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HERITAGE AND INTERVENTION IN  
EXISTING BUILDINGS OF ITALIAN  
RENAISSANCE: THREE  
EXEMPLARY CASES

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ABSTRACT

This research contributes on the theme of intervention in existing buildings. It examines this practice in the Italian Renaissance, when the notion of patrimony was configured, as an effect of the humanist's reverence for classical antiquity; the "unintentional" monuments, according to the classification of Riegl. The reflection is developed through the analysis of three exemplary cases, supported by a concise bibliographical review. The first examines the small intervention of Michelangelo at the base of the Palazzo Medici, held in 1517, when he inserts the so-called *inginocchiati* windows - or kneeling. The second examines the construction of the Palazzo Savelli-Orsini on the ruins of Teatro di Marcello by Peruzzi in the 1520s, as well as other layers of intervention: one from the Mussolini period, where the *diradamento edilizio* took place; another of modern lineage, between 1962 and 1964, with the author Quaroni acting similarly to Scarpa. And the third deals with the conversion of Diocletian's Thermal in Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, conceived by Michelangelo in 1561: undoubtedly, the actuality of the economy of means used would be one of his last and greatest lessons.

KEYWORDS

Intervention in existing buildings. Italian Renaissance. *Inginocchiati* windows. Teatro di Marcello. Diocletian's Thermal.

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PATRIMÔNIO E INTERVENÇÃO EM  
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RESUMO

O estudo oferece uma contribuição ao tema da intervenção em edificações existentes. Examina a prática no renascimento italiano, quando se configura a noção de patrimônio, como efeito da reverência dos humanistas pela antiguidade clássica; ali surgiam os monumentos “não intencionais”, segundo a classificação de Riegl. A reflexão se desenvolve através da análise de três casos exemplares, amparada em uma revisão bibliográfica concisa. A primeira examina a pequena intervenção de Michelangelo na base do Palazzo Medici, realizada em 1517, quando ele insere as chamadas janelas *inginocchiati* – ou ajoelhadas. O segundo caso examina a construção do Palazzo Savelli-Orsini sobre as ruínas do Teatro di Marcello, realizada por Peruzzi nos anos 1520, assim como outras camadas de intervenção: uma do período Mussolini, onde ocorreu o *diradamento edilizio*; outra de linhagem moderna, entre 1962 e 1964, com o autor Quaroni atuando de modo similar a Scarpa. E o terceiro caso trata da conversão da Terma de Diocleciano em Basílica de Santa Maria degli Angeli, concebida por Michelangelo em 1561: sem dúvida, a atualidade da economia de meios utilizados ali seria uma de suas últimas e maiores lições.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Intervenção em preexistências. Renascimento italiano. Janelas *inginocchiati*. Teatro di Marcello. Terma de Diocleciano.

## OVERVIEW

A growing practice in the country, intervention in existing buildings has presented a great deal of unsatisfactory results, reflecting the quality of the architecture as a whole and the lack of specific professional training to deal with some cases. It is presumed that this deficiency originates in undergraduate school, in which the disciplines of architectural design adopt predominantly blank slate exercises (*tabula rasa*), thus ignoring the appeals of context frequently, and the project modality is virtually ignored. The problem occurs prominently in material patrimonies only, without legal safeguard. But it also reaches, to a lesser extent, protected goods and sets which allow deeper adaptive interventions, especially those whose preservation is justified less by historical-artistic merit than by identity value. It should be remembered that the category of "cultural heritage" associated with the memory of social groups originated in the enlargement of the concept of patrimony that occurred in the 1960s, consolidated in the Venice Charter (1964). However, in the recent history of the country, there have been exemplary cases of interventions in buildings that deserve a highlight, such as *Sesc Pompeia* (1977-1982), by Lina Bo Bardi, and the *Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo* (1993-1998), by Paulo Mendes da Rocha; as well as successful examples in buildings with common programs using conventional architectural features.

<sup>1</sup>Riegl defined the assets transformed into monuments whose "meaning, and importance were not fundamental. In cases where, intentional and unintentional monuments, these are values of memory and so we speak about monuments. [...] In the first case, the value of the memory is granted by the author; nevertheless, it is assigned by us" (RIEGL, 2014, p. 36).

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the practice in the Italian Renaissance, using the analysis of a set of exemplary cases supported by a concise historiographical review. At that moment the notion of patrimony arose as an effect of the humanists' reverence for the remnants of Classical Antiquity, which came to be treated as "unintentional" monuments, according to the classification proposed by Alois Riegl<sup>1</sup>. The general objective of the study, in turn, is the search for a reconfiguration of the issue of intervention in existing buildings, from the analysis of that period for the reasons explained above, seeking to produce critical bases that offer a necessary contribution to this praxis in the present days.

