

IRVING LAVIN

BERNINI'S BALDACHIN: CONSIDERING A RECONSIDERATION

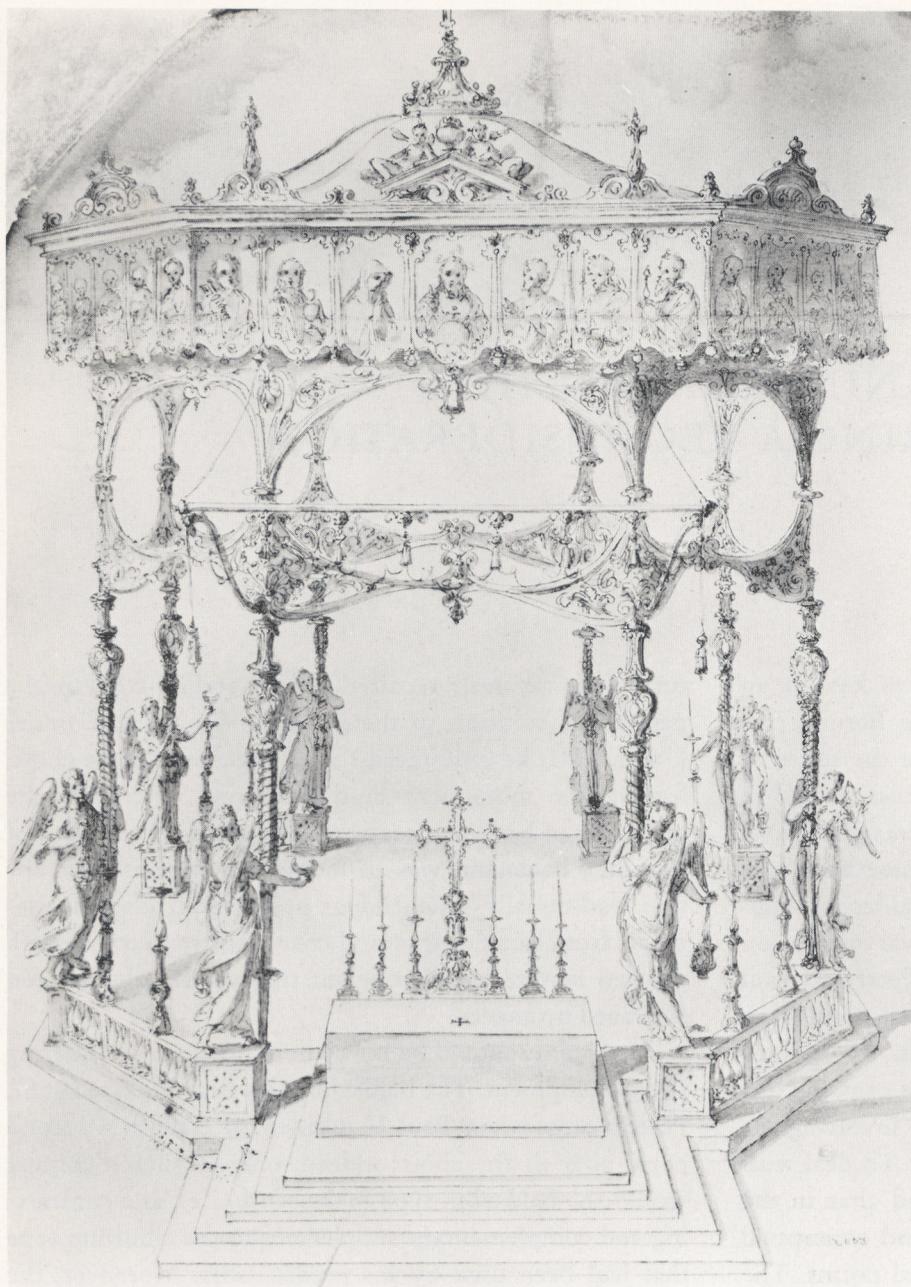
An important if by no means exclusive key to an understanding of that extraordinary image Bernini created in the baldachin of St. Peter's lies in the series of provisional monuments installed in the crossing and in the choir of the building by the predecessors of Bernini's patron, Pope Urban VIII (1623–1644). There were two main stages in this prior history of the baldachin. Clement VIII (1592–1605) removed the medieval installation at the altar over the tomb of the apostles Peter and Paul and erected in its place a ciborium with a cupola resting on columns, made of temporary materials. In the new church, however, the high altar was in the crossing, far removed from the choir where ceremonies involving the College of Cardinals normally took place. To deal with this problem, Paul V introduced a second altar in the choir, and with it a fundamental visual and conceptual distinction between the resulting two focal points. The type of architectural ciborium Clement had placed over the high altar was transferred to the choir altar, where the ancient marble spiral columns that had decorated the early Christian presbytery were reused as supports for the cupola and as part of a screen across the apse. The altar that remained in the crossing was now given an altogether different kind of covering, also impermanent, consisting of a baldachin with a tasseled canopy supported by staves which were held erect by four standing angels. No doubt the purpose of these two contrasting but complementary forms was to express, on the one hand, the function of the altar in the choir as the liturgical focal point of the building, and, on the other hand, the symbolical significance of the site in the crossing where the remains of the apostles were interred. The two struc-

tures were variously repaired, rebuilt and replaced until a permanent solution to the problem was reached under Urban VIII; he renounced the arrangement in the choir, leaving the monument in the crossing to convey the meanings of both predecessors. The great achievement of Bernini's baldachin was to merge in coherent form the two traditionally independent prototypes, adapting elements from each: a structural crown above a cornice with tasseled lambrequin resting on true spiral columns and sustained by angels.

