

*I progetti per la facciata di Santa Maria del fiore (1585–1645): Architettura a Firenze tra Rinascimento e Barocco.* Mario Bevilacqua.

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In this book, Mario Bevilacqua examines all the projects designed at the end of the Cinquecento and in the first half of the Seicento for the facade of Florence's cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore — unfinished projects, as is well known, since the current facade was realized and completed only in the nineteenth century. It is a paradox, moreover, that two of Florence's main churches, the cathedral and San Lorenzo, never received the facade *alla moderna*, which would logically have finished them in the Renaissance. But, as the author reminds us, the case is not isolated: this is also true of another large and important church, San Petronio of Bologna.

The introduction clearly sets out the terms of the issues and places the history of the churches' facades within the general framework of the Renaissance, and, more specifically, in that of Florence of the sixteenth century. From this point, the book follows a structure comprised of three chapters: the first two develop with great precision the chronology of the various projects initiated under the successive governments of Francesco I, Ferdinando I, and Ferdinando II; the third proposes a synthesis of this very rich and fruitful information. Substantial appendixes containing the transcriptions of the archival documents on which the analysis is based usefully complete the work and constitute an essential complement to the important corpus of drawings examined by the author, as well as to the collection of wooden models preserved in the Museo dell' Opera of the Duomo.

Chapter 1 deals with projects realized under the reigns of Dukes Francesco I and Ferdinando I. Bernardo Buontalenti proposed the first important project on the initiative of the former, which was not realized because of the unexpected death of the duke. His brother, who succeeded him, preferred different projects proposed by Giovanni Antonio Dosio and don Giovanni de' Medici, a natural son of Cosimo I, whose project, officially approved in the years 1591–92, would never be constructed because Ferdinando preferred to concentrate his efforts on the Capella dei Principi in San Lorenzo. It was then necessary to wait for the accession of Ferdinando II to note, around

1630, a new interest in the facade: this is the subject of chapter 2. Gherardo Silvani and the Accademia del Disegno were the protagonists in this period, when an official competition was opened to select the final project, although without concrete success.

Chapter 3 analyzes all this historical data in order to place the problem in a context at once historic and typological. The difficulty posed by the facade of a modern church consists in adapting an antique decorative system (that of the orders of architecture) to medieval structures, which were very different from temples or triumphal arches. Alberti, Antonio de Sangallo, Vignola, and Della Porta proposed a shape with two superimposed levels, which, as employed for the Gesù of Rome, gives the almost definitive model, while in Venice, Palladio proposed a solution with a giant order, which remained purely Venetian. Yet Michelangelo's failure with San Lorenzo prevented the creation of a formula specifically Florentine.

The period studied by Mario Bevilacqua is indeed crucial, coming as it does between the end of the Renaissance, which was strongly marked by Michelangelo's genius, and the beginning of the Baroque, which, especially in Rome in the 1630s, gave Italian architecture a new impulse. Things were more problematic, it seems, in Florence, where the artists had difficulty in freeing themselves from the influence of Michelangelo. The various proposed projects, drawings or wooden models, as well as the ephemeral structures built in front of the cathedral for solemn entries, were indeed lacking in originality with regard to the models of the previous century: there was nothing comparable to the inventions of Bernini, Pietro da Cortona, or Borromini. The adventure of the unfinished facade of the Duomo is nevertheless very interesting as the author studies it here, because he reveals with erudition, relevance, and originality the elements composing the the senses of identity of this little-known period of Florence's artistic history.

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