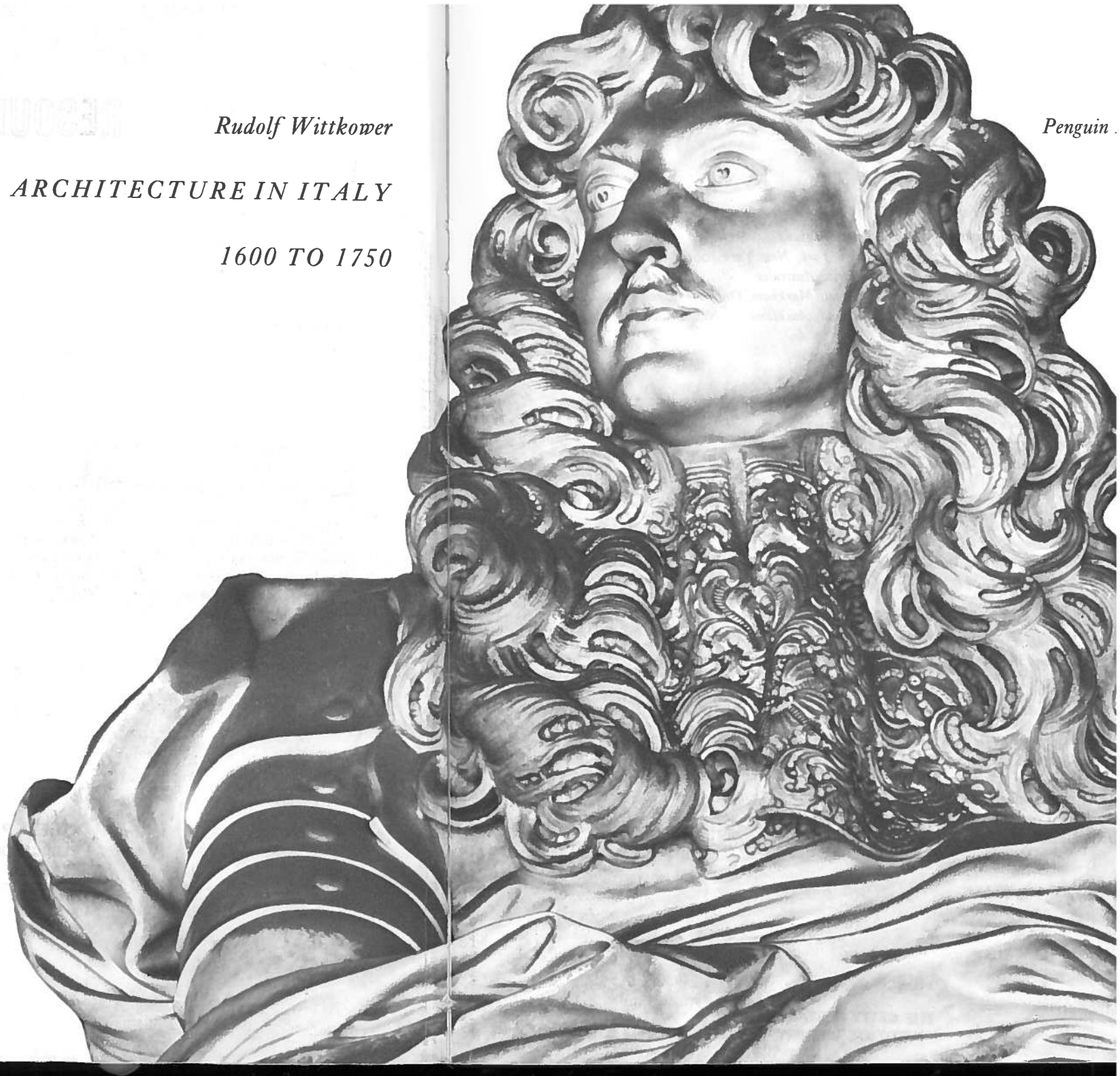


*Rudolf Wittkower*

*ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN ITALY*