Two points should be borne in mind when considering this development. The baldachin idea first appeared at St. Peter's only when Paul V decided to establish a second papal altar in the choir; indeed, only in such a context would the baldachin type make sense, i.e., as a contrasting and complementary supplement to the ciborium type that had been used by his predecessors. Moreover, the final baldachin's patently "chimerical" combination of elements from both prototypes was precisely what was attributed to Bernini in a bitter criticism of the work by the painter Agostino Ciampelli, recorded by Borromini on a manuscript guide to Rome written by one of his friends: "(Ciampelli) said that baldachins are not supported by columns but by staves, and that the baldachin should not run together with the cornice of the columns, and in any case he wanted to show that it is borne by angels: and he added that it was a chimera."¹

¹ For details on all the foregoing, see I. LAVIN, *Bernini and the Crossing of St. Peter's*, New York, 1968; also *idem*, "Letter to the Editor," *The Art Bulletin*, LV, 1973, 475–476, and *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, New York and London, 1980, 19–21.

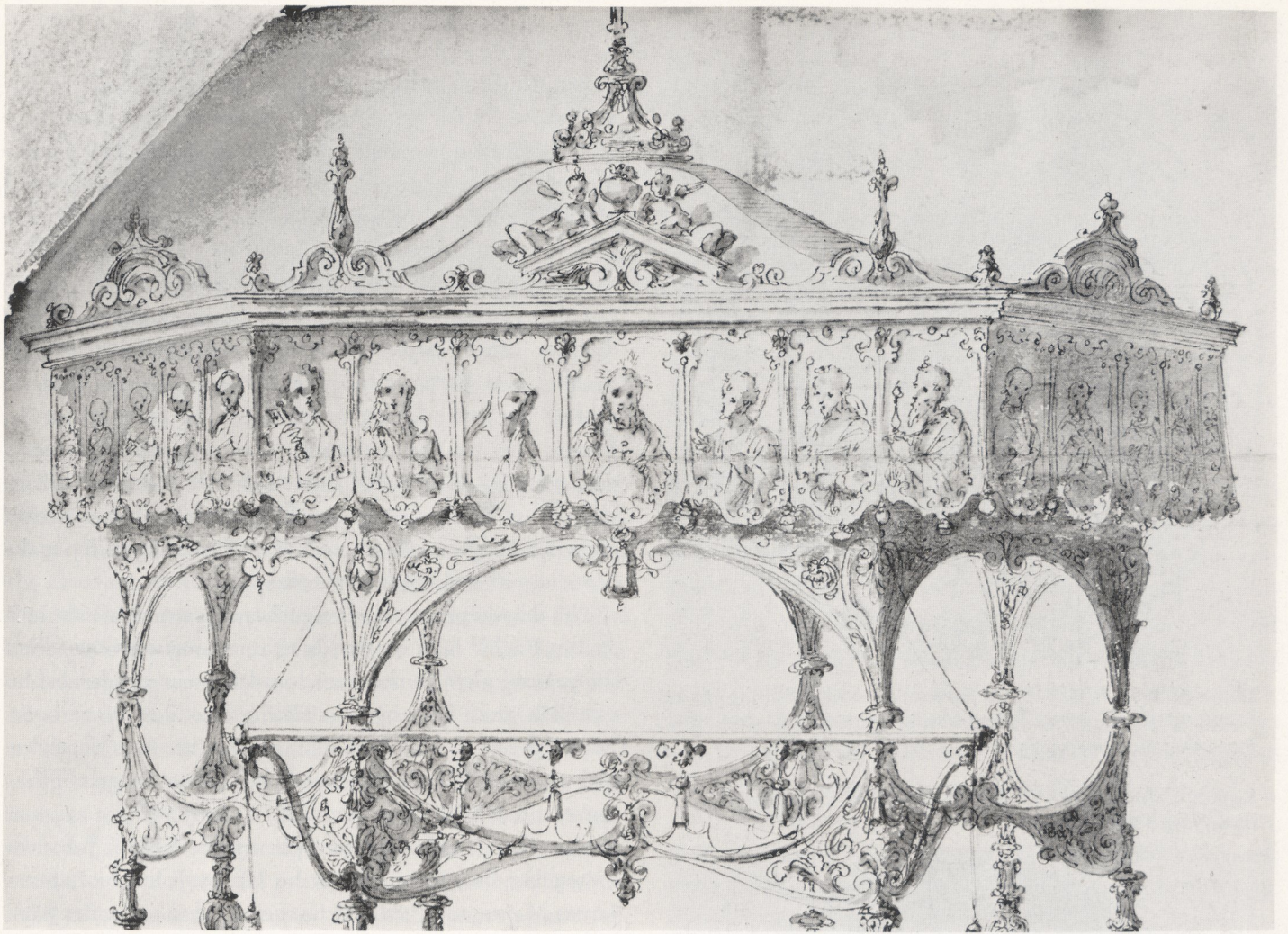
1. Baldachin bearing Aldobrandini arms, drawing. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm



In a recent article W. Chandler Kirwin has provided a good deal of additional information concerning this “pre-history” of Bernini’s baldachin.² The new material comes mainly from two kinds of sources, which Kirwin has examined more thoroughly than any of his predecessors: on the one hand, the actual accounts of payments to workmen, prepared by and for professionals in matters of architecture and construction; on the other hand, the minutes of meetings of the Congregation of Cardinals

that supervised the building of St. Peter’s, and the diaries of the papal Masters of Ceremonies, written by and for amateurs in such matters. We now know that the temporary structures erected over the two altars were more numerous than we had suspected (though not so numerous as Kirwin makes out), we have a clearer image of what certain of these structures were like, and we have a better idea of how the altars were used. These are real, but disappointingly modest gains, and evidently in a misguided effort to inflate his own contribution, Kirwin assumes the task of deflating Bernini’s. He concludes with proclamations of Bernini’s “power,” “innovative

2 “Bernini’s Baldacchino Reconsidered,” *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, XIX, 1981, 141–171.



