowned open oval-shaped colonnades.

## New St. Peter's

The new St. Peter's was an astounding feat of collective art patronage by a succession of Popes through the last decades of the 16th century and most of the 17th century. As the new St. Peter's progressed, the issue of its use and design, together with the question of its liturgical function and role as a place of worship, gained an increasing urgency. The Basilica project not only absorbed vast sums of money but also occupied the energies of the era's most innovative artists.

In the 16th century, liturgical processions and worship still took place in the massive nave built under Constantine, with the High Altar in the centre of the new building only a provisional measure. Under Gregory XIII, the first permanent altars were established in the new St. Peter's. Completing the dome, during Sixtus V's pontificate, re-established a centre for worship and ceremony and allowed the papal altar over the Apostle's tomb to be used again. Paul V had the vast nave of the old St Peter's demolished and the altars and tombs transferred into the new building.

However, only under Urban VIII did this centre receive its basilica, the papal altar, with the young Gianlorenzo Bernini commissioned to design a triumphal *baldacchino* over the High Altar of the new St Peter's. At the same time, Bernini started on plans for the grand papal tombs and his decorative columns. Urban's extensive building programme found only limited continuation under Innocent X. Alexander VII, however, once again made new St Peter's the centre of papal concern, further developing Urban VIII's vision and commissioning Bernini to design the *Cathedra Petri* in the apse of the basilica, a project that took more than a decade to complete.

## Gregory XIII (1572–1585)

Ugo Boncompagni (1502–1585), born in Bologna, was 60 years old when, in 1572, the Conclave of Cardinals elected him as the next Pope. Once in office, Gregory XIII put his energies into implementing the Council of Trent recommendations. He also liberally supported the Jesuits, well aware that only by establishing an untainted clergy with unwavering commitment to Catholic teachings could he realise his reform goals and successfully combat the emerging Protestant faith. He similarly promoted the Jesuits' missionary work outside Europe, especially in China, Japan and the Philippines. In Rome too, the Society of Jesus was encouraged to play a prominent role, with Gregory XIII appointing the Jesuits to run the new seminaries of the *Collegium Germanicum* and the *Collegium Romanum*.

But Gregory XIII did not exclusively support the Order of Jesus. He similarly fostered other orders as well, including Philipp Neri's Congregation of the Oratorio, which received Gregory's approbation in 1575, and the Discalced Carmelites - named after their practice of wearing sandals rather than shoes and stockings.

He was active in initiating new urban planning projects, many of which still influence Rome today – a significantly improved street network and water supply, and grand, imposing buildings.

Gregory XIII also promoted a new enthusiasm for the Classical World and the study of Christian antiquity, an interest fuelled by the accidental discovery of archaeological finds during his pontificate.

## Sixtus V (1585–1590)

Felice Peretti (1521–1590) came from a humble background and joined the Franciscan order before embarking on a brilliant career in the Roman Curia, the central Catholic Church administration in Rome. In 1570, Peretti was appointed a Cardinal and later, after the death of Gregory XIII (1572–1585), he was unanimously elected to the throne of St. Peter. Peretti chose to be called Sixtus in honour of Sixtus IV (1471–1484), who gave his name to the Sistine Chapel and had been the last Franciscan Pope.

Sixtus V not only vigorously pursued the defence of the Catholic faith, church reform and the re-establishment of the Pope's spiritual authority, but also sought to heal the rifts caused by the temporal power struggles in the Vatican State. Despite his pontificate only lasting five years, his keen support of culture and the arts initiated architectural works that left a lasting mark on both the Vatican's and Rome's cityscapes as, under Sixtus V's untiring efforts, Rome's urban design was radically altered - usually with works by his favourite architect, Domenico Fontana. Such changes belonged to Sixtus' plan to create a new urban magnificence in Rome as the setting for a transformed papacy. In 1595, an astounded visitor reported in a letter: "I am in Rome, but where has Rome gone? So many new buildings, so many new streets, piazzas, fountains, aqueducts and obelisks, and all those other marvels with which the glorious memory of Sixtus has beautified this old and ruinous city...".

Paul V (1605 - 1621)

After his election to the throne of St. Peter, Camillo Borghese (1552–1621) took the name of Paul V in memory of Paul III and Paul IV, former Popes who had both supported his father.

