

An homage from Filippo Juvarra to August the Strong and the relationships between the courts of Rome, Turin, and Dresden

The book of drawings preserved in the *Kupferstich-Kabinett* (Graphic and Print Collection) of Dresden celebrates the preeminent example of Rome over the centuries. Through its subjects, its staged compositions, and its graphic technique, an evocative narrative unfolds – a further confirmation of Juvarra's multi-faceted qualities as a great director of the arts. The drawings are here analyzed as a whole for the first time, together with some unpublished letters that help shed light on an artistic exchange involving the courts of Rome, Turin, and Dresden.

SACRA REAL MAESTA

*SARANNO presentati a V.M. dal Sig. Conte di Wackerbarth questi pochi fogli di Disegni di Prospettiva Ideale, quali offero in ossequioso tributo alla M.V. non perche gli reputi degni di un tanto Monarca, mà bensì per soddisfare all'ambizione, che da lungo tempo nudrisco di procacciarmi per questo mezzo il supremo suo Patrocinio.*⁵³⁰

This quotation is taken from the letter that Filippo Juvarra (1678–1736) sent to Dresden in the spring of 1732 together with 41 drawings (*Disegni di Prospettiva Ideale*) representing architectural fantasies (*capricci*) which were meant for August the Strong (1670–1733), prince-elector of Saxony and king of Poland. The bearer of the gift was Antonio Giuseppe Gabaleone, Count Wackerbarth-Salmour (1662–1734) – the Turin nobleman transplanted to Saxony – who at that time was in the papal city on a secret mission on the king's behalf.

Juvarra was born in Messina into a family of silversmiths spanning generations, when Sicily was still part of the Spanish crown. As self-taught artist, he moved to Rome with the help of his fellow countryman Ruffo. He immediately became a pupil of Carlo Fontana, who at the time was the chief architect of the Basilica of Saint Peter. In 1705 Juvarra won the first prize in the papal competition of the Accademia di San Luca (*Concorso Clementino*) with a project for a villa for three personalities of equal rank, which for its

⁵³⁰ Introductory sentence of the cover letter: «*Sacred Royal Majesty, these few pieces of Ideal Perspective Drawings will be presented to Your Majesty by the Count of Wackerbarth. I offer them as an obsequious tribute to Your Majesty, not because I consider them worthy of such a Monarch, but rather to satisfy the ambition that I have long harbored of seeking by this means your supreme patronage.*»

inventiveness, composition, size, and refinement allowed him to immediately emerge on the Roman artistic scene. From 1709 he was employed as scenographer at the court of the enlightened Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni at the Palazzo della Cancelleria. But the real breakthrough in his career came in 1714, when he became first royal architect of the House of Savoy with the task of renewing Turin, which had just become the Capital of the Savoy states and the Kingdom of Sicily (later Sardinia), adopting a modern architectural language that would express power and magnificence of the absolutist court of Victor Emmanuel II. Juvarra received an appointment to Madrid in 1735 with a commission to design the new royal palace which had been seriously damaged in a fire. Had he not died prematurely before he was able to carry out the work, for which he had, however, already provided plans, his already successful career might have achieved even greater international fame. Juvarra's notoriety, however, was due not only to his esteemed qualities as an architect, but also, and to a considerable extent, to his graphic and scenic skills.

During his entire lifetime, Juvarra made several attempts to give his talent an international dimension, striving to work for the most important European ruling houses (the Holy Roman Emperor, the courts of France, Portugal, Saxony, Poland and Spain), but also for the British nobility, the Roman cardinals, the aristocratic families of the Italian peninsula and the papal court. In 1732, while spending some months in Rome, and probably after the umpteenth disappointment for failing again to fulfill one of his greatest ambitions, i.e. to get a papal commission – in this case the façade of the Lateran basilica – Juvarra must have conceived the idea of trying to enter the service of the Polish sovereign, perhaps taking advantage of the presence in Rome of a trusted representative.