2. Detail of Fig. 1

brilliance” and “genius”; but he offers no definition of these achievements, and the effect of his argument is to assign to Bernini the improbable role of executant of his predecessors’ basic ideas. We shall see that, on the contrary, Kirwin’s results in no way alter the substance of what could be surmised from the material previously available and add remarkably little to our understanding of the genesis of Bernini’s creation. Perhaps more important, however, and certainly more dispiriting, is the intricate pattern of misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and actual misquotation of evidence that Kirwin has woven to support his undertaking. The following consideration of Kirwin’s reconsideration is therefore intended not only to refute his thesis, but also to expose his method. The reader must be forewarned that although I have simplified it to the extent possible, the subject is complicated – as much by Kirwin’s construals as by the nature of the evidence itself.

CLEMENT VIII’S CIBORIUM(S) IN THE CROSSING

Kirwin naturally starts with the ciborium of wood, canvas, and *papier maché* erected by Clement VIII over the altar in the crossing. Here payments to the workmen clarify the picture of the structure: it had eight columns with bases and foliated capitals.³ Kirwin tries to connect the work described in these documents with one illustrated in a drawing in Stockholm (Figs. 1, 2). The project represented here is octagonal in plan and consists of eight angels standing on balustrades with pedestals bearing the arms of the Aldobrandini pope Clement VIII. The angels grasp elaborately carved staves which support a canopy. The identification is quite untenable. The drawing represents a baldachin, not a ciborium. The payments consis-

³ Kirwin, Appendix I–A, p. 165.



3. Sacrament altar, St. John's in the Lateran, engraving (showing figures falsely described by Kirwin as angels reclining on the pediment). After Buonanni, *Numismata pontificum*, 1699, II, 457, fig. XI

4. Sacrament altar, St. John's in the Lateran, medal of Clement VIII. *Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris*



tently refer to a "ciborium" and "columns" with "bases" and foliated "capitals" – terms no one versed in such matters would use for the work shown in the drawing (see below for the terms used when a real baldachin was built). The documents make no reference to angels. Particularly telling is a contemporary writer's comment that

this monument was similar to a catafalque,⁴ a type of structure which had nothing in common with the design in Stockholm. Catafalques, however fanciful, and including those cited by Kirwin himself, were essentially architectural monuments with true columns and monumental superstructures; they might be amply decorated with sculptures, but never with figures holding up the columns.⁵ Furthermore, the documents indicate that Clement expected to execute his ciborium in marble, a material that certainly could not have been envisaged for the delicate affair depicted in the Stockholm drawing.⁶ Finally, and perhaps most important, Clement had no motive for introducing a baldachin in isolation at St. Peter's. If, on the contrary, one supposes Clement's ciborium to have established the type followed subsequently at St. Peter's – basically square in plan with a cupola resting on paired columns placed diagonally at the corners – all these difficulties disappear.

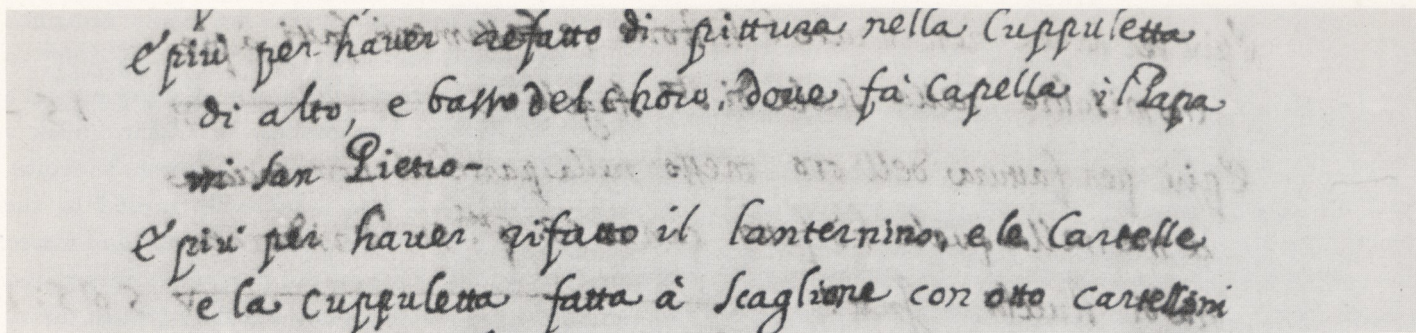
The drawn project does significantly anticipate the baldachin Paul V later erected in the crossing when he added the second altar in the choir, and Kirwin's eagerness to establish that fact by associating the design with St. Peter's seems to have blinded him to what is evidently its real purpose. This is suggested by the bust-length figures represented in the lappets of the canopy: Christ appears in the center flanked at his right by the Virgin, John the Evangelist, and Peter, and at his left by John the Baptist, James Major, and Paul. The inclusion of the apostles John and his brother James in this context makes no sense for the altar of Peter and Paul at St. Peter's, a difficulty Kirwin tries to dispose of in his description by relegating the interlopers to a footnote.⁷ The disposition makes perfect sense, however, at one place in particular – at St. John's in the Lateran. There it would be eminently proper to give precedence after the Deisis to John the Evangelist (to whom, along with the Savior and the Baptist, the church is dedicated) and James; and to include after them Peter and Paul, relics of whom are preserved at the high altar. The connection with the Lateran helps to explain the form and function of the project, because we know from a contemporary source that Clement VIII planned to do

