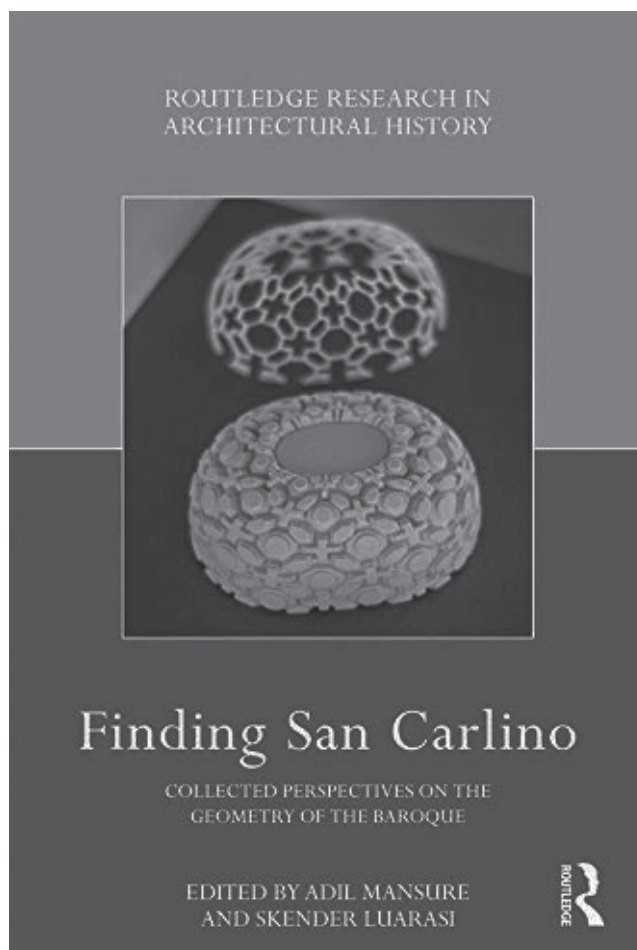


Finding San Carlino

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For centuries the work of Francesco Borromini has attracted the interest of researchers and architects from every part of the world. His works and drawings, even though studied from different perspectives and through multiple approaches, always seem to carry with them some secrets and new possibilities still to be traced and explored. When questioned on the importance of Borromini in the history of architecture, the Italian critic Bruno Zevi, stated that - differently from the past - in the work of Borromini no perspective painting embraces the whole of reality, to take possession of which a kinetic commitment is needed, an itinerary that allows capturing its multiple, unpredictable effects. The architecture of the Swiss-born architect is then intended as a complete experience where the body is the main actor of a spatial discovery that blends architectural masses, light, and the viewer itself. It is not a secret then that there is still so much to say about the work of Borromini and still new paths can be traced in the exploration of his timeless practice.

The book 'Finding Carlino' - edited by Adil Mansure and Skender Luarasi - is another step into this research and the attempt of the researchers, raised and educated in the best schools in US and Canada, to disclose some brand-new insights on this topic. The text is organized as a miscellany of several essays from researchers in these fields while Mansure and Luarasi skillfully weave the canvas of a narrative that invites the reader to focus on the several ambiguities, non-consensuses, and complexities behind the work of Borromini. The list of contributors to the next is astonishing, as much as the number of questions raised by the authors. The inquiries developed by the contributors do not focus only on the historiographical issues of the church under examination - San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane, built from 1634 to 1644 under the patronage of cardinal Francesco Barberini - but also on the complex relationships among the drawings of the master, the compositive and symbolic behind the building itself.

The *Preface* and have the role of setting the debate for the reader and anticipating the different topics that will be deep-

ened in any of the single contributions from which the book is composed. After some first notes regarding the history and reasons behind the construction of San Carlino, Mansure and Luarasi speak wisely of the geometrical interpretation of the church and the questions still opened regarding the generation of its form. Furthermore, they state that there are still some missing points between the final construction and the drawings of Borromini itself and they invite you to reflect on the possibility of the existence of a new framework of analysis for San Carlino, precisely the discovery of a new technical framework that might be offered to the architectural community to explore such a piece of masterpiece.