## RENAISSANCE AS THE ORIGIN OF PRESERVATION

It is reasonable to imagine that the practice of intervening in existing buildings started immediately when building. However, the recognition of significant cases of this activity in the West world dates back to the Renaissance, when the architecture became somewhat better documented through texts, drawings and engravings, especially of the project that emerged in the modern models. The graphical representation and the three-dimensional models began to register with more precision the conceived form, allowing the interpretation by the others and the consequent autonomy of the execution; and this also began concomitantly to shape historiographical data.

The Renaissance was an intellectually privileged period in architecture, in light of other areas, presenting, in addition to the creation of notable urban constructions and spaces, numerous examples of interventions in existing structures on the scale of edification and the city. The *Trecento* is considered a

preparatory period for the Renaissance; Petrarch's interest in the Latin texts of antiquity personas, such as Virgil and Cicero. It had the gradual adherence of other intellectuals, originating humanism. The end of that century was also the time when the first collectors of ancient art and manuscripts appeared, which led to the "discovery" of a remnant copy of the Vitruvian treatise in 1414, reverberating to the adoption of classical canons by the Italian architecture of the following years (CHOAY, 2006, p. 48-49). After all, most architects would follow the interpretation of that text.

In the early 15th century, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Ghiberti and Luca della Robbia travelled to Florence to study the antiquities. Beginning in 1420, important exchanges would happen among artists and humanists: the first educating the intellectuals, who were reciprocal and contributed with the historical-cultural perspective. Leone Battista Alberti would make his first trip to Rome in that decade, guided by the first three to study Roman art. Alberti brought together intellect and artistic sensitivity, as he demonstrated through his treatises and works of architecture. Alberti was responsible to make a survey of the Eternal City - the *Descriptio urbis Romæ* - and to become a consultant to Nicolau V in urban projects for the recovery of the ruined city, in the pontificate period between 1447 and 1455 (HEYDENREICH 1998, p. 34-35).

A similar goal was the subject of the letter of Raphael Sanzio (probably co-authoring with Baldassare Castiglione) to Leo X in 1519, seven decades later in which many other ancient monuments were transformed into limestones and stones for use in new works (MIGLIACCIO, 2010). The letter seems to be the only remaining document of the work for which he was commissioned by Pope Medici, elected in 1513, at age 37, with the credential being the son of Lorenzo de Medici, known as "the Magnificent": the patron who transformed art and culture in political triumph for Florence. But the ambitious project of the *Renovatio Romæ* was interrupted by the premature death of the so-called Prince of the Painters in 1520. The work consisted in the graphic reconstruction (plans, cuts and elevations) of the buildings of ancient Rome by surveying the ruins; and the complementation of the suppressed elements would occur through the interpretation of the treaty of Vitruvius, which would allow the idealized virtual reconstruction of the city in perspectives to be reproduced in engravings. This supposedly would allow the physical reconstruction of ancient Rome. Correspondence among those who lived in Raphael's circle gives a notion of the project, such as Marcantonio Michiel's letter to Antonio Marsilio:

*[...] for painters and architects, he described in a book [...] the ancient buildings of Rome, showing the proportions, shapes and their ornaments so clearly [...] and the first region had already ended. It is observable not only the plans of the buildings and their area (the site), which with enormous work from the ruins would be raised, but also the facades with their ornaments deduced from Vitruvius and the reason for the architecture and the ancient histories, where the ruins had not been preserved (MIGLIACCIO, 2010, p. 20).*

Raphael proposed to apply in architecture what was happening in sculpting at that moment, the "integrative restoration", which was condemned vehemently by Camillo Boito at the conference "The Restorers", given in 1884 at the Turin

Exhibition and later published. Among the cases exposed at the time, it is worth mentioning the sculpture *Hercules in Rest* (Farnese Hercules), for which Paul III would have appointed Michelangelo to add its missing legs. According to the report, the artist performed the study in plaster, began to examine it and destroyed it with the hammer, saying “*not even a finger I could do for this statue*”. Only two centuries later, with the discovery of the original legs, it was understood why they were so badly added by Guglielmo della Porta (KÜHL, 2014, p. 39). This insertion of “prostheses” into paintings and sculptures was a similar anastylosis without the necessary accuracy. After all, to assume the shape of a missing bodily part is very different from continuing the geometric shape of a column or other classical element. When Raphael proposed the reconstitution of the old buildings through this expedient, he showed excessive belief in the predictability of classical architecture. It is worth remembering that Viollet-le-Duc adopted a similar attitude in interventions such as Carcassone and Pierrefonds in the 19th century.