4 J. A. F. ORBAAN, *Documenti sul barocco in Roma*, Rome, 1920, 47f., n.

5 For surveys of funeral catafalques, see in general O. BERENDSON, *The Italian Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Catafalques*, unpub. Ph. D. diss., New York University, 1961; for Rome, M. FAGIOLO DELL'ARCO and S. CARANDINI, *L'effimero barocco*, 2 vols., Rome, 1977–1978.

6 Kirwin, App. I–B, p. 165.

7 Kirwin, 149, n. 49. The Evangelist is identifiable by the chalice he holds, James Major by his pilgrim's staff and kinship with John.



5. Archivio della Reverenda Fabbrica di San Pietro, I Piano, serie 1, vol. 2, fasc. 4, fol. 3 verso (showing dash [-] falsely identified by Kirwin as a colon [:]). St. Peter's, Rome

at the Lateran something very similar to what Paul V later actually did at St. Peter's, namely, move the Gothic ciborium over the altar of the apostles farther back from the crossing into the tribune.⁸ The baldachin shown in the Stockholm drawing would thus have contrasted with the architectural monument in the choir. The whole scheme adds to the accumulation of testimony I have given of the importance of Clement VIII's work at the Lateran for the subsequent developments at St. Peter's.⁹

We next learn that less than three years later, in the first months of 1597, this ciborium was rebuilt or refurbished.¹⁰ The new structure, which must have incorporated elements from the previous one, again consisted of eight columns, four of feigned Portasanta marble and four

of feigned yellow marble, placed against eight pilasters also in imitation marble, which supported a superstructure with architrave, frieze, cornice and pediment, surmounted by a cupola.¹¹ Clement replaced the ciborium a second time in 1600 for the Jubilee year. The documents give no hint of the design of this work, but again there is no reason to assume it was radically different from the extant ciborium.¹² Three years later, canvas was purchased for still another state of the ciborium, of which nothing more is heard before Clement's death.¹³

Two conclusions, neither of them suggested by Kirwin, may be offered at this point. The Stockholm drawing shows that Paul V's idea for a baldachin supported by standing angels, used as a counterpart in the crossing for an architectural ciborium in the choir, may have originated in Clement VIII's plans for the Lateran. Kirwin's documents indicate that Clement VIII's ciborium (ciborium, if my suspicion is correct that the successive replacements were essentially refurbishings of the first monument) also anticipated the form Paul V gave to the centerpiece of the ciborium he added in the choir of St. Peter's.

8 "Nella visita del Papa a S. Gio. Laterano, volse vedere minutamente la capella et li organi che vi si fabricano, et se bene S. S.ta sia molto essausta de danari ordinò agli architetti che tirassero l'opera à fine dovendovisi rimover quel gran tabernacolo che contien li corpi delli dui Principi d'Apostoli et metter sotto la tribuna, et farvi il pavimento di nuovo" (E. ROSSI, "Roma ignorata," *Roma*, XII, 1934, 40). This matter will be discussed by Mr. Jack Freiberg of New York University, in his dissertation on the sixteenth-century redecoration of the Lateran.

9 Lavin, Crossing, 16–18. Precisely the opposite must be said of Kirwin's own attempt to supplement the evidence. Discussing (p. 149, n. 49; cf. also p. 163, n. 154) the motif of the angels reclining on a pediment which appears on the canopy of the baldachin in the Stockholm drawing, he cites, without illustration, an engraving published in 1699 depicting a medal of the Sacrament altar erected at the Lateran by Clement VIII for the Jubilee in 1600 (Fig. 3; F. BUONANNI, *Numismata pontificum romanorum quae a tempore Martini V usque ad annum MDCXCIX*, 2 vols., Rome, 1699, II, 457, Fig. XI [not IX as in Kirwin]). Kirwin describes this engraving as a "contemporary source" according to which the Lateran altar "was also originally conceived to include two reclining angels on the outer edges of the pediment above it." In fact, no such figures appear in the engraving or in the original medal on which it was based (Fig. 4).

10 Kirwin, 151, App. II, pp. 165 ff.

11 Kirwin, 152, makes a separate project out of a summary invoice for the decoration of a ciborium by the painter Cesare Nebbia, which includes a payment dated September 1598 (App. III, cf. No. 11, p. 166). The work must have been done on the structure built in 1597, however, since two payments for that project made to Nebbia in March 1597 (Kirwin, App. II, No. 1, p. 165) were deducted from the amount owed him in the later bill (Kirwin, App. III, No. 11, p. 166).

Four *papier maché* bases paid for in March 1597 (Kirwin, App. II, No. 2, p. 165) were evidently partial replacements for those of the 1594 ciborium.

