

keit, die Geschichte von Neu-St. Peter auch und mehr als zuvor unter dem hier erprobten rezeptionsgeschichtlichen Ansatz zu erfassen, dürfte in Zukunft allerdings niemand mehr vorbeikommen.

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**Nicola Courtright: The Papacy and the Art of Reform in Sixteenth-Century Rome.** Gregory XIII's Tower of the Winds in the Vatican; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004; 312 S., Ill. ISBN 0-521-62437-1; \$ 85,-

The Tower of the Winds next to the Cortile of the Vatican Library stands out as a small vertical extension of the more famous *Galleria delle Carte Geografiche*, which any tourist aiming at the Sistine Chapel walks through. When it was built between 1578 and 1580, it seems to have functioned as an observatory. It might have been related to the important scientific developments in the calculation of the solar year that eventually resulted in Gregory's reform of the calendar in 1582<sup>1</sup>. Contemporary visitors to the Vatican complex must have admired this structure, which united and improved secular knowledge in the service of the Catholic Church's religious authority and unity. Nowadays, it is largely hidden from sight and not open to the public.

As Nicola Courtright argues in her study, this Tower of the Winds was more a sign for, than the origin of the calendar reform; actually, the astronomical observations were done elsewhere. The tower is thus seen as a piece of symbolic architecture embellished with interior decoration underlining the continuity between past, present and future of Christianity, and it was inspired by descriptions of antique examples such as the Tower of the Winds in Athens. Inventor of the Vatican ensemble was, as is assumed here, Ignazio Danti, the Dominican friar and cartographer who in Florence had designed the Sala del Mappamondo in the Palazzo Vecchio for Cosimo I de' Medici, and who played a prominent role in the planning of the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche in the Vatican<sup>2</sup>. Afterwards, he seems to have been appointed on the commission for the Calendar Reform as well. Nicola Courtright argues on the basis of a later autograph account in which Danti stated he 'made these' (*farli*), and on the basis of additional evidence such as his involvement with architectural and perspectival theory, that the Tower of the Winds was not only scientifically, but also artistically devised by Ignazio. The architect Ottaviano Mascarino and a number of painters, such as Nicolò Circignagni and the Flemish landscape painter Matthijs Bril, were commissioned to execute Danti's concepts.

1 See A. CANOBBIO, *Ragionamento di Alessandro Canobbio sopra la riforma fatta da N.S. Papa Gregorio XIII l'anno MDLXXXII*, Rome 1582. See also the publication on the restoration of the Torre dei Venti, F. MANCINELLI/J. CASANOVAS: *La Torre dei Venti in Vaticano*; Vatican City 1980.

2 On the Galleria, see for example M. SCHÜTTE: *Die Galleria delle Carte Geografiche im Vatikan. Eine ikonologische Betrachtung des Gewölbeprogramms*; Hildesheim/New York 1994, and L. GAMBÌ/A. PINELLI: *La Galleria delle Carte geografiche in Vaticano/The Gallery of Maps in the Vatican*; Modena 1994.

In Nicola Courtright's interpretation, the Tower of the Winds becomes an object referring back to the origins of Christendom, to the time of the Emperor Constantine in particular. The architecture of the tower, for example, is described as a combination of a part of the classical villa meant for retreat, and a late Antique architectural detail now usually called the Serliana, which according to the author from the second century AD functioned as an 'imperial appearance motif' in palaces and circuses<sup>3</sup>. This particular combination of private and public forms heightened the image of the pope as spiritual and secular ruler. The combination of study and power underlined his authority to 'intervene' in the course of nature. This was precisely what Gregory XIII did for the reform of the calendar, when he cancelled ten days in October 1582. By adding a small structure to the Vatican visually referring back to the ancient rulers of the Roman empire, and pointing at the present astrological knowledge, he secured the future reliability of the liturgical year of the Catholic Church.

Nicola Courtright's argumentation starts from the architecture and the decoration itself, and relates these to early Christian works of art and contemporary prints and paintings. On the basis of formal similarities, it is argued that Gregory XIII and his advisors were inspired in the decorations they saw in the Roman catacombs, and that they pointed out these examples to their artists. This suggests, that the culture at the late sixteenth-century papal court was one of mere admiration of early Christian remains, and that these were immediately recognised and understood by the general public – who could only see the outside of the Tower – or by the invited visitor allowed inside.