For August the Strong, to whom the drawings analyzed here are dedicated, Juvarra deployed his congenial sensitivity through his graphic creations to meet the interests, needs, tastes, inclinations, and ambitions of the sovereign. Actually, there were no specific commissions, but August the Strong – who embodied the roles of Elector of Saxony and the King of Poland – planned the enhancement of the two capitals of the kingdoms he ruled: Dresden and Warsaw. Juvarra, who at that time enjoyed great renown and maintained international contacts, had to demonstrate his skills with captivating projects. In this way, his creativity and inventiveness, combined with a solid education and years of experience, would become manifest to August the Strong.

The 41 DISEGNI / DI PROSPETTIVA IDEALE / DEL / CAV D FILIPPO YUVARA / ARCHITETTO / E DAL MEDESIMO DEDICATI / ALLA SAGRA REAL MAESTA / DEL / RE AVGVSTO / DI POLONIA⁵³¹ are documented in the Heucher's inventory since 1738 as part of the Dresden court graphic collection, that was founded 1720 and was housed at that time in a Pavilion of the Dresden Zwinger. The drawings are today kept in the local *Kupferstich-Kabinett* with

⁵³¹ «41 drawings of ideal view by the chevalier Don Filippo Yuvara, architect, and by himself dedicated to the sacred majesty of the king August of Poland.»

the signature Ca 66 and have a fine binding of reddish calfskin leather (*marocchino*) with gold ornamentations and an impressive coat of arms (*Allianzwappen*).

The *Disegni di Prospettiva Ideale* represent a series of monumental architectural fantasies in urban environments, enriched with charming sculptural decorations which are quoted from Antiquity, the Renaissance and the Baroque. The drawings offer a synthesis of that coeval (baroque) idea of spatiality that was the basis for the planning of large Italian, French and German towns in the 17th and 18th centuries. The spatial dimension is completed by a historical dimension, in which the interest in classical antiquity – Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultures – becomes evident. Juvarra, who was not only a renowned architect and an excellent draughtsman, but also a skillful scenographer, succeeded in combining contemporary and ancient masterpieces in an intellectually stimulating yet witty way. With his virtuosity, his rich imagination and the seductive power of his compositions, he created a new dimension, a partly imaginary but nevertheless credible architectural world that fascinated everyone. This explains why these drawings not only belong to the controversial genre of architectural *capricci*, but are concrete sources of inspiration for real architectures, as the result of focused reflections, and above all they have the value of autonomous works of art.

The selection of motifs illustrated in the drawings also reflects the Saxon ruler's preference for foreign cultures and traditions, an attitude that not only prevailed in the Dresden Royal Collections, but also testifies to an overarching European fascination with antiquity, which Juvarra emphasized in the dedication, particularly with regard to the Dresden Gallery: «la fameuse Gallerie de Dresde [...] temoignage [...] de la Protection, que Votre Majesté donne aux beaux arts, et à ceux que les cultivent. Vous l'avez [...] enrichie de toute sorte d'ouvrages des plus fameux Maitres anciens et modernes [...]»⁵³².

In the way it is presented – with its accurate lines, fine, dense hatching and an impressive representation of the pictorial layers by means of light and shadow effects – the album brings to mind those engraved works which, especially in the first half of the 18th century, illustrated prominent princely residences and collections to spread the fame of European – especially German – courts.

Juvarra is part of this tradition, not by reproducing existing architecture, gardens, or sculpture collections, but by offering samples of his ability, creativity, knowledge, and experience, with the aim of encouraging the King's interest in the construction of new buildings, extensions or enhancement of already existing complexes, as well as the acquisition of Italian (Roman) works of art.

