

A DRAWING BY MARTEN VAN HEEMSKERCK  
OF THE INTERIOR OF S. GIOVANNI IN LATERANO

The drawing on the right half of folio 70 verso in the first volume of Marten van Heemskerck's sketchbook in Berlin (fig. 1) was said by the editors of the volume to show the interior of S. Stefano Rotondo.<sup>1</sup> In reality, however, the drawing is a view of the interior of S. Giovanni in Laterano.<sup>2</sup> The view-point Heemskerck took was near the center of Nicholas IV's ambulatory, a well known element of the building recorded on Rainaldi's survey plan of 1646

(fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> Heemskerck stood just inside the door in the outer wall and looked east through the northern part of the ambulatory, back to Nicholas IV's transept, and beyond it into what remained of the western ends of the two Constantinian side aisles flanking the nave to the north.

The darker foreground of the drawing shows the ambulatory. The inner wall to our right is articulated by half column responds and decorated with wall paintings, the subjects of which are unfortunately not made clear in the drawing.<sup>4</sup> The outer wall to our left contains another half column respond and a large arched doorway,<sup>5</sup> and a sarcophagus seems to stand in front of the wall.<sup>6</sup> Two columns, aligned on a concentric curve with the walls to either side, divide the ambulatory into two equal aisles, a point Heemskerck makes abundantly clear with his quick guide line in the floor. The

1 Ch. Hülsen and H. Egger, *Die Römischen Skizzenbücher von Marten van Heemskerck*, 2 vols., Berlin 1913-1916, I, Text 36. There are two other drawings on the same page; one of them may also be associated with S. Giovanni in Laterano. At the left Heemskerck drew an ancient carved marble bath chair, which Egger claimed to be the one now at S. Stefano Rotondo. He misquoted his source, however (F. Matz and F. von Duhn, *Antike Bildwerke in Rom III*, Leipzig 1882, 127 no. 3707), which actually says that there are two identical chairs, one in the Lateran cloister and another at S. Stefano. Neither one is that shown by Heemskerck, however. In the center of the page is a drawing of a vine scroll column which might be any one of three such columns still preserved in Rome (Hülsen and Egger, *op. cit.*, 36). Most important, however, as Egger does say (*loc. cit.*), it is nearly identical to the one shown in the *Codex Escaurialensis* (ed. H. Egger, Vienna 1906, Text 102; Plates, folio 35 verso), located by an inscription in that manuscript to the Lateran. It should be noted that the present close association of our drawing with the left half of the famous exterior view of the Lateran complex (Libro I, folio 71 recto) is an accident of the rearrangement of the drawings (see Hülsen and Egger, *op. cit.*, I, Text VI-IX).

2 For the Lateran see now R. Krautheimer and S. Corbett, in collaboration with R. Malmstrom and R. Stapleford, *La basilica constantiniana al Laterano; un tentativo di ricostruzione*, in: *RivArchCrist* 43 (1967), 125-154.

3 Vienna, Albertina, IT. AZ. 373; the drawing was first published by H. Egger, *Francesco Borrominis Umbau von S. Giovanni in Laterano*, in: *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte Franz Wickhoff gewidmet von einem Kreise von Freunden und Schülern* (Vienna 1903), 154-162. For a guide to the architectural history of the church in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries see R. Malmstrom, *The building of the nave piers at S. Giovanni in Laterano after the fire of 1361*, in: *RivArchCrist* 43 (1967), 155-164.

4 C. Rasponi, *De basilica et patriarchio lateranensi*, Rome 1656, 43 states: *olim picturis erat parum elegantibus ornata, nunc tantum dealbata*. Nothing beyond this seems to be known about them.

5 The large arched opening does not appear on Rainaldi's plan. In its place Rainaldi shows a small door leading to a small *vano*.

6 This suggestion was first made by Egger (Hülsen and Egger, *op. cit.*, I, Text 36).



1. Marten van Heemskerck. Interior of S. Giovanni in Laterano. Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett

vault covering the ambulatory is lightly indicated at the top of the drawing.