In a way, the preservation of Roman monuments had begun with their reuse under Gregory I (590-604 AD). Conscious and admitted defense of preservation began much later, possibly in the pontificate of Eugene IV (1441-1447) but failed to stop the destruction in the period. Pius II Piccolomini (1458-1464) published a papal bull in 1462, prohibiting the extraction of material from the remains of antiquity. Also, Paul II (1464-1471) went further, restoring works such as the Arch of Septimius Severus, the Colosseum, the Column of Trajan and *Forum Romanum*. However, the same popes continued to subtract marble and travertine blocks from the remains for their works. Built at the beginning of the second century, the Pantheon of Rome is an exceptional example of reuse, having survived destruction through this expedient and endured “official vandalism” through the ages. It was converted into a Christian basilica in the 7th century, with the bronze of the roof removed for the founding of cannons and, presumably, the Baldachin of St. Peter in the *Cinquecento*. In the second quarter of the following century it received a pair of bells attributed to Bernini, nicknamed “*donkey ears*”, which were to be removed in 1883.

The conversion of the 13<sup>th</sup> century church of San Francesco de Rimini in Malatestiano Temple - a type of mausoleum of the family of Sigismondo Malatesta - was another prominent case: in the project conducted around 1446, Alberti “*conceived a form that manifested the most intimate approximation with the monuments of antiquity hitherto struck by Renaissance architecture*” (HEYDENREICH 1998, p. 37). The author inaugurated the most literal use of the repertoire of classical tradition, which would become an important reference for the architecture of the period that began. New facades were built on the existing ones, notoriously the adoption of the arch of August existing in the city, consecrated in the year 27 BCE, like reference of the frontal elevation. On the sides, in turn, arcades possibly inspired by the Roman aqueducts were used, as Heydenreich (1998, p. 37) suggests; or a transcription of the arcade walls of the Teatro di Marcello or the Colosseum, stripped of the classical orders.

There are, however, less known cases by the public, whose analysis can contribute to a necessary reconfiguration of the project problem into different

patrimonies. Three of them were selected for the assessment that follows, because of the important issues they pose in different scopes of the problem.

### THREE EXEMPLARY CASES IN ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

The paper seeks to offer a contribution to the theme through the analysis of three cases of intervention in existing buildings that occurred in the Renaissance. The first one examines the small intervention made by Michelangelo at the base of the Palazzo Medici in Florence. The second examines the inlay of the Palazzo Savelli (later Orsini) on the ruins of the Teatro di Marcello, in Rome, by Baldassare Peruzzi; and includes the later interventions made in the Mussolini period and in the early 1960s, by Ludovico Quaroni. The third case studies the insertion of the church of *Santa Maria degli Angeli* in the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian in Rome, also by Michelangelo, in which a late Baroque intervention occurred later.

#### The insertion of the *inginocchiati* (kneeling) windows in the Palazzo Medici (Michelangelo, 1517)

This is a small intervention by Michelangelo at the Palazzo Medici in 1517, in the building designed by Michelozzo in 1444, which became the archetype of the Florentine Renaissance palace. The work consisted in the placing of three windows on the ground floor, where the so-called *loggia d'angolo* and the

opposite gate were closed, which used to access rooms for the administration of the Medici Bank (Figure 1). With a plan of square proportion (smaller than the current room) without connection with the palace, the *loggia pubblica* had in each facade of the corner a span framed by the radiating-*voussoir* arches. An unusual solution in the local civil architecture, it did not have repercussions on the later production, having as a precedent - apparently unique - the Loggia del Bigallo, in Piazza del Duomo. It is said that it was intended for *contrattazione* (business), but also to meeting of citizens, having even been guarded, on the return of the Medici from exile, in 1512: a much smaller civilian version of the Loggia dei Lanzi, also called Loggia della Signoria, linked to Palazzo Vecchio. It is also necessary to consider the stage function of public ceremonies of the family, like the Loggia Rucellai, when it was not an occasion for the semi-public environment of the arcades of the patio. Lorenzo, the Duke of Urbino, who resided in the palace at the time, decided to the closing of the *loggia* under the argument of the loss of its initial functions.



Figure 1: The *inginocchiati* windows inserted in the base of Palazzo Medici.  
Source: the author.



<sup>2</sup>Michelangelo had already carried out, in the scope of architecture, the aedicula of the Saint Cosmas and Damian Chapel, in the Castle Sant' Angelo, in Rome (c.1514); the proposals for coating of the drum of the Florence Duomo (1507 and 1516); and presented at the time the proposal for the facade of San Lorenzo.