*1600 TO 1750*

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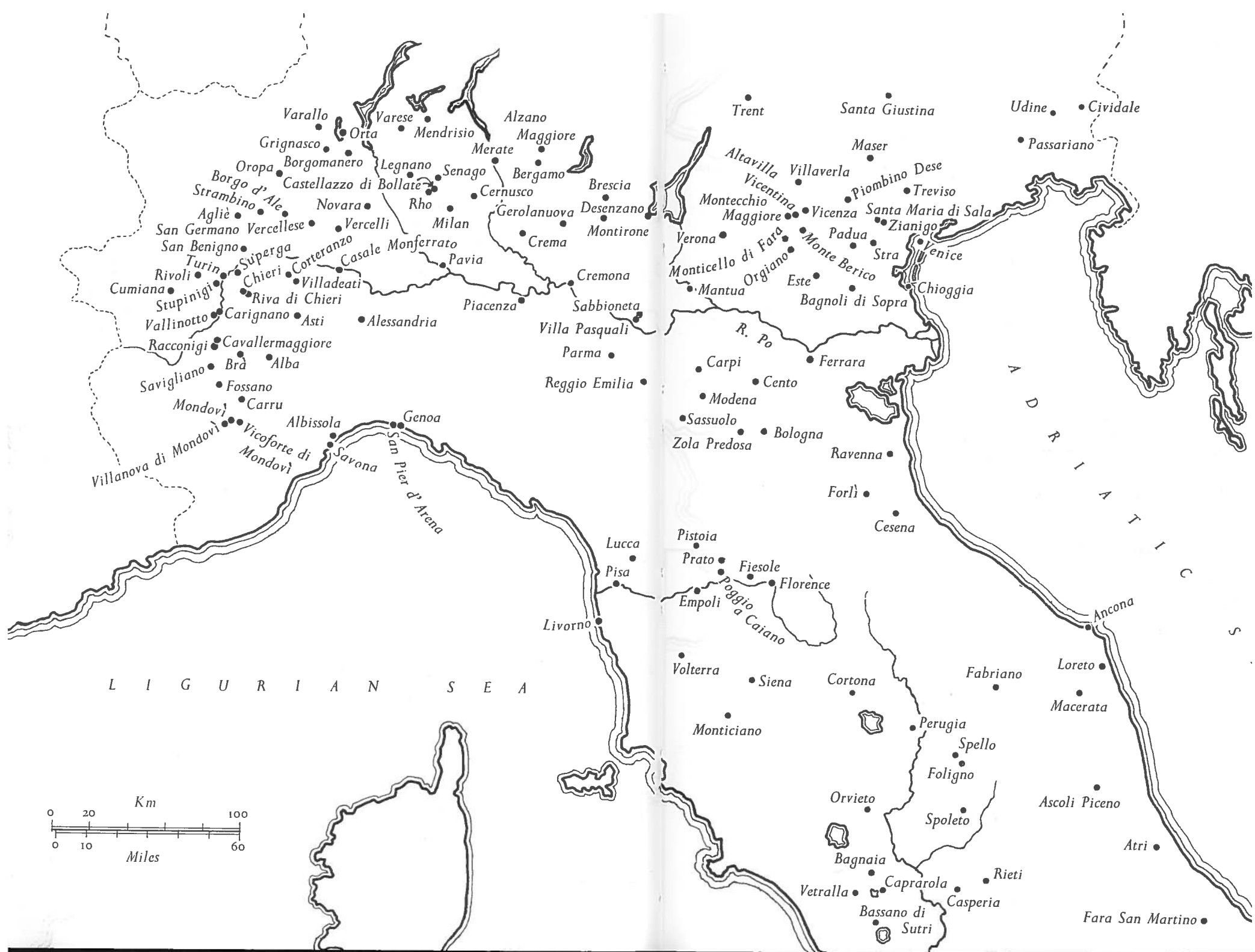
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