Rome, with its artistic and cultural heritage, was thus seen as a model, as exemplified by the motto – FAMA REFERT QVÆ ROMA VETVS / SED MOLIBVS ALTIS / QVANTA FVIT PLVS QVAM FAMA / RVINA DOCET – which originated from Francesco Albertini (1510), was

532 «the famous Dresden Gallery [...] demonstration [...] of the Protection, which Your Majesty gives to the fine arts, and to those who cultivate them. You have [...] enriched it with all kinds of works of the most famous ancient and modern masters [...].»

taken up more successfully by Sebastiano Serlio in the frontispiece of the *Quinto libro d'architettura* (1574), and expanded by Juvarra.

At the same time, the album is also an exclusive collector's item of high status, which includes major works of antiquity, Renaissance and contemporary architecture as well as sculpture. In this sense, the King becomes a 'passive' collector and at the same time a potential Maecenas of the arts, whether as an active patron or as the proud owner of a valuable collection of drawings containing the most desirable examples of Italian art. This also refers to the role of the Polish king as «Glorioso AUGUSTO, di cui porta si' degnamente il nome», not least also because of his gallery «così arricchita delle Opere dé più insigni Artefici dell'Antichità [...] e di prodigiose cose della natura, che non hà che invidiare alle più celebrate non dirò di Roma, d'Italia e d'Europa, ma del Mondo tutto»⁵³³.

The album measures approx. 50 × 39 cm (19,5 × 15,35 inches) on the outside; the sheets (approx. 48 × 37 cm; 18,9 × 14,5 inches) serve as supports for the drawings, which are individually glued and bordered with a line made with ink. The drawings are executed in graphite, then drawn with pencil and washed in warm brown tones. The graphic treatment of the compositions could give the impression that they are preparatory drawings for engravings, as Wittkower assumed. But precisely because the execution of the drawings is so accurate, the thesis that is put forward here proposes that Juvarra deliberately chose a careful execution to imitate engravings, to evoke this widespread technique of graphic reproduction, but he did not necessarily want to provide copies of models prints, which would have been in addition an expensive undertaking for him. In this way, Juvarra imitated the long-appreciated technique of printed designs: in fact, engravings in the eighteenth century were an important and widespread means of disseminating knowledge and also valuable as gifts and collector's items.

Architectural engravings, in series, as a form of representation and also as a mediating 'tool', were published throughout the period between 1600 and 1800. However, they experienced a major revival in the 1720s and 1730s, when a peak was reached in terms of the frequency of their publication and their size. The most famous and best known are Paul Decker's (1677–1713) *Fürstlicher Baumeister 1711/1716*), Johann Bernhard Fischer's von Erlach (1656–1723) *Entwurff einer historischen Architektur* (1725), the *Recueil des Dessins et Gravures Representent les Solemnites du Mariage* on the occasion of the marriage of the Elector of Saxony with the Austrian Archduchess Maria Josepha (1719) and Matthäus Daniel Pöppelmann's (1662–1736) *Vorstellung und Beschreibung des Zwingergartens zu Dresden* 1729). They mostly contain images of already existing buildings or illustrate

⁵³³ «Glorious August, whose name it bears so worthily, not least also because of his gallery, so enriched with the works of the most illustrious Artists of Antiquity [...] and of prodigious things of nature, that it has nothing to envy to the most celebrated, I will not say of Rome, of Italy and Europe, but of the whole world.»

celebrations that took place at court, as well as ideal designs that were intended to serve as ‹instructions› to realize a residence worthy of a ruler.