12 Kirwin, 151, App. IV, p. 166.

13 Kirwin, 151, App. V, p. 167.

PAUL V's BALDACHIN IN THE
CROSSING AND CIBORIUM(S)
IN THE CHOIR

Paul adapted Clement's baldachin by reducing the number of staves and supporting angels, and he adapted the ciborium by flanking it with additional columns so as to create a screen across the apse. In essence, the latter arrangement recalled the situation that had obtained in the Constantinian presbytery at St. Peter's, an evocation that was reinforced by incorporating ten of the spiral columns from the original structure. Eight of the columns were used for the centerpiece, while the screen consisted of three columns extending laterally on each side, the two outermost being original marble spiral columns while the two pairs of inner ones were made *ex novo*. Here, Kirwin's two kinds of sources create a problem because they contradict each other, a problem which recurs and which each time Kirwin either overlooks or ignores. In the present case, the papal diarist reports that the new columns were made of cement and stone and imitated as closely as possible the original marble columns, which were of the composite order;¹⁴ instead, the actual bill for the work, submitted by the craftsman and countersigned by the architect Carlo Maderno, shows that the new columns, like the entire superstructure, were actually made of wood and were of the Doric order.¹⁵ We must certainly lend credence to the professionals, especially in the accounting records, where accuracy was a matter of hard finances. The discrepancy effectively rules out Kirwin's attempt to identify with this structure a drawing of the ciborium and screen made later by Borromini, inscribed with the name of Paul V.¹⁶ Here the columns are all of the same, composite order, except that the outer two are spirals whereas the inner four are straight. The additional evidence reinforces my identification of the drawing with a refurbishing of the 1606 structure carried out under Paul's successors, which the inscription and other evidence indicate must have been envisaged toward the end of Paul's reign.¹⁷

14 "Ex dictis sex columnis, quae coronidem praedictam sustinebant, duae quidem marmoreae erant et ex eisdem, quas a tempore Salomonis translatas esse traditur, *aliae quattuor ad illarum similitudinem, quantum licuit, ex cemento ac lapidibus fabricatae fuerunt*" (italics mine; Kirwin, App. VI-A, No. 4, p. 168).

15 Invoice of "Giuseppe di Banchi falegname (carpenter) in Borgo" ... "per quattro colonne tonde con base, capitello di ordine dorico," November 23, 1606 (Kirwin, App. VI-A, No. 2, p. 167).

16 Kirwin, 154ff.

17 See Lavin, Crossing, 8, 43f., Nos. 26, 27.

The ciborium and screen in the choir remained unchanged for a decade and a half. Here, in order to circumvent an inconvenient document, Kirwin creates a grotesque straw man. He imputes to Oskar Pollak a nugatory error in the transcription of a painter's invoice, an error by which I was supposedly misled to the assumption that the work was for a ciborium and screen at the high altar.¹⁸ Pollak was not in error, however, and the full description of the work and the repeated use of the word "rifatto" show patently that it was a renewal of the monument in the choir.¹⁹ The only significant change from the predecessor is that the four columns were now remade with fluted and foliated shafts;²⁰ they certainly could not have had Doric capitals, and there is no indication they were spiral in form. For these reasons, and because the other details correspond exactly, the drawing by Borromini mentioned earlier must reflect the renewed, rather than the original state of the monument.

One other thing of importance happened under Paul V. Borromini, in the same text referred to earlier, records that Carlo Maderno submitted a project which included a baldachin canopy and spiral columns.²¹ This project, otherwise unrecorded, is important because it is the first evidence we have of an attempt to combine the baldachin and ciborium prototypes. Borromini's purpose was clearly to record this precedent for the bronze baldachin of Bernini, so several points concerning his carefully worded statement must be understood: he says explicitly that the canopy did not touch the cornice of the columns, he does not suggest that the spiral columns were to be imitated in bronze on a colossal scale, and he makes no reference to supporting angels. All these were essential features of Bernini's baldachin, and it is unimaginable that

18 Kirwin, 160, n. 118.

19 See O. POLLAK, *Die Kunsttätigkeit unter Urban VIII*, 2 vols., Vienna, 1928-1931, II, 12f.; cf. Lavin, Crossing, 8, 44, No. 27. Kirwin, who misquotes the text itself, says that Pollak omitted a colon (:) after the words San Pietro (cf. Fig. 5), whereas Pollak simply replaced the dash by dots, a typographical practice followed throughout the book. The successive clauses describe distinct tasks on various parts of the structure.