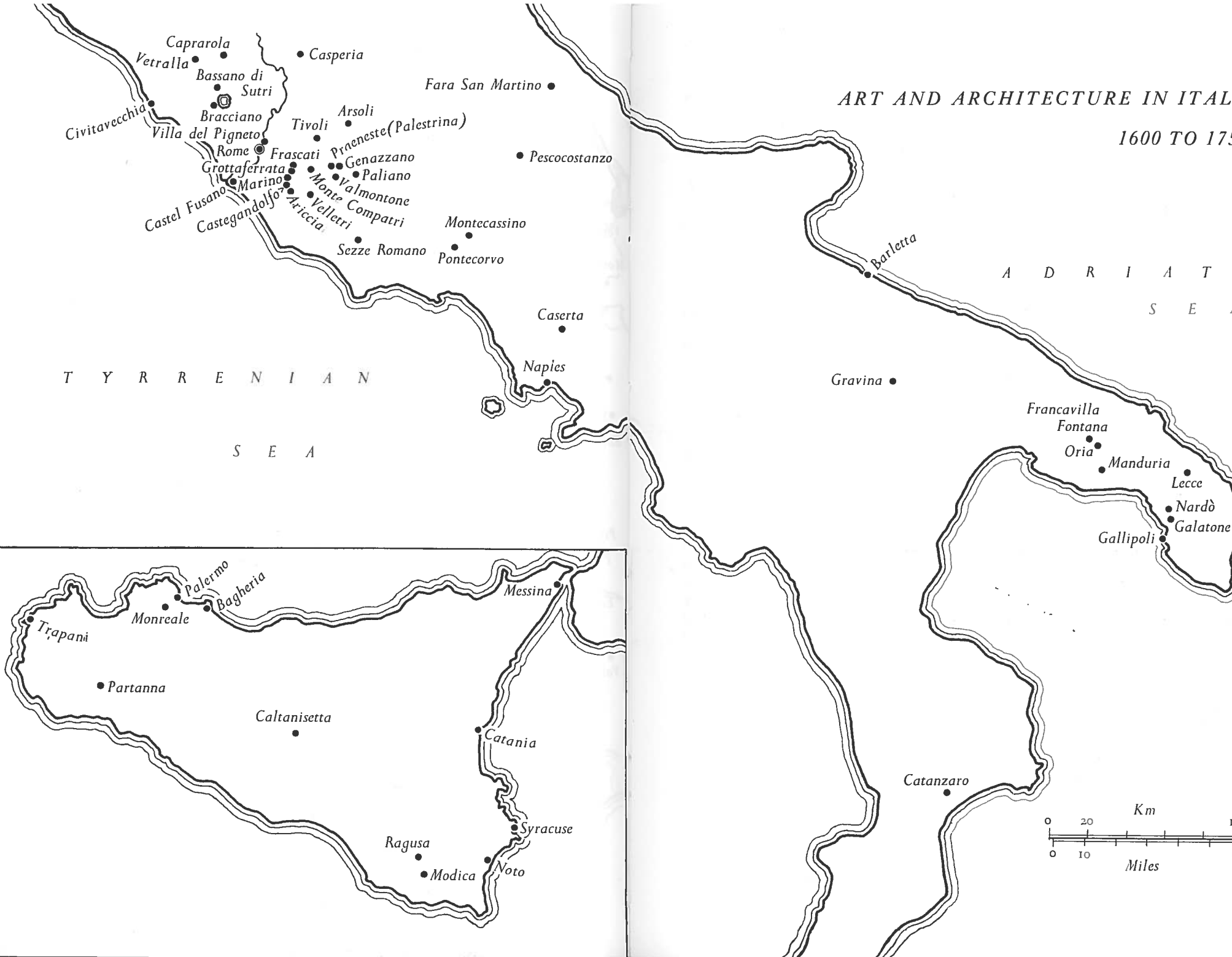
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TO MY WIFE



ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN ITAL

1600 TO 17





## PART TWO

# THE AGE OF THE HIGH BAROQUE

CIRCA 1625-CIRCA 1675

## CHAPTER 7

### INTRODUCTION

The Second Part of this book, with the generic title 'The Age of the High Baroque', comprises many different artistic tendencies; but the period receives its imprint from the overpowering figure of Bernini, who for more than half a century dominated Italian artistic life at the focal point, Rome. His success was made possible because he had the good fortune to serve five popes who showed the highest regard for his genius.

The new era begins with the pontificate of Urban VIII (1623-44), whose strong but refined features survive in a number of magnificent busts by Bernini [70]. Quite different from the austere popes of the Counter-Reformation, Urban saw himself as a Julius II re-born. In his early youth he had written poems in Latin and Italian modelled on Horace and Catullus.<sup>1</sup> As pope he revived the humanist interest in learning and surrounded himself with a circle of poets and scholars, and superficially his court assumed something of the freedom and grandeur of his Renaissance forerunners. But it

would be wrong to see either Urban's reign or those of his successors simply in terms of an increasing secularization. On the contrary, Urban VIII confirmed the decrees of the Council of Trent, and not only maintained the peace with the Jesuits but regarded them as his foremost allies in consolidating the results of the Counter-Reformation. The words with which he registered the memory of St Ignatius in the Roman martyrology are characteristic of his attitude: 'On the 31 July is celebrated in Rome the feast of St Ignatius, Confessor, Founder of the Society of Jesus, illustrious for his holiness, his miracles, and his zéal in propagating the Catholic religion throughout the world.'<sup>2</sup> It is equally characteristic that the Pamphili Pope Innocent X, Urban's successor (1644-55), was attended on his death-bed by none but the general of the Jesuit Order, Padre Oliva, who was also on intimate terms with Bernini.

Once again, therefore, the question asked in the first chapter of this book arises during the new period; did the Jesuits and, for that matter, any other of the vigorous new Orders such as the Carmelites and Theatines take an active part in shaping not only their own but also the papal art policy? No one can doubt that a considerable change occurred in artistic inter-

70. Gianlorenzo Bernini:  
Bust of Urban VIII, 1640-2. Bronze. Detail.  
*Spoleto, Cathedral*

pretation of religious experience; but it was not a change in one direction. The bow stretches from an appealing worldliness [236] to tender sensibility [169], to sentimental and mawkish devotion,<sup>3</sup> bigoted piety [207], and mystic elation [78, 79] – sufficient evidence that we face the artists' reactions to the protean temper of the age rather than a deliberate policy. In actual fact, religious institutions accepted whatever was in the power of the artists to offer.

#### *Seicento Devotion and Religious Imagery*

One must probe into the religious tendencies which developed in the course of the seventeenth century in order to gain an understanding of the character and diversity of religious imagery.<sup>4</sup> During the first half of the century, casuistry and, in its wake, the various forms of probabilism became the widely accepted patterns of theological thought and conviction, principles to which the masses of the faithful reacted by laxity of morals.<sup>5</sup> It would be difficult to assert that morality sank to a lower level than ever before; what took on a new and morally perilous aspect was that the Church now not only connived at, but even supported, individual decisions of convenience at variance with the letter and the spirit of dogmatic religion. This was the hard core of probabilism. To be sure, in the second half of the century probabilism lost ground, but a public figure such as Padre Oliva, General of the Jesuits from 1664 to 1681, gave it his full support.

At the same time quietism, a new form of mysticism, swept through Spain, France, and Italy. Its chief prophet was the Spanish priest Miguel de Molinos (d. 1697), whose *Guida spirituale*, published in 1675, took Rome by storm.<sup>6</sup> Molinos, it is true, ended his life in prison; yet quietism had come to stay. Catholic historians describe it as a perversion of the mystical doctrine of interior quiet. Molinos's 'soft and savoury sleep of nothingness' of the

soul in the state of contemplation led, in the view of traditional ecclesiasticism, to the exaltation of an empty consciousness and consequently to immoral apathy. In contrast to 'classical' mysticism, quietism was theological rather than metaphysical, obscurantism rather than enlightenment, an escapist form of devotion produced at will rather than a spontaneous condition of sublime union with God.