By assuming this, Nicola Courtright leaves unanswered a number of important – and complex – issues related to the Tower of the Winds: the intentions of the patron, and the reception of these artistic and scientific concepts by Roman and foreign visitors to the Vatican. Indeed, only scarce information can be found on the exact function of the Tower and its use during the lifetime of Gregory XIII. Sources either document the physical construction and decoration of the Tower, by means of accounts, sketches or preparatory drawings, or underline the programmatic symbolical meaning of the *Torre*. It is to these two kinds of sources that Nicola Courtright's book is heavily indebted, but the limitations of which she does not wholly circumvent.

Any discussion of a probable real function of the tower, apart from its symbolic importance, remains limited in Nicola Courtright's study to the reference of several rooms as a 'suite', without any reference of how these various spaces were meant to serve specific functions in the context of an apartment<sup>4</sup>. That these rooms probably constituted a typical sixteenth-century 'laboratory of nature' or a museum of natural curiosities has not been taken into account in the explanation of the architectural form nor in the description and interpretation of the decorative programme<sup>5</sup>. An observa-

3 Courtright, p.59–68.

4 For the discussion of the Roman apartment and its functions and uses, see P. WADDY: *Seventeenth Century Roman Palaces*; New York 1990, p.3–13; for the apartment in the context of the Vatican palaces, see JOHN SHEARMAN: *The Vatican Stanze. Functions and Decoration in Proceedings of the British Academy* 57, 1972, p. 1–58.

5 On the development of spaces for the allocation of natural collections and their study, see PAULA



tory of the sun and stars was in late-sixteenth-century eyes akin to a collection of curiosities, as both were contexts in which the cosmos was studied. In such a constellation, the adjacent *Galleria delle Carte Geografiche* would have been a logical pendant, as it also contained a ‚collection‘ of images referring to contemporary geographic knowledge of the earth.

Furthermore, the question as to how well-known the ‚imperial appearance motif‘ was in the late sixteenth century, remains unanswered. Even in late Roman architecture, the Serliana was not a standard motif for indicating the imperial loge – often indicated with the roman term *pulvinar*. This box was at times also given the form of a plain elevated loggia<sup>6</sup>. This architectural type had developed from the location where the statues of the gods were displayed to the imperial box in a circus. When architectural typology had been ambiguous in the time of Constantine, how then was the late sixteenth century onlooker able to understand its meaning? By focussing upon the Tower of the Winds in the Vatican, and leaving aside contemporary sources or structures that used the same typology, Nicola Courtright’s argumentation is not always completely convincing.

Comparison to contemporary buildings and apartments is only mentioned in the last chapter of the book – here discussed under the heading of ‚the influence of the Tower of the Winds‘, which primarily considers this phenomenon in one direction. In this epilogue, the author points at a very interesting ‚double‘ to the *Torre dei Venti*, namely the tower-like structure containing a loggia added to the front of the Quirinal Palace. That Gregory XIII was also the commissioner of this structure, and that it had been erected in the same period with similar elements referring to astrology and time, makes it an extremely relevant point of reference for the interpretation of the Vatican example. The reason why Gregory wanted similar structures in both palaces, and the possible position of both towers within a suite of rooms comprising a gallery, might have clarified better how the religious and scientific culture of the late sixteenth century led to this particular addition to the Cortile del Belvedere in the Vatican, and how its function was related to its form and decoration. Now, the study offers a first complete art-historical and well-documented description of the Tower of the Winds, with a complete catalogue of its frescoes, and a number of interesting suggestions for further research.

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FINDLEN: *Possessing Nature. Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy*; Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1994. – For a possible use of the Torre dei Venti in the late eighteenth century, see C. PIVA: *Il laboratorio alla Torre de’Venti. Giovanni Pierantoni „Soprintendente alli restauri“ in Vaticano* in: *Neoclassico* 23/24, 2003, p. 96–108.

6 For the architectural typology of the pulvinar, see G. DAREGGI: *Genesi e sviluppo della tipologia del loggiato imperiale nelle raffigurazioni degli edifici circensi*, in: *Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome – Antiquité* 103, 1991, p. 71–89 and *Der neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, vol. 10; Stuttgart/Weimar 2001, col.589.