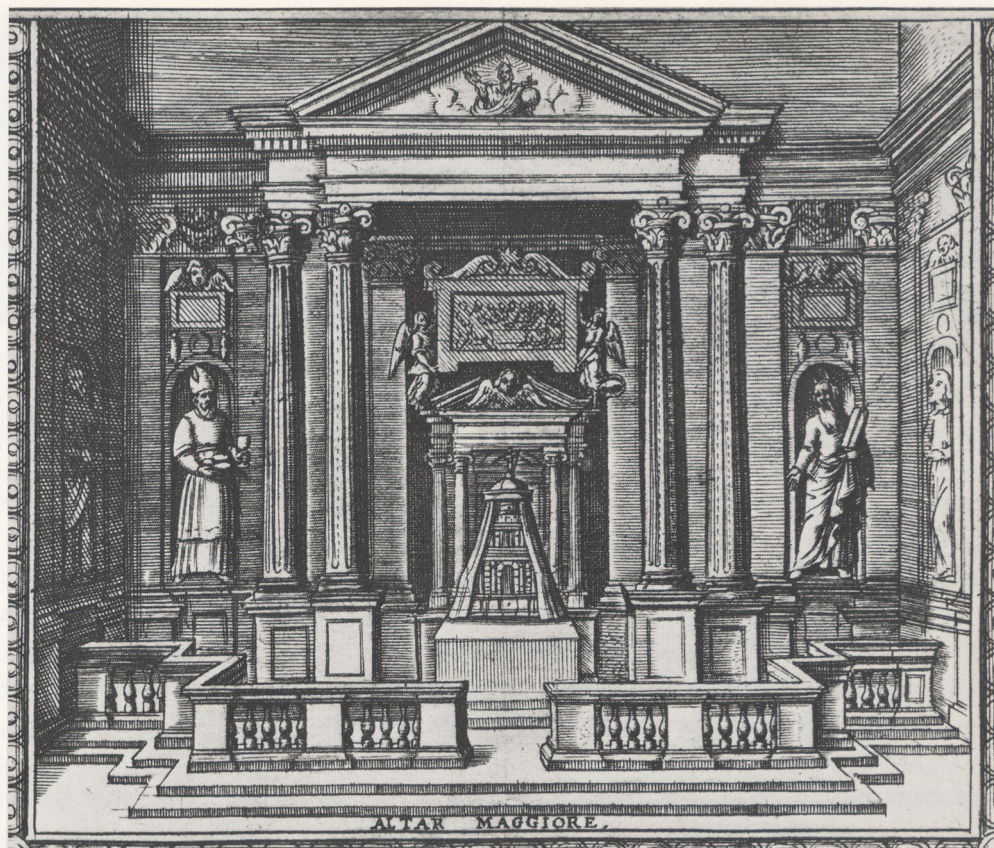
The term "cappella del coro" introduced by Kirwin nowhere occurs in this document. The phrase actually employed, "choro, dove fa capella il Papa," is equivalent to the "ciborio dove fa Cappella Nostro Signore Papa" used for the 1606 version (Kirwin, App. VI-A, No. 2, p. 167).

I have not troubled to check all of Kirwin's transcriptions, but we shall see that each time he accuses Pollak of error Kirwin himself is tentidiously at fault. I am indebted to Jack Freiberg for taking the photographs of documents reproduced here.

20 "... quattro Colonne scanellate e fogliami finti di chiaro e scuro con li suoi Capitelli ..." (Pollak, *Kunsttätigkeit*, II, 12).

21 Lavin, Crossing, 11f., 42, No. 17.

6. *St. John's in the Lateran*, engraving by Giovanni Maggi and Matthias Greuter (showing Sacrament altar labeled "ALTAR MAGGIORE")



Borromini would have failed to mention them. Kirwin's new material bears on Maderno's project in only one respect: the papal diarists continued to refer to the altar at the tomb of the apostles as the high altar, although it was used only rarely after the new altar was introduced for regular services in the apse. Since Borromini says Maderno's project was for the high altar, Kirwin argues that it was meant for the tomb altar rather than the apse altar, as I had surmised. The matter is not quite so simple as Kirwin makes out. In the identifying inscription on a drawing of the ciborium in the choir by a contemporary French architect, the apse altar is described as "le grand autel."²² Borromini's usage may be comparable to that of certain early seventeenth-century sources concerning the Lateran, which refer to the great Sacrament altar built by Clement VIII in the transept of the church, rather than to the altar of the apostles in the crossing, as the "altar maggiore" (cf. Fig. 6).²³ Moreover, Kirwin's attempt to locate

Maderno's project in the crossing conflicts with the report we have that Paul V intended to execute the 1606 baldachin with supporting angels permanently in bronze.²⁴ Kirwin's theory that Paul intended to do away with his own new second altar in the choir is belied by the evidence alluded to above that he began a refurbishment of the ciborium and screen. In any case, there was never any doubt that the project of Maderno recorded by Borromini was of seminal importance for Bernini's design. The precise meaning and implications of Borromini's canny formulation are debatable, but its veracity is not; and Kirwin utterly misrepresents the case in stating that I "seriously questioned" Borromini's "accuracy and reliability."²⁵

GREGORY XV's BALDACHINS IN THE CROSSING

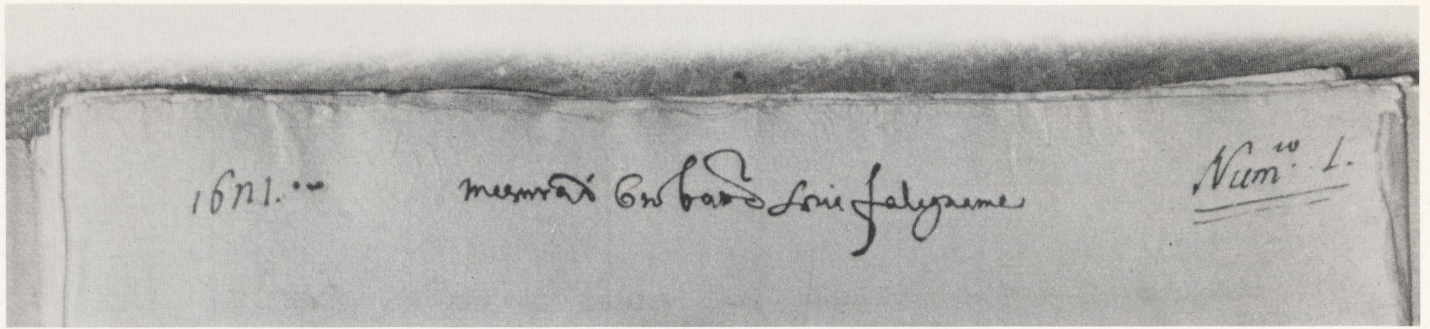
The subsequent history of the baldachin at the crossing was also essentially one of renewing the structure erected at the beginning of Paul V's reign. A baldachin with

22 Cf. Lavin, *Crossing*, 47, No. 1, fig. 28 A.

23 See the avviso of 22 April 1600 quoted in E. Rossi, "Roma ignorata," *Roma*, XII, 1934, 323. Our Fig. 6 is from an incomplete set of photographs in the Bibliotheca Hertziana of a suite of engravings by Giovanni Maggi and Matthias Greuter (Lavin, *Crossing*, 41, No. 8); cf. C. D'ONOFRIO, *Roma vista da Roma*, Rome, 1968, 65.

