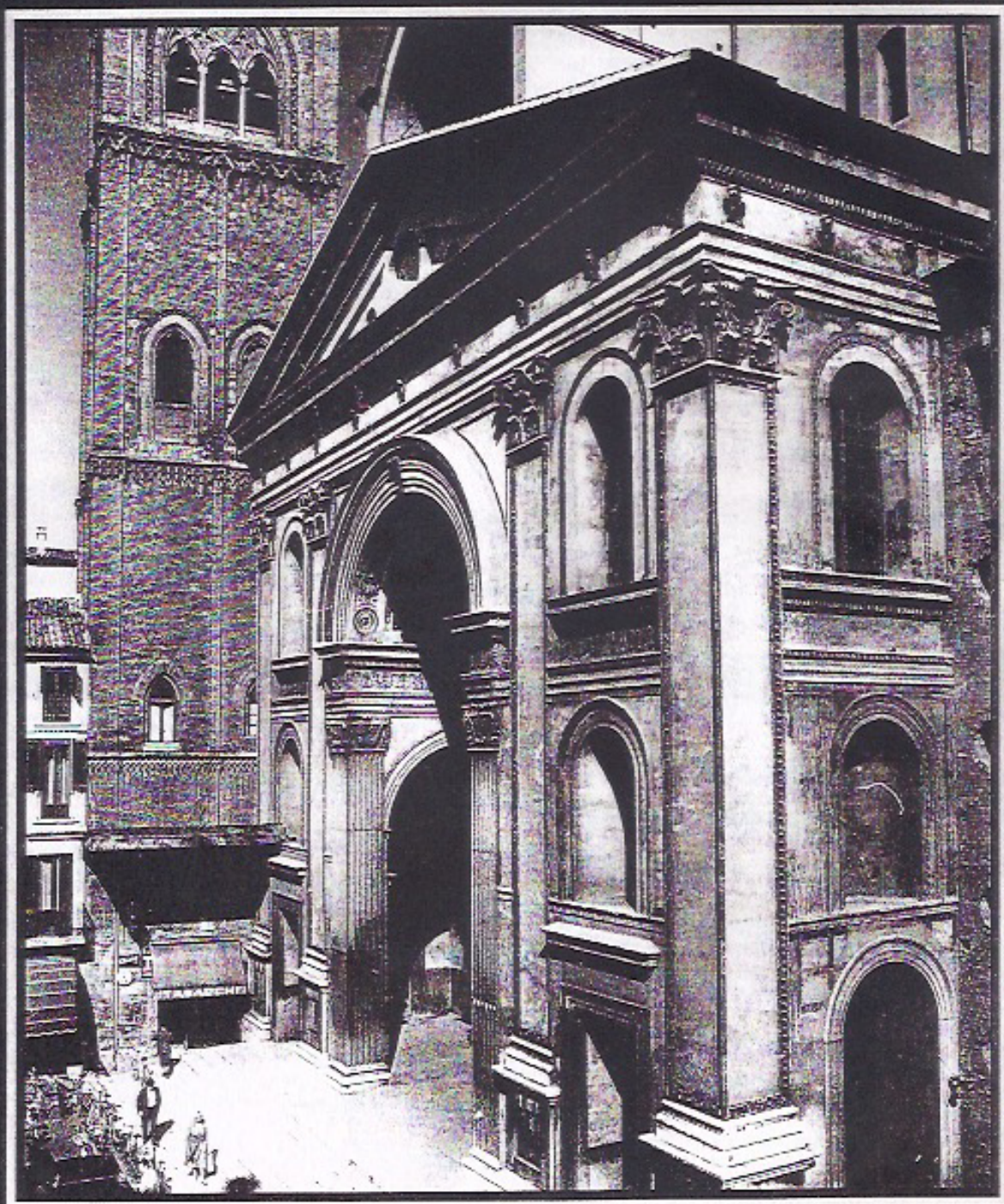


International Dictionary of Architects and Architecture - 2

ARCHITECTURE





Piazza Navona, fountain: 1650

PIAZZA DEL POPOLO

Rome, Italy

Roots in Antiquity: Ancient Roman Gate to the City

1472-77: Santa Maria del Popolo built; **Architect:** Attributed to Andrea Bregno. **1572-78:** Fountain built; **Architect:** Giacomo della Porta (1532-1602). **1655:** Porta Flaminia decorated; **Architect:** Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). **1662:** Piazza designed; **Architect:** Carlo Rainaldi (1611-91). **1662:** Santa Maria di Monte Santo begun; **Architect:** Carlo Rainaldi. **1673-75:** Construction on Santa Maria di Monte Santo halted, designs revised, and work completed; **Architects:** Bernini (1598-1680) and Carlo Fontana (1634-1741). **1675-79:** Santa Maria de' Miracoli built; **Architect:** Carlo Rainaldi and assistant Carlo Fontana. **1810-16:** Piazza redesigned and rebuilt; **Architect:** Giuseppe Valadier.

Publications

CIUCCI, G.: *La Piazza del Popolo*. Rome, 1974.

The grand scale of Piazza del Popolo is an anomaly among the more intimate spaces of Rome, Italy. The Piazza was first laid out along a north-south axis during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. In the 19th century, during the French occupation, the Piazza underwent a monumental expansion in the neoclassical style, which added an east-west axis to the plan and showed a strong French influence.