Paul V's contemporaries generally viewed his pontificate favourably, impressed by his decisive action to control the Vatican State administration, the series of social measures he instigated, his vigorous support for diverse building projects in Rome, and his advocacy of missionary work in distant lands. While Paul V constantly tried to keep the Catholic Church from becoming too embroiled in conflicts in Europe (for example, at the start of the Thirty Years War), he enthusiastically promoted the spread of the Church's teachings abroad, seeing one of his pontificate's main goals as fostering sustained missionary work – especially by the Jesuits and Oratorians – to bring the Catholic faith into the most distant corners of the globe.

Paul V's keen interest in improving the quality and convenience of life in Rome went hand in hand with his desire to recreate the capital of the Christian world as a modern and monumental architectural composition, with emphasis provided by imposing churches and magnificent public buildings. In this scheme, Paul V considered his most important projects to be the Quirinal Palace, the Pauline Chapel in the Santa Maria Maggiore and completing the nave, the façade and the portico at the Basilica of St. Peter – and all were completed by the twelfth year of his pontificate.

## Urban VIII (1623–1644)

Maffeo Barberini (1568–1644) came from a leading Florentine family and studied law in Pisa before beginning his Church career. Once in Rome, he rapidly rose through the administrative ranks, thanks in part to the influence of his uncle, Monsignor Francesco Barberini. In 1604, under Clemens VIII, he was appointed Papal Legate to the French court. Two years later, in 1606, Paul V made him a Cardinal. Barberini soon acquired a reputation as a cultivated and dedicated patron of the arts, surrounding himself with artists, writers, and collectors. He also composed his own poetry and owned an extensive library.

Maffeo Barberini was elected Pope on 5 August, 1623 and took the name of Urban VIII. He quickly established numerous members of his family in positions of power, appointing his nephew Francesco first as Cardinal and then as Vice-Chancellor. Under Urban VIII and his favourite artist, Gianlorenzo Bernini, the Baroque style enjoyed its Golden Age. Urban VIII's patronage of the arts had a specific agenda: he intended to raise Rome to the foremost spiritual and cultural centre, legitimating Papal primacy in Europe. Yet ultimately, this massive cultural policy project was overtaken by events in the world around it: Galileo's condemnation for heresy in 1633; the political and economic catastrophe of the First War of Castro (located in present-day Lazio, Italy) and finally, after Urban's death, the infamous flight of his nephew to France. In the end, though, Urban VIII's support for the arts and far-sighted cultural policies guaranteed him a permanent place in European history.

## Innocent X (1644–1655)

Giambattista Pamfili (1574–1655) came from Rome and studied law at the La Sapienza University there. Highly regarded both by Gregory XV and his successor Urban VIII, he became Papal Legate first to Naples and later to Spain. In 1630 Pamfili attained the dignity of a Cardinal and, from 1639, took on the office of President of the Council of the Congregation. He was elected Pope on 15 September, 1644, taking the name Innocent X.

Innocent X was renowned for his notorious distrust of others and his indecisiveness, a quality that even under Urban VIII had already earned him the nickname of *Monsignore-non-si-può* ("Monsignor-it-won't-work"). Innocent X was reputed to strongly favour Spain and equally strongly dislike the Barberini family. His predecessor, Urban VIII, had filled many Church posts by nepotism, and Innocent X accused Urban's family members of siphoning off the state's money. Yet under the influence of his power-hungry sister-in-law Olympia Maidalchini, he gave in to just the same sort of nepotism.

Innocent X energetically backed a programme of church reform and recorded notable successes in the missionary work he promoted, especially in East Asia. He condemned the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, ending the Thirty Years War, as a treaty unacceptably disadvantaging Catholic interests, but his protests were to no avail. His most important artistic commissions came in the run-up to the Holy Year in 1650 – a major success which also benefited the economy. Under Innocent X, the nave of St. Peter's Basilica was refurbished in a unified style. He also commissioned Francesco Borromini, one of his favourite architects, to renovate San Giovanni in Laterano, redesign the Piazza Navona, and construct the Church of Saint Agnes in Agone.

## Alexander VII (1655–1667)

Fabio Chigi (1599–1667) was born in Siena into a leading Tuscan banking family and completed a doctorate in philosophy and theology. Once in Rome, Chigi's career in the Church quickly took off: Vice-Legate in Ferrara, Bishop of Nardò in Apulia, Apostolic Delegate and Inquisitor of Malta. Under Urban VIII, he became Papal Legate to the court at Cologne and later, under Innocent X, was the Papal Envoy to the peace treaty negotiations at Munster that ended the Thirty Years War. In 1651, he was appointed Cardinal and became Innocent X's Secretary of State. Fabio Chigi was elected Pope on 7 April 1655 and, in memory of his Sienese predecessor Alexander III (1159–1181), adopted the same name.