At the time of the work, the building still had the original size, with the main facade of *Via Larga* - now Cavour - encompassing three of five spans from the corner. It is less known to the wider public that this alteration of the building, which covered the composition built according to Michelozzo's design, with the base of the "excavated" corner. As Giulio Argan said, the modest incumbency would not have been accepted by the moody artist, even if it were for his great patrons, "if he was not interested in the almost linguistic study of the window as an iconic resurrected constant"; to which was added the fact that the edification was of an architect that he respected, highlighting the "deliberately archaizing elegance" of the palace, with its carapace of large rustic stones with precise linear joints. Argan went even further by proposing that the pediments that crowned the windows would have been used by Michelangelo as a way of honoring Michelozzo, seeking to make amends for the adulteration of his conception (ARGAN, 2012, p. 85).

In the analysis of Bruno Contardi, Argan endeavors to demonstrate the great artist's lack of commitment to the classical repertoire and, consequently, to Vitruvius' regulations, since his almost inaugural confrontation with the practice of architecture. He denounces Michelangelo's dissent to dominant architecture-mimesis, arguing that he exercised the doing as an extension of praxis in sculpting and painting, replacing the classical syntax with "certain consonances, like rhyme, between the human figure and architecture"; that is to say, exploring the rhyme between the big volutes under the striking window-sills and the small ones under the pediments that crown the windows, whose "relationship was one of assonance, not of proportions" between them. The reticulated gratings, besides giving the necessary security, also constituted another important element of the composition, originating what was denominated with certain humor of *finestre inginocchiate* - or kneeling windows - in allusion to a misericord (VASARI, 2011, p. 728)<sup>2</sup>. The sculptor-architect used a three-dimensional wooden model to define the solution, "which Giovanni da Udine worked on stucco and painted" (VASARI, 2011, p. 728).

For Argan, Michelangelo's interest in windows or other recurring forms was not typological but iconological, highlighting that "it was not a scheme liable to reasoned variations, but an icon which was transformed by rhythm": the window was deconstructed, but its iconic image has been preserved. In conclusion "the contrast between Michelangelo and the Rome school was, substantially, a contrast between typology and iconology as two different processes of planning" (ARGAN, 2012, p. 85). His analogy between the work and a sonnet or madrigal is well-timed and precise:

*Michelangelo's interest in this ex tempore architecture, composed metrically and rhymed like a sonnet or madrigal with the customary play of opposites, went beyond that of a subtle and already virtually Mannerist linguistic analysis.*

Assuredly, the great significance of this small work, in addition to the compositional solution used, was to foreground the Mannerist anticlassicism. Argan does not consider accidental that the first anti-classical manifestation took place in Florence, in the Medici palace, conceived by one of the Latinist pioneers, a student of Vitruvius, establishing an unlikely link between

“Florentinism and anticlassicism”. And he concludes that “*this window model was nothing other than an experimental trial in which were announced some of what would become the great themes of Michelangelo the architect*”.

### **The symbiosis between *Teatro di Marcello* and *Palazzo Savelli* (Peruzzi, c. 1520; Quaroni, 1962)**

The insertion of the Palazzo Savelli - later Orsini - on the remaining parts of the *Teatro di Marcello* in Rome is a different case from the practice of reusing the ruins of antiquity. This proceeds both from the importance of the heritage property and from the unusual result of the intervention and the involvement of architects such as Baldassare Peruzzi and Ludovico Quaroni.

Completed in 13 BCE, almost a century before the Colosseum, the Teatro di Marcello presented the form that became typical of the program in the period in line with the standard defined in book V of the treaty drafted by Vitruvius, about two decades earlier. The semicircular generatrix of the audience - in the open air - was identical to that used in the Greek amphitheatres; however, this Roman modality presented the *cavea*, a structure in which the grandstand was supported, formed by 42 radial walls with a floor plan in wedge, producing 21 spans with arcs in the facade. The audience was divided, upwardly, into the categories of senators, gentlemen, people, plebeians and *matroneo* - intended for mothers and children. The different layers of the public corresponded to the three classical orders arranged on the external and internal facades (on the sides of the stage covered in marble, in continuity), presenting their different heights and proportions, with a more robust Doric base, the Ionic intermediate sector and a slimmer Corinthian attic. The building reached 32 meters in height and width of almost 130 meters, equivalent to the diameter of the drum. It accounts for about 15,000 spectators.