It seems not far-fetched to conclude that the mentality which informed probabilism and quietism found an echo in religious imagery. Much that strikes the modern observer as hypocritical piety in Seicento pictures stems no doubt from the general attitude towards confession and devotion at the time of the Catholic Restoration.

It must also be emphasized that in the course of the seventeenth century the Order of the Jesuits itself went through a characteristic metamorphosis: under the generals Muzio Vitelleschi (1615–45), Vincenzo Caraffa (1645–9), and Giovan Paolo Oliva, mundane interests in wealth, luxury, and political intrigue, and a frivolity in the interpretation of the vows replaced the original zealous and austere spirit of the Order. Moreover, the Catholic Restoration had led to a consolidation of doctrine and authority, expressed by the glamour of the High Baroque papal court, which vied with those of the absolute monarchies. As a result of such developments one finds, broadly speaking, that inside the Church the anti-aesthetic approach to art of the period of the militant Counter-Reformation was now replaced by an aesthetic appreciation of artistic quality. This readiness to discriminate, which began under Pope Paul V, coincided in the pontificates of Urban VIII, Innocent X, and Alexander VII (1655–67) with the maturity of the great Baroque individualists, Bernini, Cortona, Borromini, Sacchi, and Algardi, who received full official recognition.

The turn to aestheticism in official religious circles is one of the distinguishing marks of the

new era. Even if the arts remained an important weapon in the post-counter-reformatory arsenal, they had no longer the sole function to instruct and edify, but also to delight. Every official pronouncement bears this out, beginning with Urban VIII's well-known words, which he supposedly addressed to Bernini after ascending the papal throne. 'It is your great good luck, Cavaliere,' he is reported to have said, 'to see Matteo Barberini pope; but we are even luckier in that the Cavaliere Bernini lives at the time of Our pontificate' – an unambiguous homage to artistic eminence. To what length aesthetic appreciation was carried becomes apparent from some highly interesting documents which, though rather late, yet characterize the new attitude. A controversy arose between the Jesuits and the sculptor Legros regarding the placing of his statue of the Blessed Stanislas Kostka in S. Andrea al Quirinale, Rome.<sup>7</sup> The Jesuits rejected the artist's request to move the statue from the little room of the Novitiate into one of the chapels of the church, advancing the argument, among others, that there would be no relationship between the size of the figure and that of the chapel and, in addition, that the figure would interfere with the uniformity of the church, a principle on which Bernini, the architect, had insisted and which Prince Camillo Pamphili, the patron, had fully accepted.

The course taken by Seicento devotion, the 'secularization' of the Jesuit Order and the papal court, the aesthetic aspirations in clerical circles – all this would seem to militate against a resurgence of mysticism in art. Yet it happened, as is evidenced by a number of Roman sculptures and paintings roughly between 1650 and 1680, from Bernini's *St Teresa* [85] to Gaulli's frescoes in the Gesù [213]. The same tendency is to be found outside Rome; as proof may be mentioned only the late paintings of Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione or the works of Mattia Preti's middle period [245]. Bernini's

late manner, in particular, reveals an intense spirituality at variance with the laxity of official devotion. I have pointed out that Bernini had close contacts with the Jesuits (p. 24) and regularly practised St Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*. While the *Exercises* owed their unparalleled success to the vivid appeal they made to the senses, which is also a hall-mark of Bernini's work, their practical psychology, centred in the deliberate evocation of images, was essentially non-physical.

To what extent Bernini himself and others were captivated by quietist mysticism is a question that would need further investigation. Italy produced no great mystics during the seventeenth century, but there seems to have existed a popular undercurrent which kept the mystic tradition alive. It is more than likely that Bernini had studied the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite,<sup>8</sup> and we have his own word for it that the *Imitation of Christ*, written by the late medieval mystic Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), was his favourite book, from which he used to read a chapter every night.<sup>9</sup> It is in this direction, I believe, that one has to look in order to explain the alliance in many High Baroque works between Jesuit psycho-therapeutic directness and non-Jesuit mysticism.