In the brighter background the eastern wall of the north transept is visible. To the left is the low arch leading through it to the outer north side aisle, while the higher arch to the right leads to the inner aisle. Between the two arches stands a small altar, with an image of the Crucifixion set against the pier above and behind it. A canopy of some sort crowns the altar, and above that, on the transept wall itself, there are sketchy indications of wall decorations.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the tran-

7 To my knowledge none of the written sources prior to Clement VIII mentions any decorations on the walls of the transept, figural or otherwise; as Prof. Lotz observed, it might be preferable to read Heemskerck's sketch as showing *stemme* painted on or attached to the wall surface.

sept to the east one can distinguish the columns and arches of the low arcade of Constantinian date that separated the two aisles.<sup>8</sup>

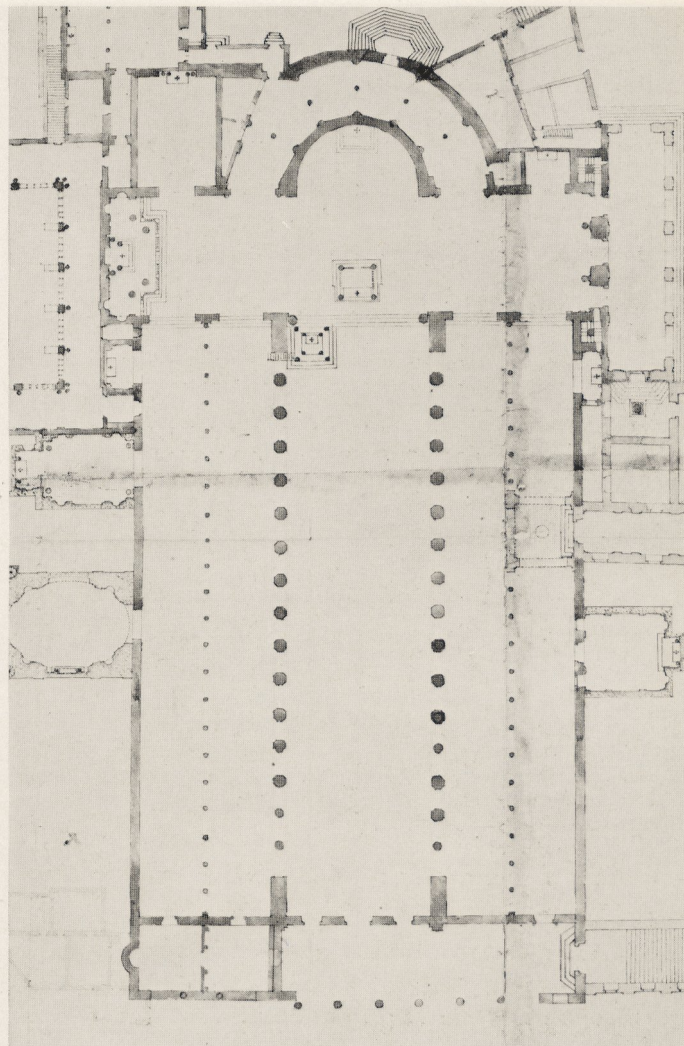
The proper identification of this drawing is admittedly a small correction to Hülsen and Egger's otherwise admirable monograph on the Heemskerck sketchbooks. Yet, correctly identified, the drawing adds to our knowledge in no small part because so few early views of the interior of

8 This wall may be recorded in detail in a Borromini workshop drawing now in Vienna (Albertina, IT. AZ. X 21; see Krautheimer, et al., *op. cit.*, fig. 8). On the other hand, that drawing may show the wall dividing the two southern aisles (as stated *loc. cit.*). As the transept was raised four steps above the level of the nave and aisles, the bases of the columns and the small pedestals below them are not visible in Heemskerck's drawing.

the Lateran basilica are known.<sup>9</sup> Aside from what was said above about the wall decorations, two other points in the history of the church are clarified by the drawing.