During his career in the Papal diplomatic service, Alexander VII had seen how powerless the papacy could be, with the tense relations between the Vatican State and France a constant source of political and diplomatic problems. The conversion of Christina of Sweden was noted as one of the few political triumphs during his pontificate. Alexander VII encouraged the sciences and the arts on a grand scale, intending Rome to develop into a leading cultural capital, a showcase for the Catholic Church. He commissioned works by numerous architects, including Borromini, Pietro da Cortona and Carlo Rainaldi, but it was Gianlorenzo Bernini whose style really shaped 'Alexandrine Rome' – with buildings like the massive Scala Regia staircase, the entrance to Vatican Palace, and the colonnades on the square in front of St Peter's Basilica.

## Clemens X (1670–1676)

Emilio Altieri (1590–1676) came from old patrician family in Rome. He completed his doctorate in law and, in 1624, after being ordained as a priest, entered the service of the Roman Curia. Initially only employed in minor positions, he began to be appointed to more important posts under Alexander VII, for example, as Superintendent of the Papal Exchequer and, in 1657, Secretary to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Finally, in 1669, Clemens IX appointed Emilio Altieri to the Sacred College of Cardinals.

When Clemens IX died, the Cardinals appear to have tried to select a transitional figure, hoping for new elections again soon. Hence, it was largely thanks to his advanced age that, on 29 April 1670, Altieri was chosen to take his place on the throne of St. Peter. On the same day he was elected, Clemens X appointed his adopted nephew Paluzzo Paluzzi degli Albertoni as his vice-chancellor, leaving him to largely take care of all administrative matters – a difficult task both in view of both of the Vatican State's empty coffers and the new Pope's generosity in promising everything to everyone. On the political stage, Clemens X primarily directed his efforts at supporting Poland in its struggle against the Turks, while Cardinal Paluzzi Altieri attempted to restrain the major European players in their drive for power and limit their influence on Rome.

But Clemens X has not been remembered primarily for his political impact, but for his intense concern with religious affairs. During his pontificate, he beatified and canonised numerous church figures.

## Orders and Saints

In the wake of the Reformation, a number of new Orders played a central role in the project of renewing the Catholic Church, none more prominently than the Society of Jesus, founded in 1540 by Ignatius von Loyola.

The Jesuits swiftly established a leading position in two key areas – education and missionary work. The Jesuits taught extensively in schools and universities, used the theatre as a medium to inspire people for the church's concerns, and established a network of missionaries, teaching and spreading the Catholic faith to the entire world. The Society of Jesus (S J) was one of the fastest growing orders in the Renaissance period and the mother-house in Rome rapidly found itself at the centre of an expanding network of Jesuits organisations across Italy, southern and central Europe, with branches in colonial territories all over the world. Since new churches and missionary buildings were soon needed to serve such rapid growth, Jesuit patronage significantly shaped trends in architecture, religious painting and sculpture in the Baroque period. From the very outset, the Jesuits regarded the graphic arts as one of their key weapons in buttressing and disseminating the Catholic faith.

The second new order was not an order in the strict sense, yet still had a major impact on Catholic thought. The Congregation of the Oratorio, founded by Philipp Neri (1515–1595), was a community of Roman Catholic clergy and lay-brothers living together to share pray and spiritual debate. Their principal works of charity were directed to caring for the sick and pilgrims to Rome. The Oratorians' new form of spiritual guidance and pastoral care greatly influenced the Vatican's church reforms.

## Science in Rome

Scientific research in 17<sup>th</sup> century Rome, and indeed across the whole of Europe, was fuelled by a culture of intellectual curiosity. Observing, measuring and calculating nature became as important as studying the Bible and the canonical ancient Greek texts on natural philosophy, particularly Aristotle. This pan-European emphasis on the primacy of sensory perception led to the foundation of numerous scientific academies, the first of which were established in Italy around 1600. Named after the sharp-eyed lynx, the Accademia dei Lincei, which counted Galileo among its members, led the way in 1603. Long before the foundation of the Royal Society in England in 1660 or the Académie des sciences in France in 1666, religious orders, first and foremost among them the Jesuits, had created a worldwide network of institutions that engaged not only in missionary work but also in scientific research. Galileo's condemnation in 1633 cut the scientific culture of the Baroque to the quick. It dealt a decisive blow to 17<sup>th</sup> century cosmological research; other areas of scientific enquiry, however, were less affected.