

Architecture and Royal Presence

Architecture and Royal Presence:
Domenico and Giulio Cesare Fontana
in Spanish Naples (1592-1627)

By

Sabina de Cavi

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P U B L I S H I N G

Architecture and Royal Presence: Domenico and Giulio Cesare Fontana in Spanish Naples (1592-1627),
by Sabina de Cavi

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Per l'amore, che ho ricevuto da mia madre
Per la tenacia, che ho appreso da mio padre
Per la dolcezza, che vedo in mio fratello
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I am a Roman, but this book is the result of my fascination with Naples.

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INTRODUCTION

SPANISH NAPLES: PROBLEMS, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND METHOD

Of the disposition of the souls of the Kingdom towards the present government [...] you will know eventually, Your Excellency, that the men of this realm are more or less of three types; plebians, nobles and barons, even if these groups have certain common qualities: they are interested in novelty, not very respectful of the law, they greatly value honor, they love appearance more than substance, they're courageous, murderous, and – worst of all – they are all equally discontented with the present government.¹

This book concerns the Neapolitan activity of Domenico Fontana (1543-1607), an architect and engineer born in Switzerland (Canton Ticino) who established his career in Rome under Pope Sixtus V. In 1592 Domenico moved to Naples, where he planned royal monuments and major engineering projects for the Spanish Habsburg viceroys until his death in 1607. Because his son Giulio Cesare (1580-1627) was his first assistant in the family workshop, and inherited most of his projects, the younger Fontana's activity in Italy and Spain is also an essential part of this study. The presence of the Fontanas in Naples is documented between 1592 and 1627; accordingly, these years loosely furnish the chronological frame for this book.

More broadly, the chronological span of this research encompasses the papacy of Sixtus V (1585-90) and the reign of Philip III of Spain (1598-1621). Based on substantial new archival material, it can be demonstrated that, far from witnessing a period of political decline and artistic inactivity, the age of Philip III saw a flourishing of international propaganda by the Habsburgs.² In the first part of this book, I contend that in the last years of Philip II's reign, and in response to repeated political crises, the Spanish crown devised a strategy of self-representation in its Italian provinces

¹ PORZIO [1577/79]: fol. 47r-v.

² On this period: *Représentation, écriture et pouvoir* [1998] 1999; SÁNCHEZ 1988; SÁNCHEZ 1998; FEROS CARRASCO 2008.

aimed at enhancing its reputation and at guaranteeing the *conservación del reino* in the new century.³ The defeat of the Invincible Armada in England (1588), Henry IV's conversion to Catholicism in France (1593), and the third bankruptcy of Philip II (1596) set the stage for a struggle for primacy in Europe.⁴ Furthermore, an acute diplomatic crisis with the papacy emerged at the death of Philip II, when the Spanish investiture of the kingdom of Naples was abruptly renegotiated from Rome.⁵ Thanks to the efforts of the duke of Lerma (1552-1623) and cardinal nephew Pietro Aldobrandini (1571-1621), in 1599 an agreement was reached and the investiture confirmed by Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605). On that occasion, Madrid chose to overhaul Naples as the capital of the kingdom, and make it the beating heart of Spain's Mediterranean politics.⁶

Among the questions this study raises is why the crown chose Domenico Fontana, a Ticinese architect trained in papal Rome, rather than a Neapolitan or a Spanish architect to work at the Neapolitan court. The Spanish Habsburgs were invested in creating a new self-image in their Italian territories, and Domenico's name and architecture style were instrumental in achieving this political aim. Through his architecture and by means of local architectural traditions and taste, the new idea of the Spanish monarchy, developed in Spain under Philip II, was transferred and adapted to Naples. By focusing on these issues, this book casts new light on the state of Spanish and Neapolitan architecture around 1600, illuminating a reciprocal relationship of overlaps and borrowings.

Domenico Fontana's activity in Naples is crucial to understanding Neapolitan architecture at this moment and after. Through his work we can examine the artistic and political ties that bound Spain and its Italian capital, and explain several features of seventeenth-century Neapolitan architecture. Before the arrival of Cosimo Fanzago (1591-1678) in 1612, Domenico was, in fact, the only architect of international stature working for the Neapolitan Spanish court.⁷ Renowned as the architect who redesigned Rome for the popes and moved the great obelisk of St. Peter's, in his time Fontana was not merely an engineer but a prime celebrity. In

³ See Chapters I-II.

⁴ On the political decline of Spain in the first half of the seventeenth century: ELLIOTT 1961; ELLIOTT 1977 (B); ELLIOTT 1982, PARKER 2001.

⁵ Philip II died at dawn on September 13, 1598: see Chapter III.

⁶ See Chapters IV-V and Conclusion.

⁷ On Cosimo Fanzago: BRAUEN 1976 (B); BÖSEL 1978; CANTONE 1984; *Cosimo Fanzago* 1991; *Cosimo Fanzago e il marmo* [1992] 1995; DOMBROWSKI 1995/96; SPINOSA 1997; FIADINO 1999; NAPOLI 2003 (A); NAPOLI 2003 (B); D'AGOSTINO 2007.