First, Heemskerck gives a fairly clear view of the altar standing in the transept between the arches leading to the aisles. It was one of the many subsidiary altars once found in the church,<sup>10</sup> but it is not among those recorded on the incomplete "Archives Plan" of ca. 1560 (?).<sup>11</sup> Panvinio discusses it, however.<sup>12</sup> He calls it the altar of the Holy Cross, and states that it was erected in 1492 by Guglielmo Pererio.<sup>13</sup> On the basis of this information it is clear that the Crucifixion image once decorating the altar is that large, anonymous marble relief now displayed in the chapel of SS. Rufina e Seconda of the Lateran Baptistry, standing high over the door connecting the chapel to the baptistry proper.<sup>14</sup>

The altar seems to have been removed from the transept under Clement VIII in 1600.<sup>15</sup> The Crucifixion relief itself seems then to have been placed at the east end of the outer aisle on the south side of the nave.<sup>16</sup> The date of its removal from that position is not certain, but given the extent of Borromini's structural work in the aisles, the relief must



2. Carlo Rainaldi. Survey plan of *S. Giovanni in Laterano*. Vienna, Albertina. It. Az. 373

have been removed ca. 1646, when it was placed in the ambulatory.<sup>17</sup>

The second and more important point concerns the arches linking Nicholas IV's transept to the shortened Constantinian side aisles. As we have seen, the arch corresponding to the inner aisle was considerably higher than the outer aisle arch. Therefore we must reinterpret another drawing of the interior of *S. Giovanni*, the famous cross section through the northern aisles made by Borromini's

17 The *Relazione dello stato nel quale si trovava la basilica Lateranensi* (Arch. Lat. FF. XXIII, 12, in Lauer, *op. cit.*, 585–593, esp. 591, col. 2) of ca. 1660 states that the relief used to be near the east end of the south aisle, but that it had been taken down and placed dietro la tribuna della basilica where the author read its inscription.

9 To my knowledge the only other sixteenth century view of the interior is a fresco of the 1580's showing *S. Angelo meeting SS. Francesco and Domenico at the Lateran*. The location of this work is unknown, but it was reproduced in an engraving by Battista Panzera (in turn reproduced by Ph. Lauer, *Le Palais de Latran*, Paris 1911, 305, fig. 112), and in a photograph at the Pontificia Commissione per Archeologia Sacra (negative number 12446). Cf. Krautheimer, et al., *op. cit.*, 132–133, and 133, note 10.

10 Consult O. Panvinio, *Le sette chiese principale di Roma*, Rome 1570, 156–160; O. Panvinio, *De sacrosancta basilica baptisterio et patriarchio lateranensi*, Book I, Chapter X (published in Lauer, *op. cit.*, 435–439); P. Ugonio, *Historia delle stazioni di Roma*, Rome 1588, carta 42 recto – carta 43 recto; and G. Rohault de Fleury, *Le Latran au Moyen Age*, Paris 1860, 348–350.

11 For which see Rohault de Fleury, *op. cit.*, Atlas, plate 5, and notes to that plate on page 4.

12 Panvinio, *Sette chiese*, 158–159: *Dal medesimo lato nel pilastro della nave minore è l'altare di Santa Croce dedicato à Dio nostro Salvatore dell'istesso Guglielmo Pererio Auditor di Rota pur nel 1492*. Cf. Panvinio, *Sacrosancta basilica* (in Lauer, *op. cit.*, 438 col. 2).

13 It may have formed a part of Alexander VI's scheme for the redecoration of the transept (see Rohault de Fleury, *op. cit.*, 256 and 348–350).

14 S. Ortolani, *S. Giovanni in Laterano*, Rome n.d. (Le Chiese di Roma Illustrate, 13), 34 and 90, and fig. 39. For the inscription see V. Forcella, *Iscrizioni delle chiese e d'altri edifici di Roma VIII*, Rome 1876, no. 44.