The great structure went into a process of degradation with the dissipation of the Roman Empire, being occupied throughout the Middle Ages by families who fortified it. The silting over a millennium covered more than half of the Doric base that was almost ten meters high, which became occupied by business; and the sector equivalent to the Ionian order, a little more than ten meters high, was divided into two and three floors of rental housing, as documented by the engravings of Giuseppe Vasi (1761), Piranesi (1774), Luigi Rossini (1850) and the photographs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Savelli assumed the archaic construction in the 14th century, commissioning Baldassare Peruzzi in the 1520s to turn it into a palace crowning the cyclopean structure. Peruzzi was the author of works such as Villa Farnesina (1509) and Palazzo Massimo alle Collone (1532), which placed him in the position of successor of the master Bramante, along with Raphael and Antonio da Sangallo; which brings meaningfulness to the work. The palace was composed of a *piano nobile*, an upper floor with a smaller floor-to-ceiling height and mansard roofs, replacing the attic composed of the Corinthian order with a little more than eleven meters of structure gauge and the eaves. For gradual augmentation on the back, a right angle matrix was adopted, in contrast to the curved shape, creating an almost triangular inner courtyard that, subdivided, composed two yards of contrasting dimensions: the small would receive a new entrance staircase starting from the base, in the intervention performed by the team of Ludovico Quaroni, in the



1960s, to be analyzed hereafter. The palace changed proprietors in 1712 and was renamed Orsini, as the new owners.

Over the centuries spontaneous expansions have occurred at the base of the ruin, originating what could be defined as an “informal” urban fabric. In front of the curved segment of the arched facade that remained, a narrow, picturesque road was formed, which opened itself to a small square, then bifurcated into two other small alleys in the westward direction. This was registered in the survey carried out on the occasion of the “liberation and restoration” of that heritage, between 1926 and 1932; a work carried out by the architect Alberto Calza Bini, who integrated a larger plan of interventions in the city undertaken by Mussolini. It was customary in the period the work of “liberating” monuments, the so-called *diradamento edilizio* – or “decreasing” (and less denseness) – which Gustavo Giovannoni advocated using parsimony to improve access, ventilation and illumination to places, as well as the visibility of the so-called “major” monuments, and also proposing the maintenance of the contexts of “minor” works as a “framework” for those (KÜHL, 2013, p. 137-177). At that time, the medieval buildings of the base, the trade and poor houses of the interior of the millenarian structure were removed, and the thick silting was eliminated, fully revealing the core (Figure 2). It was not a parsimonious intervention that occurred, but rather a more radical liberation of the monument, visibly prevailing the desire of the “Duce” to recover the old Baroque splendor proper to fascism.

Between 1962 and 1965, the palace received an intervention of modern lineage, composing another layer of the complex case. This was the work of Ludovico Quaroni, an architect for whom ancient architecture was a very expensive theme for his poetics (GRECO/REMIDDI, 2003, p. 14). Quaroni made functional adaptations in parallel to the necessary works of static restoration, with the collaboration of Gabriella Esposito and Luciano Giovanini.



Figure 2: The ruins of Teatro di Marcello with the Palazzo Orsini above.  
Source: the author.

The most important aspect of the work, more than the redefinition of the internal division itself, was the introduction of a staircase leading from the entrance level to the *piano nobile* - *affrescato* by Peruzzi - and *attico*, which was improved on occasion with the inclusion of attic space. Placed in the small triangular patio previously mentioned - covered with glass in the occasion - the vertical circulation was conceived as a didactically attached element to the edification. The stairs, steps and their peripheral walls were constituted with metallic structure, allowing “the old structure to transpire through the new” (GRECO/REMIDDI, 2003, p. 14). In a statement, Quaroni emphasized the decision to extend the external plaster to the interior of the staircase to avoid that the idea of that old space was lost; and strengthen the aggregated element, it seems.

The project analysis also highlights the “*deep sense of connection between architecture and place*” through the author’s approach to the intervention over the old: first, by combining various materials and techniques, which sought to establish an analogy with the constructive features of the Teatro di Marcello; second, through the perception of a necessary sturdiness of the stairs in front of the monumental dimension of pre-existence, “*at the cost of invading space with an excessive amount of matter*” (Figure 3 and 4). The structure of double T-shaped metallic beams established the majestic staircase, with steps and mirrors in red granite embedded in travertine bases; and the crystal parapet was supported by simple metallic profiles, receiving as a final touch a flat and sinuous handrail, handcrafted and authorial design, in contrast to the rigid stereometry of the stones. In such ways, Quaroni’s approach to the case tangential to what Carlo Scarpa proposed in his contemporary works such as the Castelvecchio Museum in Verona and the Querini Stampalia Foundation in Venice.

Nowadays, the unusual form of that important archaeological site surprises visitors. And the surprise increases when one discovers that the ruined building on the monument of that size is the Palazzo Orsini: its worn appearance produces the mimicry indispensable for a more harmonious coexistence between both.

Figure 3: Constructive detail of fittings of different stones.  
Source: the author.