The first essay, *On Borromini's Drawings and 'Practical Geometry'* – by Werner Oechslin – is an attempt to retrace the tradition of geometry belonging to the times when Borromini worked. Recalling the times when the architect was employed as a mason, he sees how geometry for Borromini was never a way of crystallizing and cooling forms but of investigating the world, space and its possibilities fusing at the same times the abstract and sensorial peculiarities of geometry itself. Furthermore, he divides the 'gestures' of the architect into two different families: 'lines' and 'complex figures', both mutually exclusive and operational.

In *Toggling through San Carlino*, Luarasi affirms that San Carlino is a nuanced work of both the methodologies and figures described earlier. The author states that the church is at the same time serious and fun; normative and fun; focused on method and structure but, at the same time, also fashion and derived from a common sense of pastiche derived from the times when it was built. Inspired by Whitehead's philosophy, for Luarasi the work of the architect can be intended as motivated from two different perspectives: on the one side jiggling between *subject* and *superject*, and the other between *norm* and *freedom*.

Two other essays along the books weave the strands of the so-called *invisible geometry* behind the work of Borromini. John Hendrix, in *The Deep Structure behind San Carlino*, uses a neo-platonic lens to investigate the work of the architect. In his thoughts, he implies that geometry can be seen as an embedded phenomenon in the mind. For Hendrix, the *hidden geometry* in the church must be searched in the many symbols used and repeated in Borromini's drawings and invests the building of some new readings inspired by the Neo-Platonic philosophy of the 20th Century. Meanwhile, Karsten Harris, in his *Architecture, Geometry, and the Sacred*, emphasizes the importance of the space to be 'shaped' rather than be 'bound' and the inner dichotomies in the work of the architect such as perfect/imperfect – visible/invisible, can be read through a metaphysical lens to be understood.

Baroque Constructive Geometry?: Borromini's Design for the Elevation at San Carlino, is the text authored by Jonathan Hales, where the main object of inquiry is the acceptance of underlying geometric order and structure in the church. He overlays recent scanner studies in the church with some hypotheses such as design and Triangulum vs. design and Quadratum, and

the connection between medieval and post-renaissance figures of geometry. In the following essay, *From String to Volume*, Lauren Jacobi and Karl Daubmann discuss the affinity of San Carlino with contemporary architectural praxis. While moving our interest from the central space of the church, they mutually investigate the Madonna and Crucifix Chapels, where the former is considered about life while the latter is about death either symbolically, geometrically, formally, and stylistically. The majesty of the first one is balanced by the austerity of the second and both of them suggest the inner relation and delicate relation between comedy and tragedy.

The topic of the surface of the church is explored in the essay of Adil Mansure. In his '*Surface*', the Canadian researcher reflects on the meaning of the surface in the work of Borromini. According to him geometry, structure, form, and space are all entangled and readable on the surface/s of the building itself. The idea is that there is no existence of a deeper structure and then a surface which is created to cover but everything should be seen as a whole, as an inner coherence in the work of Borromini where everything concurs with the meaning of his architecture. Mansure explores three cases of this relationship: the column-wall juncture; the pendentive zone; and the dome. The surface is then proposed to be both a meta-concept and spatio-temporal interface that creates an indissoluble bond among the architect, the viewer of his drawings and an unknown visitor of the church.

The last contribution, *The Xenophora Principle* – by Niklas Maak – deepens the operative metaphor of an object in its fluid environment that covers many aspects of the analysis of the church. Using some reminiscences from Neo-Platonic philosophy, San Carlino is intended as an overgrowing mollusc secreting its abode throughout time, while being continuously shaped by the forces of time, chance, and visitors with unpredictable consequences.

As it might have been noticed in this review, the book is a complex text where many different voices have been put together to disclose new and several points regarding not only one of Borromini's masterpieces but the work of the master itself. I was told once, during my studies, that 'everyone needs to have Borromini's syndrome' to be considered a researcher in the field of architecture. This book, for me that I am writing this short thought on the text, is a confirmation of that. The wise way through which geometry, symbolism, philosophy, and investigative tools such as drawings – and not less important, the use of software – to investigate the church, creates a perfect picture to project new light on the work of one of the most influential architects of all time and, as an ending note, the importance of operative frameworks in the work of the architect – and the research in the field of architecture – is one of the most precious secrets contained in this text.