15 The altar is not mentioned explicitly by Ugonio (*op. cit.*, carta 43 recto), but he does say, when describing the north arm of the transept, *Nel medesimo circuito son' alcune altre Cappelle*. O. Panciroli (*I tesori nascosti nell' alma città di Roma*, Rome 1600, 349) states that Clement VIII *ha sgombrato tutti gl'impedimenti, che ci attraversano*, from the transept, suggesting that it was removed in 1600.

16 Rasponi, *op. cit.*, 62.



3. Borromini workshop. *S. Giovanni in Laterano*: Section through Northern side aisles, looking West. Vienna, Albertina, It. Az. 381

workshop in 1646 (fig. 3).<sup>18</sup> It shows the transept wall: to the right is the low outer aisle arch, decorated with classicizing moldings, and to the left one sees two superimposed arches. The upper one is composed of two ranges of bricks and is undecorated; the lower one is as high as its mate to the right and is similarly decorated. When the upper arch to the left was built as part of Nicholas IV's transept it was open throughout its entire height. The lowering of the inner aisle arch and the decoration of both aisle arches seem to have been carried out ca. 1600 as a part of Clement VIII's redecoration of the transept.<sup>19</sup>

Thus Heemskerck's drawing proves that Nicholas IV's transept had arches of three sizes linking it to the eastern parts of the church. The low northern arch related to the low outer aisle, the higher inner aisle received a higher arch, and the triumphal arch (not shown in the drawing) was higher still, corresponding to the greater height of the nave.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that the hierarchy of spaces characteristic of Constantine's basilica was preserved intact down to

the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Although it is by no means certain, it would therefore seem likely that the small „clerestory“ at the top of the Constantinian wall dividing the two aisles was also preserved. It could well have disappeared only with the rebuilding of the aisle roofs into that form shown in the Borromini workshop cross section (fig. 3), an event of the fourteenth century (?).<sup>22</sup>

Finally, when one looks very closely at the Constantinian dividing wall in the Heemskerck drawing it seems that a horizontal line marks the tops of the arches shown there. It is known that the intradoses, faces and spandrels of these arches were revetted with marble sheets in Constantinian times.<sup>23</sup> Should the line above the arches be seen as evidence that at least part of that revetment still existed down to Heemskerck's time? Alternatively, the line may have been only a guide line for the arches.

18 Vienna, Albertina, IT. AZ. 381. The modern redrawing reproduced as fig. 9a in Krautheimer, et al., *op. cit.*, shows that the upper arch was interpreted as a kind of relieving arch above the lower structural arch, but the text (147–148) does not discuss the issue directly, thus allowing different interpretations.

19. The arch leading to the inner aisle may well have been lowered to allow room for the execution of the large frescos on the walls of the transept above, the main glory of Clement VIII's restoration (see most recently D. Stephen Pepper, Two drawings by Baglione for the 'Gift of Constantine', *Master Drawings*, 8 [1970], 267–269).

20 The height of Nicholas IV's triumphal arch is not known; the present arch was the result of a restoration undertaken at the end of the fifteenth century by Innocent VIII and Alexander VI (see S. Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, ed. O. Tommasini, Rome

1890, 279–280; in addition, the *stemma* of Alexander VI still stands over the triumphal arch on the nave side, hidden now by the coffered ceiling, but visible from above). Nicholas IV's triumphal arch may well have been as high as his apse arch across the transept (destroyed, of course, in 1876, and confusingly replaced by one as high as Alexander VI's triumphal arch).

21 See the reconstruction drawing in Krautheimer, et al., *op. cit.* 144, fig. 11.

22 The Heemskerck drawing shows no half moon windows at the top of the dividing wall, indicating that they had disappeared from this part of the church by that time. The fire of 1361 was so violent and the repairs so extensive that it is hard to believe that the side aisle roofs were not rebuilt in the 1360's along with all the rest covering the church (see Malmstrom, *op. cit.*, 159–162).

23 At the time of its discovery in 1933 the fragment of dividing wall arcade preserved a clamp and a clamp hole on one of its faces (see Krautheimer, et al., *op. cit.*, 128 and 153). See also note 8 above.