24 Lavin, *Crossing*, 6, n. 24.

25 Kirwin, 158.



7. Archivio della Reverenda Fabbrica di San Pietro, I Piano, serie 1, vol. 4, fasc. 1, fol. 1 recto (showing date, 1621, correctly [not erroneously, as stated by Kirwin] transcribed by Pollak). St. Peter's, Rome

staves supported by kneeling rather than standing angels was erected for a canonization celebration in March of 1622. Contemporary engravings show that the staves were richly carved with floral motifs and Kirwin cites a descriptive pamphlet in which the phrase “colonne all’antica” is used;²⁶ but the term was obviously used loosely, for it is evident from the engravings that the supports were not true columns.

Kirwin next shows that a design for replacing this baldachin was submitted by May 12, 1622.²⁷ He would have us believe, however, that the work was completed in less than three weeks, citing in evidence (but not quoting) a passage in a papal diary to the effect that the pope celebrated mass at the altar on June 29. The passage in fact says nothing about a new baldachin and the design approved in May was surely that for which Bernini made a set of kneeling angels.²⁸ Payments to the craftsmen begin a month later and thereafter complement each other chronologically as well as substantively.²⁹ Kirwin seeks to avoid the inevitable conclusion that only one work was involved by again falsely accusing Pollak of an error, this time of having “incorrectly transcribed” a date on the woodcarver’s invoice. Pollak’s transcription of the year, 1621, is perfectly accurate (cf. Fig. 7), and Kirwin’s emendation to 1622 (which he describes as “indisputable” [sic]) is simply based on an unexplained and unwarranted

transposition of the date of the succeeding document in the volume.³⁰

The worst is yet to come. In 1976 a volume of the minutes of the meetings of the Congregation of Cardinals that supervised St. Peter’s was rediscovered by the archivist of the Fabbrica. In the minutes of meeting of July 3 and October 6, 1623, the secretary of the Congregation speaks of “four columns of wood made to support the baldachin over the high altar”; Kirwin takes these references as evidence of still another temporary baldachin and as proof that the idea of supporting a baldachin on columns dates from this period.³¹ He quotes a payment to a scarpellino who worked on the baldachin in the following

26 Kirwin, 161, n. 125.

27 Kirwin, 161, App. IX, No. 1, p. 170.

28 Lavin, *Crossing*, 8f., 41f., No. 13. In a letter written before January 1, 1624, Teodoro della Porta complains about the provisional works at the “Altare magg(io)re che è stato fatto e rifatto quattro volte ... come hora segue medemam(en)te” (Pollak, *Kunsttätigkeit*, II, 71); he was presumably referring to the ciborium of Clement VIII, Paul V’s baldachin of 1606, the canonization baldachin of 1622, and the replacement baldachin of 1622–1624.

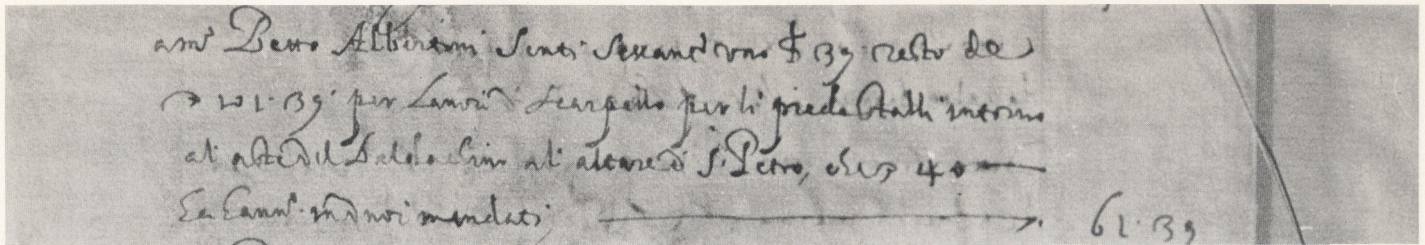
29 Cf. Pollak, *Kunsttätigkeit*, II, 306ff., Nos. 984ff. Significantly, only payments to the woodcarvers who made the supports predate the instructions to erect them (Kirwin, App. IX–B, Nos. 1, 2, p. 170); work by the other craftsmen followed afterward.