Figure 4: Detail of the Quaroni staircase, with the granite step embedded in travertine and the handcrafted handrail.  
Source: <http://www.archidiap.com/opera/ristrutturazione-e-restauro-di-palazzo-orsini/> (Osmar).



### The conversion of the ruins of Diocletian's Thermae into *Basilica de Santa Maria degli Angeli* (Michelangelo, 1561)

The Diocletian's Baths were one of the largest bathing and leisure complexes built on Roman territory, the largest remaining architectural structure remaining in Rome - more precisely Late Antiquity. Its construction was initiated by Maximiano, co-emperor with Diocletian during the Tetrarchy (285-312 AD), in 288-289 AD and completed in 305-306 AD. It occupied about fourteen hectares, repeating the arrangement of the Caracalla Baths (Palladio, 2008, p. 136). Palladio's study of the city gave rise to the book *L'Antichità di Roma* (1554), in which he highlights the extraordinary dimensions of that complex, reporting that most of it was still standing at the time (PALLADIO, 2008, p. 64). It is also known that the eight granite columns of the main hall, which are fourteen meters high, were coveted centuries before by abbot Suger for the construction of Saint-Denis (CHOAY, 2006, p. 41).

In 1541 the Sicilian priest Antonio del Duca asked Paul III to transform the monument into a church consecrated to the angels, based on an alleged vision. In 1550, Julius III allowed him the installation of provisional altars, justified by the legend of the Baths having been built with the work of Christian martyrs. The idea was put into practice two decades later, in 1561, when Pius IV decided to build there a temple that would integrate a Carthusian monastery. This would be one of the actions of the Tridentine Church to revive paleochristian practices of appropriation of the great symbols of ancient Rome, as had already occurred with the Pantheon and other temples (VASARI, 2012, p. 624 - notes). The Council of Trent had reopened the debate on the compatibility of pagan culture with modern Christianity. The decision of Pius IV determined the impasse, as if the Church declared the thesis that the survival of the remnants of Roman monuments was the work of Providence (ARGAN, 2012, p. 309). We must also consider the opening of *Via Pia*, the current *Via Venti Settembre*, integrating plainly the area into the city and its development.

The existence of a floor plan of the Thermae and its elevation, accredited to Antonio or Giuliano da Sangallo<sup>3</sup>, and of another plan drawn by Baldassare Peruzzi, attest studies for recovery of the complex before 1561, when the pontiff gave the assignment to Michelangelo, as it was equally made with *Porta Pia* the previous year. The two incumbencies and the Sforza chapel, in Santa Maria Maggiore Church, constituted his last works. Argan points out that Michelangelo developed the successive works in a contrasting way: «where the *Porta Pia* was a lighthearted song, or madrigal, the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli was a deep meditation without words». And he adds that he had «deliberately renounced painting and sculpture, and therefore representation, and made only architecture. Then, with death near, he renounced architecture as well, reducing it to a gesture» (ARGAN, 2012, p. 303). It is clear that the option for architecture, besides being a consequence of the gradual evolution to exercise it, derives from the increasing physical limitation for the effort required for painting, and especially for sculpture.

According to Argan, the Vasari-biographer «was very circumspect in recording the matter of Santa Maria degli Angeli», highlighting only the rapture of the pope and others with the solution presented. The historian considered

<sup>3</sup> Accredited to Giuliano da Sangallo by Siebenhüner and Ackerman, and to Antonio da Sangallo by Argan and Contardi (VASARI, 2012, p. 624).

Michelangelo's intervention rather restricted, stating that he «*did almost nothing there. He limited himself to marking off the space with some dividing walls and creating a deep presbytery*» (ARGAN, 2012, p. 309). However, it would be more accurate to say that it did little, but enough to properly recycle the old structure, solving the problem broadly within the budget. Ackerman, on the other hand, was more attentive to the practical aspects involved in the project, realizing Vasari's subtle mention of the project's response to the needs of the monastery (ACKERMAN, 1997, p. 270).

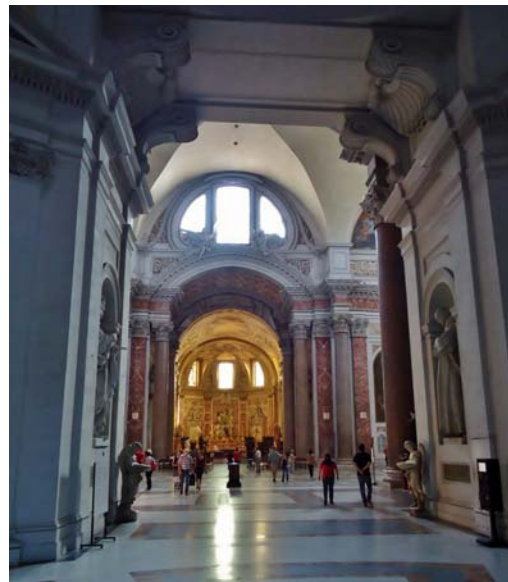
The Sicilian priest had postulated an immediate solution to the problem: to transform the great room of the Baths into a nave of the church, composed of three vaults supported on the eight colossal columns, whose approximate proportions were 24 meters wide, 59 meters long and 30 meters high (LOTZ, 1998, p. 105). The entrance would be on the smaller side, facing northwest (current *Via Cernaia*), and the altar positioned on the opposite side. It is important to emphasize that until then the use of the complex had not been decided by the order of the Carthusians, which brought some decisive determinants to the project.