#### *Rhetoric and Baroque Procedure*

Ecstasies and raptures are the psycho-physical conditions which designate the culmination of mystical activity. At many periods artists endeavoured to render not only these conditions themselves but also the visions experienced in that exalted state of perception. What distinguishes the Baroque from earlier periods and even the High from the Early Baroque is that the beholder is stimulated to participate actively in the supra-natural manifestations of the mystic art rather than to look at it 'from outside'. This is meant in a very specific sense, for it is evident that in many works from about 1640

on a dual vision is implied, since the method of representation suggests that the entire image of a saint and his vision is the spectator's supra-natural experience. Bernini's St Teresa, shown in rapture, seems to be suspended in mid-air [84, 85], and this can only appear as reality by virtue of the implied visionary state of mind of the beholder. Or to give a later example: in Pozzo's ceiling of S. Ignazio [217] 'illumination' is granted to the saint in ecstasy, but to see the heavens open with the saint and his disciples riding on clouds – that is due to revelation granted to the spectator.<sup>10</sup> Scarcely known to the Early Baroque, the dual vision was often pressed home with all the resources of illusionism during the High Baroque and supported by drama, light, expression, and gesture. Nothing was left undone to draw the beholder into the orbit of the work of art. Miracles, wondrous events, supra-natural phenomena are given an air of verisimilitude; the improbable and unlikely is rendered plausible, indeed convincing.

Representations of dual visions are extreme cases of an attempt to captivate the spectator through an appeal to the emotions. It is worthwhile seeking a common denominator for this approach so obvious in a prominent class of High Baroque religious imagery. The technique of these artists is that of persuasion at any price. Persuasion is the central axiom of classical rhetoric. In an illuminating paper G. C. Argan<sup>11</sup> has therefore rightly stressed the strong influence of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* on Baroque procedure. Aristotle devotes the entire second book of his *Rhetoric* to the rendering of the emotions because they are the basic human stuff through which persuasion is effected. The transmission of emotive experience was the main object of Baroque religious imagery, even in the works of such Baroque classicists as Andrea Sacchi.<sup>12</sup> With his technique of persuasion the artist appeals to a public that wants to be persuaded. In rhetoric, Aristotle asserts, the principles of persuasion, in order to be persuasive, must

echo common opinions. Similarly, the Baroque artist responded to the affective behaviour of the public and developed a rhetorical technique that assured easy communication. Thus the artists of this period made use of narrative conventions and a rhetorical language of gestures and expression that often strike the modern observer as hackneyed, insincere, dishonest, or hypocritical.<sup>13</sup>

On the other side of the balance sheet are the growing awareness of personal style and the role assigned to inspiration and imagination and consequently the value put on the sketch, the bozzetto, and the first rough idea, unchecked by the encumbrances of execution. These new values, often uncommitted to current rhetorical usage, were to attain prominence later.

#### *Patronage*

Nothing could be more misleading than to label – as has been done<sup>14</sup> – the art of the entire Baroque period as the art of the Counter-Reformation. The austere popes of the late sixteenth century and the great counter-reformatory saints would have been horrified by the sensuous and exuberant art of Bernini's age and would also have been out of sympathy with the art policy of the popes of the Catholic Restoration. It was mainly due to Urban VIII Barberini (1623–44), Innocent X Pamphili (1644–55), and Alexander VII Chigi (1655–67), and their families that Rome was given a new face, an appearance of festive splendour which changed the character of the city for good. In order to assess this transformation, one need only compare the gloomy 'counter-reformatory' palazzo type, exemplified by Domenico Fontana's Lateran palace and the family palace of the Borghese Pope Paul V, with such exhilarating structures as the Palazzo Barberini [53] and the Palazzo Chigi-Odescalchi [107], or the sombre church façades of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries with the imagina-