30 Kirwin, 161, n. 129. The essence of Kirwin’s method is betrayed by his discussion of the year 1621 inscribed on the outside of this invoice, a summary of work done on several projects submitted by the woodcarver G. B. Soria for final payment. Kirwin refers to the document by citing Pollak, *Kunsttätigkeit*, II, 17–20, No. 35, and his operative sentence concerning the data is as follows: “The date 1622 is indisputable (see A.F., I Piano, serie 1, vol. 4, fascioli n. 1–2).” The implication is that proof of the emended date will be found in the two documents cited in the parentheses. But fascicule 1 is the same as Pollak No. 35, and fascicule 2 is nothing more than an order of July 1622 to pay one of the sums mentioned in the invoice, one of the long series of payments to Soria that continued through 1624. (Fascicule 2 had also been published by POLLAK, whom Kirwin fails to cite although I had given the reference, “Ausgewählte Akten zur Geschichte der römischen Peterskirche [1535–1621],” *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen* XXXVI, 1915, Beiheft, 107, No. 57.)

Thus, with no justification, Kirwin transfers the date of the single, interim payment to the whole invoice. This extrapolation in turn entails the extraordinary assumption that, for no apparent reason, the woodcarver was paid for finished work in installments over the next two years! The example of belated payment Kirwin cites as a parallel (App. III, p. 166) is totally inapt: final settlement was delayed because the charges were disputed by the authorities and ultimately reduced.

The inscribed date does require explanation: Pollak thought it might be a scribe’s error for 1624, when the invoice was submitted and final payment made; I suggested that it recorded the intended beginning of work on the project.

31 Kirwin, 161, App. IX–B, Nos. 1, 2, p. 170.



8. Archivio della Reverenda Fabbrica di San Pietro, Serie armadi, vol. 240, fol. 19 verso (showing portion of document – “di scarpello per li pedestalli intorno al’aste” – omitted by Kirwin). St. Peter’s, Rome

way: “a mastro Bettino Albertini ∇ 61.39, il resto di ∇ 101.39 per i lavori del baldacchino all’altare.”³² This payment had already been published by Pollak, the accuracy of whose transcription I have verified against the original (Fig. 8).³³ In this case, Kirwin does not refer to Pollak, a convenient oversight since Kirwin omits a crucial phrase. The passage actually reads: “... per lavori di scarpello per li pedestalli intorno al’aste del baldacchino al’altare” (italics mine). In point of fact, the term “aste” is used repeatedly and exclusively in the payments to the workmen and in the invoices, which are countersigned by the architect, Carlo Maderno. These men, unlike the cardinals of the Congregation, were professionals; we must take them at their word – and the word *aste* means *stave*. I emphasized that the staves of this last temporary baldachin before Bernini’s had decorations (including “colarini” and “piedi” rather than capitals and bases) which might have evoked the original twisted columns;³⁴ but after Clement VIII’s ciborium, “column” does not appear in the financial records concerning the structures erected at the altar of the apostles until the reference is to Bernini’s project.

URBAN VIII’S “COMPETITION” AND BERNINI’S CONTRIBUTION

Another interesting resolution of the Congregation is recorded in the newly discovered volume of minutes. On June 7, 1624, that is, under Urban VIII, the overseer of the Fabbrica was instructed to issue an edict soliciting ideas and models for the baldachin to be prepared along with a verbal explanation by the next meeting of the group fifteen days later.³⁵ Kirwin sees this record as evidence of a formal competition, of which a “mockery” was made by the foregone conclusion of Bernini’s victory

as the pope’s favorite. It is difficult to see why Urban VIII should have stooped to such a subterfuge, and in fact nothing more is heard of the matter, although there was plenty of criticism of Bernini’s ideas and we know a number of alternative projects. Urban’s choice of the designer for the baldachin was certainly a foregone conclusion, however, and there can be no doubt of the essential reason.

Despite Bernini’s manifold dependence on predecessors both in the far and in the near past, the major novelties of his solution emerge clearer than ever from Kirwin’s attempt to obfuscate them: Bernini used true columns to support a baldachin, imitating the ancient spiral columns on a colossal scale in bronze; he shifted the angels from beside the monument (where they were no longer needed to support staves) to the tops of the columns where they “carry” the canopy; and he completed the marriage of processional baldachin with architectural ciborium by connecting the columns through a cornice from which, in place of the traditional architrave and frieze, tasseled lapets hang. His design thus fused the three main types of honorific covers, the architectural ciborium, the processional baldachin, and the hanging canopy.³⁶ Finally, Bernini imitated the early Christian form of the altar covering, in which crossed ribs rested on spiral columns. I have defined these innovations before and Kirwin’s material requires not the slightest emendation to any of them.³⁷

32 Kirwin, App. IX-B, No. 4, p. 170.

33 Kunsttätigkeit, II, 307, No. 993.

34 Pollak, Kunsttätigkeit, II, 18; cf. Lavin, Crossing, 9.

35 Kirwin, 162ff., App. X, No. 1, p. 170. This document had already been cited by C.D’Onofrio, *La papessa Giovanna*, Rome, 1979, 243.

36 O. Berendsen has recently pointed out that canopies were suspended from domical superstructures above the bier in certain catafalque designs (“I primi catafalchi del Bernini e il progetto del Baldacchino,” in M. FAGIOLO and G. SPAGNESI, eds., *Immagini del barocco. Bernini e la cultura del seicento*, Florence, 1982, pp. 133–143.

Before encountering J. TRAEGER’s explication of the feigned canopy in the vault of Raphael’s Stanza d’Eliodoro – especially the allusion to Peter’s vision of “a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners” (Acts 10:11, 11:5) – I had not been fully aware of the significance of this motif for the covering of the tomb of the apostle and for the Eucharist (“Raphaels Stanza d’Eliodoro und ihr Bildprogramm,” *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, XIII, 1971, 29–99, esp. 54ff., 65f.).

37 See above, n. 1.