The executed project addressed program issues, that is, not only "formal will" as a motivation, as argued Ackerman (1997, p. 270): "*Without denying the quality of Michelangelo's solution, we see in it more common sense than inspiration*". The author adopted a diverse configuration for practical reasons, defining the entrance in the semicircular concave that remained of the old *caldarium*, in the back of the *Thermae* (current Republic Square), forming an axis until the altar (Figures 5 and 6), in the presbytery built in the occasion, with a sequence of precincts: after the entrance, the rotunda that contained the *tepidarium* became a vestibule, and the central vault of the great room - the only one of the three of square proportions - joined the two contiguous smaller spaces, fulfilling the

Figure 5: Facade of the *Basilica de Santa Maria degli Angeli*, facing the Republic Square.  
Source: author.



Figure 6: Interior of the Basilica seen from the vestibule (former *tepidarium*) for the presbytery.  
Source: author.





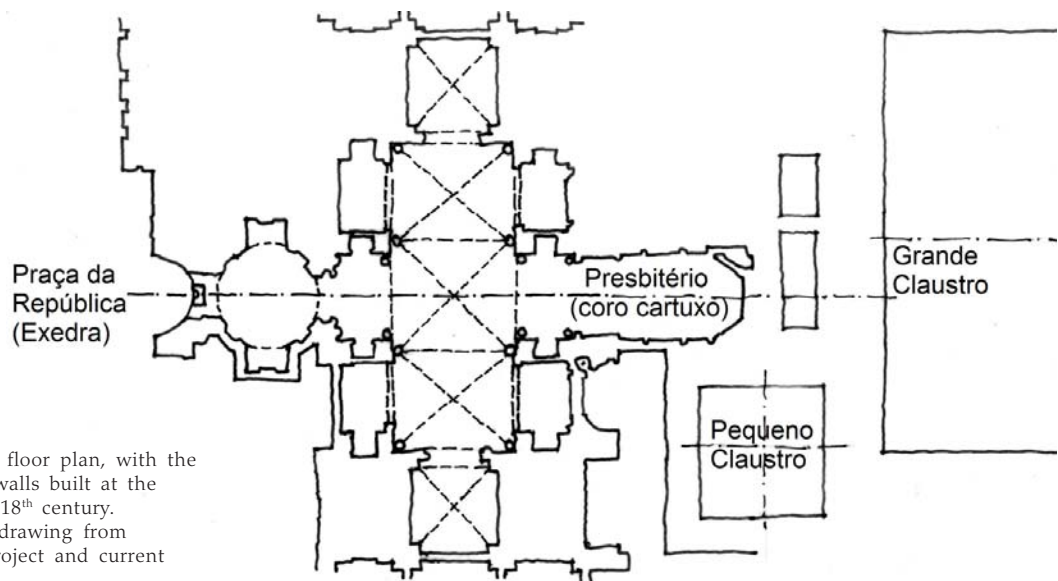


Figure 7: Basilica floor plan, with the inclusion of the walls built at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Source: author's drawing from Michelangelo's project and current surveys.

role of nave (Figure 7). In this way, he transformed the colossal space into a dominant transept, adding to it the four remaining lateral spaces and the two cubic rooms of the extremities, assigning them the role of chapels. The arrangement, besides creating «*a more interesting relation of spaces*», solved the necessary closure of the Carthusians by positioning the choir in the long established presbytery, separating the monks from the laic public; a segregation that was maintained with the direct connection of the choir to the cloister, defined where the *frigidarium* (external pool) was, in order to avoid demolitions. A final justification for the choice would be the satisfaction of the Renaissance preference for symmetry, which the Del Duca option did not possess (ACKERMAN, 1997, p. 270-273).