tive and sparkling creations of a slightly later period, such as S. Andrea al Quirinale [105], S. Agnese [129], SS. Martina e Luca [145], and S. Maria della Pace [147]; one need only think of Bernini's fountains [92], of the elation experienced by generation after generation on the Piazza del Popolo [181], the Piazzas Navona and Campitelli, and, above all, of the jubilant grandeur pervading the Piazza of St Peter's [112, 113]. These prominent examples give an idea of the character and extent of papal patronage during the period under review. They also indicate that from Urban VIII's reign on the most important building tasks were handed on to the most distinguished architects, in contrast to the lack of discrimination often to be found in the earlier period; further, that the patrons sympathetically accepted personal idiosyncrasies of style and the determination of artists and architects to solve each problem on its own merits. In contrast to the equalizing tendencies of the earlier phase, the variety of manner now becomes almost unbelievable, not only between architect and architect and not only between the early and late works of one master, but even between one master's works of the same years (cf. illustration 105 with 98 and 119 with 137). Strong-willed individualists make their entry.

If all this be true, some popular misunderstandings should yet be corrected. Contrary to general opinion, most of the new churches built in Rome during this period were small, even very small, in size; the need for large congregational churches was satisfied at an earlier period. Many of the finest structures of the Roman High Baroque, and precisely those which had also the greatest influence inside and outside Italy, are monumental only in appearance, not in scale. Moreover, compared with the extension and diversity of papal, ecclesiastical, and aristocratic patronage under Paul V, artistic enterprises under the following popes were considerably more limited. It would not be

possible, for instance, to list a series of frescoes between 1630 and 1650 comparable to those of the years 1606–18 (p. 79).

The High Baroque popes lavished vast sums on their private undertakings: Urban VIII on the Palazzo Barberini and Innocent X on the 'Pamphili Centre', the Piazza Navona with the family palace and S. Agnese.<sup>15</sup> But their primary objective, enhancing the glamour and prestige of the papal court, remained St Peter's, and it was the magnitude of this task that depleted their resources. Immediately after Urban's accession Bernini began work on the Baldacchino [86] and was soon to be engaged on the re-organization of the whole area under the dome as well as on the pope's tomb [83]. Regarding the pictorial decoration of the basilica, Urban's policy was less clear-sighted. Although Andrea Sacchi began to paint in 1625 and was kept busy for the next ten years, at first the pope also fell back on older Florentine painters like Ciampelli and Passignano; Baglione too and even the aged and entirely outmoded Cavaliere d'Arpino received commissions for paintings. But apart from Sacchi's, the main burden lay on Lanfranco's and Cortona's shoulders. Other distinguished artists such as Domenichino, Valentin, Poussin, and Vouet had their share and, in addition, the very young Pellegrini, Camassei, and Romanelli, who held out hopes of great achievement but in the light of history must be regarded as failures.<sup>16</sup> In any case, during Urban's pontificate the work of decoration in St Peter's never stopped, and almost every year saw the beginning of a new enterprise. The tempo slackened under Innocent X, but Alexander VII once again pursued the continuation of the work with the utmost energy. Under him the two most prodigious contributions, the Cathedra of St Peter [87] and the Piazza, took shape.

Compared with St Peter's, the patronage bestowed on the two papal palaces, the Vatican and the Quirinal, was negligible. In the Vatican

Urban had rooms painted by Abbatini and Romanelli, and although the latter's frescoes in the Sala della Contessa Matilda<sup>17</sup> (1637–42) are not devoid of charm, it is obvious that they cannot vie with the monumental works of these years. On the whole, it can be stated that during this period the less distinguished commissions were in the hands of minor artists. This does not apply, however, to the one major operation in the Quirinal palace, the decoration of the Gallery, accomplished in Alexander's reign by all available talents under Pietro da Cortona's supervision (p. 330).