After the marriage of the Electoral Prince to the daughter of the late German Emperor in 1719, August had bigger plans and strove to give the capital of Saxony a worthy imperial rank – a widespread wish among most German electorates. We know of the considerable number of central building projects from the first thirty years of the 18th century for Dresden and Poland, which remained in the draft stage, as well as of the expansion of pleasure palaces, or hunting castles such as Pillnitz, Moritzburg or Großsedlitz. It is also known that August the Strong collected antique sculptures in addition to porcelain, gems, bronzes, coins and other objects, further that Zacharias Longuelune had provided in 1728 projects for a museum of antiquities, and that from the second quarter of the 18th century onwards, the production of large-format copper engravings was planned – as the king himself wrote – «[...] von den in Unserer Antiquitäten-Cammer befindlichen Statuen, Brust-Stücken, Vasen, halberhabenen Bildern und Arbeit und anderen Alterthums halber berühmten Curiositäten [...]»⁵³⁴. This project resulted in the *Recueil des marbres antiques qui se trouvent dans la galerie du Roy de Pologne à Dresden* published by Raymond Leplat in 1733.

If we consider the intentions of the Polish king, his pronounced awareness of modernity as well as his aesthetic and representative ambitions in the extension of the collections and his wish to expand Dresden in terms of urban planning, it is not surprising that Juvarra, who certainly knew about this, submitted his drawings to August the Strong with partly utopian ‹proposals›. He approached the king as if he were a connoisseur of the subject matter, subliminally alluding to his interests as a collector and asking for appreciation and evaluation of his gift. The tasks that might have to be accomplished would have been welcome challenges for Juvarra, since he had just achieved something similar in Turin.

The title and the content of the *Disegni di Prospettiva Ideale* should be understood as suggestions if not as atmospheric images and as a kind of archive of knowledge. They bear witness to a unique past and its durability, which can be adopted and continued through an updated design language. The method of representation is equally revealing in order to demonstrate the meaning and purpose of the drawings. In contrast to the engravings by Decker or Fischer von Erlach, which mostly use bird's-eye views, axonometric projections, ground plans, longitudinal and cross sections, as well as image captions, and show interior views thereby constructing an ‹ideal perception› of the castle grounds, Juvarra depicted his architectural compositions merely from a low point of view or ‹close-up›. In so doing, he enlarged the objects in the foreground. This makes the depicted scenes

⁵³⁴ «of the statues, busts, vases, bas-reliefs and work (sculptures?), and other curiosities of antiquity from our antiquities chamber».

appear livelier, they have a pictorial character and are intended to impress with their aesthetic qualities. The monumental components in the background resemble a collection of surveys of ancient ruins with a strongly evocative power. Against the background, which is laid out in thin and lighter lines, a juxtaposition of basins, sarcophagi, stone blocks, framing parts, columns, vases, obelisks, sphinxes, or river gods, represented by dense brown hatching, stands out in the foreground

If we look at the drawings in terms of content, we are confronted with the diversity of the subjects treated: The frameworks for Juvarra's proposals are urban planning structures, in which themes set by the Roman Accademia di San Luca for the annual *Concorsi Clementini* are also reflected. Thus, we find monumental architectural prospects on the bank of a watercourse, which are overlaid with depictions of everyday life: boats for the transport of goods, which are loaded and unloaded, craftsmen at work, fountains and paths, and numerous people enlivening the scenes. Behind these stage-like-architectural settings, triumphal arches and bridges or monumental staircases, we guess the presence of important urban realities. Precisely these stage-like architectures, which determine the urban image, were particularly topical in Rome at the beginning of the 18th century. These included the internal harbor Porto di Ripetta (1704, designed by Alessandro Specchi), the Spanish Steps (1717/ 1723–1726, designed by Francesco de Sanctis), the Trevi Fountain (begun in 1732 by Nicola Salvi), the façade of San Giovanni in Laterano (by Alessandro Galilei), as well as major interventions such as the design of the New Sacristy of St. Peter's (not completed until the second half of the 18th century by Carlo Marchionni), and the papal commissions for the ports of Ancona and Civitavecchia besides.

In Rome, these «modern» building tasks faced the ancient substrate and the main works of the Renaissance and Baroque periods; *ancient Rome versus modern Rome*, which was a constant challenge, and Juvarra, who was familiar with this situation, combined the old and the new so harmoniously as if the result was a kind of personal invention. Rome – like Paris – still visibly had the role of a cultural model, and Juvarra masterfully succeeded in presenting the matching of scenographic inventions with his ability in urban development planning, also thanks to the care taken in the attention to details.