As the main entrance, Michelangelo used the two gates separated by a niche that were found in the remaining cylindrical fragment of the *caldarium* (Figure 8). Needless to say, the decision, ambiguous by its disproportion, was full of intentions. The former exedra, in the Therma's later courtyard, became the frontal homonymous square, transmitting to it the semicircular shape that molded the standardized façade of the current Republic Square in the 19th century. The white color prevailed in the interior, emphasizing the rosy granite of the eight columns; which later would be replaced by the polychromy of the paintings and stone coverings on the walls, in a baroque intervention by Luigi Vanvitelli in the middle of the 18th century. Therefore, the original white remained only in the vaults on the transept (Figure 9). Also, the spaces adjacent to the main room were closed in the first half of the 18th century, before the intervention of Vanvitelli. On the occasion, walls were built, and accommodated large canvas transferred from the basilica of St. Peter. This certainly altered the quality of the original conception, as warned by Brodini (2009, p. 243), both in terms of the fluidity of spatial relations and also in terms of the elimination of the contrast between the large illuminated space of the central room and the penumbra of the lower and narrower lateral spaces.



Figure 8: Detail of the entrance, reusing the doors inserted in the stretch of the semicircular wall that remained from the caldarium. Source: the author.



Figure 9: View of the great transept, with polychromy of Vanvitelli intervention. Source: the author.

Argan even postulated that Michelangelo “did not just protect those things he admired as an artist, he also stated his aversion to the programs of *renovatio*, to the classicist interpretation of the antique, and to the reduction of the antique to precepts for modern construction”. If his anticlassical architecture was the answer to the last two aspects, his aversion to the *renovatio* was demonstrated on occasions such as when he opposed the transfer of the statue of Marcus Aurelius to the Campidoglio Square, thus defined by Paul III. In the reuse of the *Thermae*, he practically gave up intervening, adding and removing a minimum of matter. For Bruno Zevi this was “the supreme text of the not-finished and the highest point of this transcendentalism” (1964 apud ARGAN, 2012, p. 309). The incompleteness of the great structure brought about by the weariness of nature and man (plunder of marble and building materials) is susceptible of interpretation as *non-finito*. The fascination with the unfinished form, pursued since the first slaves carved, reflected in his art the existential drama of the transience of sensible reality; and we are tempted to extend it to architecture. A legacy of the philosophical initiation received in the Neoplatonic Academy of Florence, inaugurated by Marsilio Ficino, in 1462, under the patronage of the Medici.

However, more recent analysis value palpable factors that interfere with the project, such as spatial, constructive and economic limitations, an approach that offers new possibilities for interpreting the works and that deserves to be considered. Brodini (2009, p. 244) adopts the strong argument of the scarcity of available resources at the time, about 17.500 *scudi*, to question the idea that Michelangelo left the ruin almost as it was only by “*veneration to the past*”, supporting its premise in the question posed by Ackerman - whether the minimal intervention “was due to respect for the ancient monument or to a new spirit of *Christian asceticism*” (ACKERMAN, 1997, p. 283). These are facts to be considered as part of the outcome. But it does not seem to be just a lack of money that is behind his proposal for Santa Maria degli Angeli, as his trajectory demonstrates.



## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The time that has passed since the interventions may suggest that they are no longer a parameter for the current moment, for the desired reconfiguration of the intervention problem in existing buildings. Nonetheless, the analysis assists and support the understanding and knowledge of the beginnings of this practice, recomposing a necessary “guiding thread” for the consistent interpretation of the problem, and above all, the coping forms of those cases evidence a modern essence.

Exactly five centuries ago, in 1517, Michelangelo made the small intervention in the Palazzo Medici, demonstrating a critical position similar to that presently prescribed today by the bases of intervention in heritage. This collective construction originated in the antinomy of the visions of Viollet-Le-Duc and Ruskin, receives the contribution of characters such as Riegl, Boito and Giovannoni, and reaches maturity in the philosophical interpretation of Brandi. In his last intervention, almost half a century later, in the 1560s, he converted the Thermae into a basilica with an even more contemporary radicality. The “formal will” of the work was not a demiurgic act, as it turned out: it had in its conditioners and in the program fundamental ingredients to the result.

In the case of Teatro di Marcello, Peruzzi treated the old ruin like a *tuff*, a promontory on which rested its bent suffering Palazzo. Four centuries later, the architect of the period of Mussolini applied *diradamento edilizio*, removing only the poor occupation: it is possible to question the differentiated treatment between palace and tenement. Nevertheless, it is Quaroni’s modern intervention that stands out, by interpreting with mastery the criteria laid down over the centuries, intervening without giving up the necessary artistic sensibility that architecture demands: with resourcefulness similar to Scarpa, he defined the vigorous proportions of the new staircase, in harmony with the cyclopean ruin; it made the contrast between the travertine and the granite, which recalls to the original constructive system; and made the final touch intervention refined with the hand-crafted design of the glass parapet framed by the curvilinear flat iron railing.

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