Theatricality was an important theme of the Piazza del Popolo, which was situated along the processional route through the heavenly city. The processional route was used for the grand entries organized to welcome visiting religious and secular dignitaries. The layout of the processional route evinced a clear sense of a sequentially ordered ceremony, a journey through a series of spiritual gates to the inner sanctum of the holy city. The Piazza del Popolo was one of these spiritual gates. The Renaissance and Baroque design made a kind of stage of the piazza, with the buildings functioning as a backdrop. The piazza was truncated in plan. Initially two streets branched off from it, the Corso and the Via di Ripetta, funneling movement toward the medieval Churches of Santa Maria di Montesanto and Santa Maria dei Miracoli.



Piazza del Popolo: Rome, Italy, 1472-77

Early in the 16th century, this fork was changed to a trident by the addition of a third street, the Via del Babuino, planned by Pope Leo X and carried out by Antonio da Sangallo. The trident was the first of its kind, and served to define the two churches. The design creates a scenic arrangement that follows the normative descriptions of theatrical design by such architectural theorists as Leon Battista Alberti, Andrea Palladio and Sebastiano Serlio, with their emphasis on the proscenium arch. In the layout of the Piazza del Popolo, the churches function as a proscenium arch, while the three avenues serve as painted backdrops.

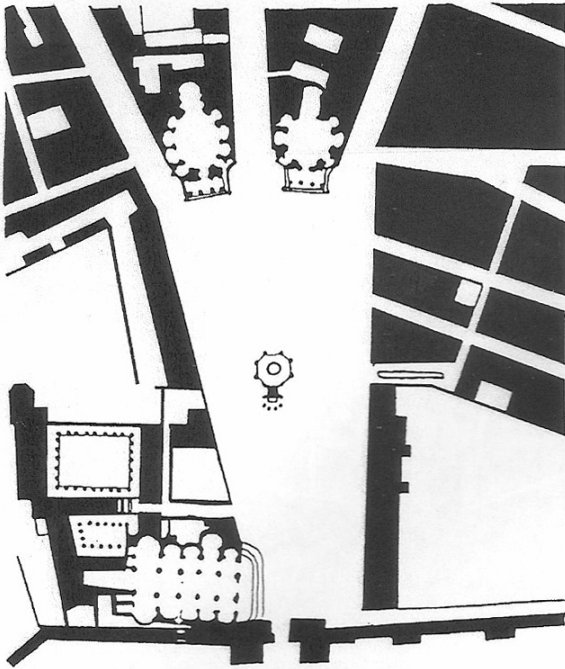
The formation of the trident enhances the drama of the Piazza del Popolo. Each of the avenues may be associated with one of three recognized dramatic types, comedy, tragedy and satire. Comedy was conventionally represented by ordinary buildings on theatrical backdrops, the equivalent of which are the homes along the Via del Babuino. Tragedy was associated with royal surroundings, which are found on the Corso, the central arm of the trident. Lined with the grand palazzos of the Roman nobility and Rome's temporal and spiritual institutions, the Corso extends directly into the heart of the city, ending at the summit of the ancient capital, the Campidoglio. Satire was symbolized in the theater by natural landscape. The Via di Ripetta represents satire by connecting the Piazza del Popolo directly to the Tiber River.

The neoclassical expansion of the piazza, while respectful of history, made some important new changes. The north-south orientation of the old plan was crossed by an east-west axis. The design of the expanded piazza was based on the classical Roman axial urban plans shaped by the *cardo* (north-south axis) and *decumanus* (east-west axis). The neoclassical expansion

employed monumental planning to express a secular rationalism of a decidedly French bent. It suggests a liberal interpretation of the divine circle, and its iconographic program is cosmological in nature. Setting the parameters of the cosmological scheme are statues of four lions, representing the four seasons and eternal time, and statues of four sphinxes, representing divine knowledge.

The east-west orientation is defined by an allegorical theme, opposing nature and culture. Nature is represented by Neptune, placed on the Tiber River side of the piazza, across from Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of civilization. On the Monte Pincio terraces are the Prisoner statues and the rostral columns, recalling victorious battle and the Arch of Constantine from classical antiquity. A bas-relief represents a rationalist Fame, which is synonymous with virtue and culture, crowning the genius of the arts and sciences. Although the 19th-century Piazza del Popolo incorporates the myths of antiquity, the impetus to do so derives from a sense of historical duty rather than a revival of belief in the world views the supernatural beings represent. Thus the café at the summit of the Monte Pincio suggests voyeuristic rather than spiritual tendencies.

The neoclassical design also refers to theatrical architecture, but uses classical Greek rather than Roman models, dispensing with the proscenium, for instance. The view from the Monte Pincio hill, overlooking the oval stage of the Piazza del Popolo, the Tiber River, the Castle Sant'Angelo and St. Peter's, uses the cityscape as the stage scenery. The neoclassical theater design faces west, with the Roman proscenium to its left, giving a panoramic view of the stage of the city, observing St. Peter's historically, rather than as a living sacred space of spiritual enlightenment.



Piazza del Popolo:
Renaissance truncated
plan as described in text.
This caption not included
in Dictionary publication.

The point of integration of the north-south and east-west axes represents the intended merging of the less-than-harmonious cultural intentions of Rome and France. In actuality, the political and theological views of the Romans, pursuing the interests of the pontifical states, and the French, seeking to realize the ideals of the *nouveau regime*, remained fixed in opposite directions. Ironically, while the Piazza del Popolo was a culmination of the evolution of many centuries of public ritual and ceremony, it was realized at a time when the city as the stage for public ritual was becoming more and more irrelevant.

—LORNA ANNE McNEUR



Neoclassical Popolo:
Overview as described
in text showing St
Peter's at the horizon
line centre point. This
photo not included in
Dictionary publication.
Popolo overview photo:
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