But to what extent could the Polish king see this album as a valuable collector's item? In other words, how could he be convinced to invite Juvarra to Dresden? This was possible, on the one hand, because the Italian architect subtly addressed the inclinations and ambitions of the regent: the strength of these compositions lies in the seductive naturalness and impartiality with which the objects are staged. While the engravings by Paul Decker or Fischer von Erlach – both spatially and sensitively – tend to be designed with distance in mind, Juvarra's drawings are vivid. The close-up view or the magnification of the details make the scene a real eye-catcher. One almost has the feeling of entering the picture and immediately belonging to it. The *Disegni di Prospettiva Ideale* have nothing of the contemporaneous treatises. They live from their evocative power, suggest urban situa-

tions, arouse a desire to collect and above all offer a broad spectrum of knowledge and education. Juvarra offers a wide range of buildings and construction tasks. Not only castle complexes, but also various ideas for civil and sacral architecture are present in his arrangements.

How could an ambitious king have resisted this temptation?

In fact, among other things, Juvarra's aim was to provide an incentive: he did not know in detail the building plans and needs of the Polish regent, but he did so from the conviction and knowledge that August set high standards for his buildings, and provided the king with a model catalog to suggest possible urban planning solutions. In this way he demonstrated his ability to think «big». Moreover, even during his lifetime, Juvarra's fame as an excellent architect and draftsman was so widespread that his sheets were collected by contemporaries. But for the execution of these drawings, he chose a technique that simulated that of engravings, to formally upgrade the worth of the album. Such a collection of drawings was not only important for the artist's self-representation, but also for the owner's prestige. On the one side, the king could boast of a magnificent volume by the hand of one of the most famous and appreciated Italian architects. On the other side, he would have had the opportunity to bring Juvarra to Dresden after Pöppelmann's death if he himself had not died only nine months later.

The Dresden *Kupferstich-Kabinett* owns a high-ranking masterpiece of Italian graphic art. When leafing through it, one will never stop thinking how it would have affected the image of the Saxon capital if it had actually been built on the monumental level that Juvarra showed us in the *Disegni di Prospettiva Ideale*.

To the structure of the present book:

One chapter is dedicated to each of the figures involved, in which the biographical and historical profile is given, taking into account their respective roles in this episode. These are the architect Filippo Juvarra, the recipient of the album – the Polish King August the Strong – and the mediator Count Joseph Anton von Wackerbarth-Salmour (1685–1761). Archival research was necessary especially for this last personality in order to clarify that he was the Italian adopted son of the better known Count August Christoph von Wackerbarth (1662–1734). Above all, it could be reconstructed under which conditions this representative of the Saxon court was able to meet Juvarra in Rome. The only direct evidence of Wackerbarth's presence in Italy in 1732, which can be supported by further evidence, is a relation about a covert mission to the papal city kept in the secret cabinet (*Geheimes Cabinet*) of the Saxon Main State Archives. Otherwise, a fortunate finding in a private archive of a set of letters written between Count Wackerbarth and his brother Francesco Giacinto Amedeo Gabaleone, Count of Salmour – a high official at the court of Turin – clearly confirm the dynamics of the delivery of the gift and the recommendations that accompanied the drawings for the court of Dresden concerning Juvarra.

In addition to the characterizing description of the individual sheets in catalog-format, they are evaluated in terms of technique, visual content and subject matter. In four sections, the main themes of the drawings, both within Juvarra's graphic production and in the wider art-historical context, are the subject of investigation: Ancient and contemporary architecture, ancient and contemporary sculptures, stairways and scenic elevations, ports, bridges and marinas. Besides an overview of the situation of Italian architects in 18th-century Europe, an attempt is made to work out the significance of the album in an international context.