The outstanding achievement of the entire epoch remains Bernini's work in and around St Peter's, executed over a period of almost two generations. Though undertaken without a premeditated comprehensive programme on the part of the popes, this work embodies the spirit of the Catholic Restoration and, implicitly, that of the High Baroque more fully than any other complex of works of art in Rome, Italy, or Europe.<sup>18</sup> In ever new manifestations the perpetuity and triumph of the Church, the

glory of faith and sacrifice are given expression, and these highly charged symbols impress themselves on the beholder's eye and mind through their intense and impetuous visual language.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, while this cycle of monumental works seemed to propound Rome's final victory, the authority of the Holy See had already begun to wane. The Peace of Westphalia (1648), ending the Thirty Years War in Europe, made it evident that henceforth the powers would settle their quarrels without papal intercession. Moreover, in the course of the century 'the authority of the Holy See' – in Ranke's words – 'changed inevitably, if gradually, from monarchic absolutism to the deliberative methods of constitutional aristocracy'. Not unexpectedly, therefore, after the age of Bernini, Cortona, and Borromini Rome could no longer maintain her unchallenged artistic supremacy. Although Rome preserved much of her old vitality, a centrifugal shift of gravity towards the north and south may be observed in the latter part of the seventeenth century: Venice, Genoa, Piedmont, and Naples began to take the leading roles.

## CHAPTER 8

## GIANLORENZO BERNINI

1598–1680

## INTRODUCTION

Few data are needed to outline the life's story of the greatest genius of the Italian Baroque. Bernini was born at Naples on 7 December 1598, the son of a Neapolitan mother and a Florentine father. We have seen that his father Pietro was a sculptor of more than average talent and that he moved with his family to Rome in about 1605. Until his death seventy-five years later Gianlorenzo left the city only once for any length of time, when he followed in 1665, at the height of his reputation, Louis XIV's call to Paris. With brief interruptions his career led from success to success, and for more than fifty years, willingly or unwillingly, Roman artists had to bow to his eminence. Only Michelangelo before him was held in similar esteem by the popes, the great, and the artists of his time. Like Michelangelo he regarded sculpture as his calling and was, at the same time, architect, painter, and poet; like Michelangelo he was a born craftsman and marble was his real element; like Michelangelo he was capable of almost superhuman concentration and single-mindedness in pursuing a given task. But unlike the terrible and lonely giant of the sixteenth century, he was a man of infinite charm, a brilliant and witty talker, fond of conviviality, aristocratic in demeanour, a good husband and father, a first-rate organizer, endowed with an unparalleled talent for creating rapidly and with ease.

His father's activity in Paul V's Chapel in S. Maria Maggiore determined the beginning of his career. It was thus that the pope's and

Cardinal Scipione Borghese's attention was drawn to the young prodigy and that he, a mere lad of nineteen, entered the orbit of the most lavish patron of the period. Until 1624 he remained in the service of the cardinal, creating, with brief interruptions, the statues and groups which are still in the Villa Borghese. After Urban VIII's accession to the papal throne, his pre-eminent position in the artistic life of Rome was secured. Soon the most important enterprises were concentrated in his hands, and from 1624 to the end of his days he was almost exclusively engaged on religious works. In February 1629, after Maderno's death, he was appointed 'Architect to St Peter's' and, although his activity in that church began as early as 1624 with the commission of the Baldacchino [86], the majority of his sculptural, decorative, and architectural contribution lay between 1630 and his death.

In the early 1620s he was one of the most sought-after portrait sculptors, but with the accretion of monumental tasks on an unprecedented scale, less and less time was left him for distractions of this kind. In the later 1620s and in the thirties he had to employ the help of assistants for such minor commissions, and from the last thirty-five years of his life hardly half a dozen portrait busts exist by his hand. The most extensive works – tombs, statues, chapels, churches, fountains, monuments, and the Square of St Peter's – crowd into the three pontificates of Urban VIII, Innocent X, and Alexander VII. Although he was active to the very end, it was only during the last years that commissions thinned out. From all we can