Naples, his architecture provoked the shift from the late Renaissance to the Baroque. After Domenico's death, Giulio Cesare continued and completed most of his father's unfinished projects, sometimes altering them but more often repeating and accentuating their already recognizable style. Bartolomeo Picchiatti (c. 1571-1643), who began his career as a draughtsman in Domenico's workshop, prolonged this stylistic legacy well into the seventeenth century.

Domenico Fontana brought the architecture of the Roman Counter-Reformation to Naples. In his works he employed mixed media and polychrome marbles, encouraging an aesthetics of layering and encrustation that was new to Neapolitan architecture. Local architects, such as Dionisio Lazzari and especially Cosimo Fanzago and his workshop, gradually developed this taste into an exuberant form of naturalism that endured as an original vein of Neapolitan vernacular architecture throughout the eighteenth century.

The architect's first-hand experience of the principles of the artistic Counter-Reformation also determined the plans and function of his ecclesiastical architecture. For instance, around 1600, with the approval of the kings of Spain, Domenico modernized the medieval crypts of the cathedrals of Salerno and Amalfi.⁸ Readapting their plans to meet the needs of a new cult of the Apostles, he was able to reveal the saints' relics and their miracles to incoming waves of pilgrims. Due to Domenico's influence, accommodation of the confessional function became a principle of Neapolitan Baroque architecture.

In contrast to Rome, seventeenth-century Naples never witnessed the plastic experimentation of architects such as Carlo Maderno or Pietro da Cortona, or the new volumetric proposals of Gianlorenzo Bernini or Francesco Borromini. Throughout the Baroque, Neapolitan architecture developed on the basis of the repetition and saturation of color rather than space and design. Moreover, Neapolitan religious architecture continued to espouse the aesthetics of the Counter-Reformation longer than in Rome, indeed well into the eighteenth century, when the pervasive taste for polychromy finally faded into monochrome, and volumes started expanding on church façades and within church interiors like fabrics blown by the wind. This characteristic attention to surface values of color

⁸ This commission is generally dated to c. 1602-12 (STRAZZULLO 1969: 151; KESSLER 2005: 299-301), but my research proves that it was begun by at least 1597. A number of documents were discovered by Giambattista D'Addosio; see D'ADDOSIO 1909. I will publish new archival material related to the cult of St. Matthew and St. Andrew in Salerno and Amalfi in the forthcoming Italian edition of this book.

and material, shared by the architects of the great Iberian and Latin-American cathedrals, was one of Domenico Fontana's legacies to Neapolitan architecture.

The organization of Baroque Neapolitan architectural workshops in tight family groups can also be traced back to Fontana's Roman experience.⁹ Having worked for years in firms with his brothers and cousins as associates, Domenico imported this pattern to Naples, where he created a new workshop with his son Giulio Cesare and Bartolomeo Picchiatti, who often acted as his surrogates and construction directors when he was away.¹⁰ While this practice is partially related to the Spanish system, where architecture as a profession was historically entrusted to family clans, under Fontana division of labor in Naples reached a new level of standardization. In this regard, Fontana's workshop anticipated the division of roles and the economy of production that would characterize that of Cosimo Fanzago and his followers, recently investigated by Nicholas Napoli in his dissertation.¹¹

In recent years, Paola Carla Verde has also examined the subject of Domenico Fontana's work in Naples.¹² Due to the overlap in our fields of research, I often refer to Verde's arguments and her discoveries. However, while we may discuss almost the same group of monuments, we have taken different approaches and thus offer different interpretations. Verde inclines toward observing these works through a Roman lens, whereas I tend to see them from an international perspective, and often with a Spanish eye. While Verde adopts a formalistic approach to architecture, I am more interested in contextualizing the architectural topic in a wider historiography on the Spanish monarchy, and on the cultural history of

⁹ But see also STRAZZULLO 1995.

¹⁰ On the Roman activity of family workshops of Ticinese stonemasons see MANFREDI 2008, *Studi sui Fontana* 2008 and Chapter I.

¹¹ NAPOLI 2003 (A) and NAPOLI 2003 (B). Given the extraordinary scarceness of Neapolitan architectural drawings and the consequent absence of thorough research on them, it is difficult to resolve this controversial theme. The use and quality of Neapolitan and Spanish architectural drawings was the subject of my research as a post-doctoral research fellow at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome in 2008.

¹² VERDE 2004 (A), now published as VERDE 2007. Our research developed at two different institutions, at exactly the same time. Her manuscript of 2004 was unavailable for consultation in Rome until it was finally published in September 2007. My Ph.D. thesis, started in 2001, was defended and deposited at Columbia University (NY) in March 2007 (DE CAVI 2007). It clearly follows that we came to our interpretations independently.