

# Borromini, the Cavaliere d'Arpino, and Others at Santa Lucia in Selci (with a Note on Santa Maria della Purificazione and the Architect Giovanni Paolo Maggi)

For Joseph Connors

## Abstract

This contribution details the history of the church of Santa Lucia in Selci from its sixteenth-century refoundation as a cloistered convent of first Benedictine (1534), then Augustinian (1568), nuns to its seventeenth-century reconstruction and redecoration by a series of artistic luminaries, adducing a wealth of unpublished archival sources. The role of Bartolomeo Bassi, not Carlo Maderno as previously thought, is shown in designing and building the original church and convent (1603–1605). The patronage history of the church's individual chapels is reconstructed and each is analysed cautiously to separate the design roles of Carlo Maderno, his studio, and others. Borromini's work in the church has hitherto not received due recognition, neither for its important place in the earliest period of his independent activity as an architect nor for its relation to his contemporary output. First, the Cappella Landi (1638–39) is analysed, with particular attention to its rich and unexamined Trinitarian symbolism and the role of the Cavaliere d'Arpino. An iconographical program for the chapel's stuccoes is also presented for the first time. Secondly, the *cantoria* (choir loft), built between 1630 and 1640, is analysed with a view to the pivotal role of choral music in the overall design of the church and the life of the convent. Finally, an attempt is made to meticulously reconstruct the appearance of Borromini's lost High Altar (ca. 1636–1643), which was destroyed in the mid-19th century. A sense of its appearance can be gleaned from autograph drawings and an engraving, though careful analysis is necessary to track the phases in its construction and filter out ephemeral elements from the permanent design. A coda to the main article details the origins and demise of the neighbouring and now largely demolished church and convent of the Poor Clares at Santa Maria della Purificazione, its artworks, and its design by the little-known Giovanni Paolo Maggi.