

Conception and Construction: Galeazzo Alessi and the Use of Drawings in Sixteenth-Century Architectural Practice

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Any scholar of Italian Renaissance architecture will know that it is extremely rare to come across a full set of drawings for one architectural project. We are much more used to having just a floor plan, an elevation or perhaps a few preparatory sketches to go on. Yet, for the architect Galeazzo Alessi (1512–72) there survives two extraordinary collections of drawings, which fully illustrate two of his most important projects: S. Maria presso S. Celso in Milan (begun 1563), and the Sacro Monte di Varallo (1565–69). There are 112 folios drawings that show his work at S. Maria presso S. Celso, held in a folder (S. 149 Sup. B) in Milan's Biblioteca Ambrosiana.¹ Even more numerous are his drawings for the Sacro Monte di Varallo, 318 in total, which illustrate his overall plan for the site as well as every chapel lining the pilgrimage route, and which are bound together in the so-called *Libro dei Misteri* in Varallo's Biblioteca Civica.² Both these remarkable sets of drawings have attracted some scholarly attention in the past, particularly with regard to questions of attribution, but neither has been discussed from the point of view of what they may reveal about Alessi's use of architectural drawings in his practice. It is the aim of this article, therefore, to examine the role that drawings played specifically in Alessi's work, but also what this may reveal more broadly about the developing use of architectural drawings, and the changing role of the architect, in sixteenth-century Italy. First, however, it is necessary to address the still thorny issue of attribution.

THE QUESTION OF ATTRIBUTION

Today it is generally accepted that Alessi was the architect behind the project to complete the pilgrimage church of S. Maria presso S. Celso, through the addition of new

exterior and interior façades, and an internal choir and fittings. We know from the documents that he was first recorded as being present at the site in April 1563, when he was paid six gold *scudi* for his design of the exterior façade, and his continued involvement in the project is recorded in the church's account books up until mid-1568.³ Included among these accounts are three further payments that relate specifically to his production of drawings. The first of these is a payment made in July 1564 for the purchase of a book for the *capomaestro*, that is Alessi, specifically for him to draw in.⁴ This reference to a book must relate to the drawings today held in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana as single folios, but which were probably originally bound as a least one and, probably two, books of drawings.⁵ The second and third payments were made in 1568, towards the end of Alessi's time at S. Maria presso S. Celso, and appear to be the final two payments made to Alessi for his drawings of the façade, choir, organ and Eucharistic tabernacle: the first payment was for a remaining 295 *lire* out of fifty gold *scudi*, and the second was for a balance of 295 *lire* out of 100 *scudi*, which were owed to Alessi by the church deputies, the administrative body in charge of overseeing the work.⁶ Presumably, therefore the deputies had two ongoing accounts with Alessi, worth fifty and 100 gold *scudi* respectively, for payment for his drawings.

Despite this documentary evidence, scholars have still questioned Alessi's authorship of the 112 drawings held in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. These drawings depict the exterior and interior façades, choir, organ housing and Eucharistic tabernacle, all of which we know were commissioned from Alessi by the deputies. This contention over the drawings' attribution, however, goes back to the 1770s when Francesco Bernardino Ferrari, who at the time owned them, assigned them all to Martino Bassi, the architect who had taken over from Alessi following his departure from Milan in 1569. His account of the matter, written in his index to the collection, is explicit:

Book of drawings relating to the church of S.M presso S. Celso and draft of the façade, all done by Martino Bassi. That these drawings are all by Bassi is clearly indicated by the notes in his hand that are found on them, and the manner, frankness, and the beauty of the drawing, all of his character. I cannot claim with certainty if they are all of his invention, not having secure proof. The commonly held opinion is that the façade was designed by Galeazzo Alessi of Perugia, even though we do not have any proof of that. However, it is agreed that of all the works depicted here, if Bassi was not the inventor, then at least he was the executor, because it is too difficult that a man of that type, very busy, could have wanted for pure pleasure to turn his hand to doing many drawings which are finished with all their measurements and many observations; besides in various places in the drawings there are variations: things that occurred during execution. In many later places, and in his writings, can be found other, better proof, and if we add the fact that there are no other drawings by that author [Alessi], it seems to me that all doubt [about Bassi's authorship] is removed.⁷

In 1940, however, Giovanni Rocco reattributed all of the drawings to Alessi, citing as evidence a document relating to the church's choir, which mentions a drawing of that choir made by Alessi, but since then opinions have been divided.⁸ Augusto Cavallari-Murat argued in 1960 that only the drawings in the folder relating to the façade and choir are by Alessi;⁹ and another, somewhat regressive, view was expressed by Maria

Luisa Gatti Perer in her 1965 assessment of the Ferrari collection, in which she failed to question Ferrari's attribution and simply reattributed all the drawings in the folder to Bassi.¹⁰ Subsequently, Aurora Scotti argued in 1974 that the majority of the drawings in it are by Alessi, but that some of them show the hands of collaborators and the workshop,¹¹ and Nancy Houghton Brown, in her 1982 PhD thesis, accepted that Alessi had a draughtsman for the scale drawings of the details he had designed, which the draughtsman then annotated. She also suggested that Alessi used more than one draughtsman for his work on the church, to explain the differences in handling that she perceived between the earlier and later folios.¹² I will be arguing, however, that all the drawings in the folder were actually produced by Alessi himself.

There is a similar situation as regards the Sacro Monte drawings. Thanks to the work of Stefania Stefani Perrone, scholars now accept that Alessi was the architect behind the project to redevelop the pilgrimage site of the Sacro Monte, but questions are still raised as to whether he executed the 318 drawings in the *Libro dei Misteri*.¹³ In her critical commentary to the *Libro*, Stefani Perrone herself stated that the *Libro* was largely Alessi's work, but she fell short of claiming that all its pages were by him. This was because she identified two hands responsible for the annotations, one writing the majority of them in the same brown ink used for the drawings themselves and the other using a red ink, and she suggested that the red-ink annotations could be the work of an unnamed assistant, who Alessi mentioned in a letter written in 1568 to his Genoese patrons, the Sauli.¹⁴ However, a comparison between the red- and brown-ink handwriting strongly suggests that they are actually from the same hand.¹⁵ What is more, the letter only states that Alessi was hoping to find someone to work for him, if he felt it necessary, and it does not specify the project he wanted assistance with, so it is difficult to link the letter with the preparation of the *Libro*, particularly when it is remembered that he had been working on the Varallo project since 1565, which is three years before the date of the letter. Despite these problems, Scotti has still argued recently that Alessi used assistants to produce the drawings for the *Libro* and she has been trying to establish their identities.¹⁶ Presumably, this is the same group of assistants that Scotti argued were involved in the production of the drawings for S. Maria presso S. Celso. My belief, by contrast, is that the drawings in the *Libro*, like those in the Ambrosiana, are in fact all autograph.

In order to substantiate my hypothesis that the drawings in both of these collections are all in Alessi's hand it is necessary to conduct a thorough analysis, in both collections, of the handwriting on the various folios and of the drawing style. A comparison of the drawings in the Ambrosiana folder and the *Libro dei Misteri* also helps to confirm they are all the work of one man, and that this must be Alessi.

We are fortunate that numerous examples of Alessi's handwriting have survived in letters written by Alessi in relation to the construction of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano in Genoa, which today can be found in the Archivio Durazzo-Giustiniani in Genoa. One of these letters, which is unquestionably autograph, provides a specimen of Alessi's distinctive signature and also includes a small sketch of the plan of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano, the church commissioned by the Sauli family (Fig. 1).¹⁷ The handwriting seen in the annotations to the sketch matches that seen in the letter as a whole,

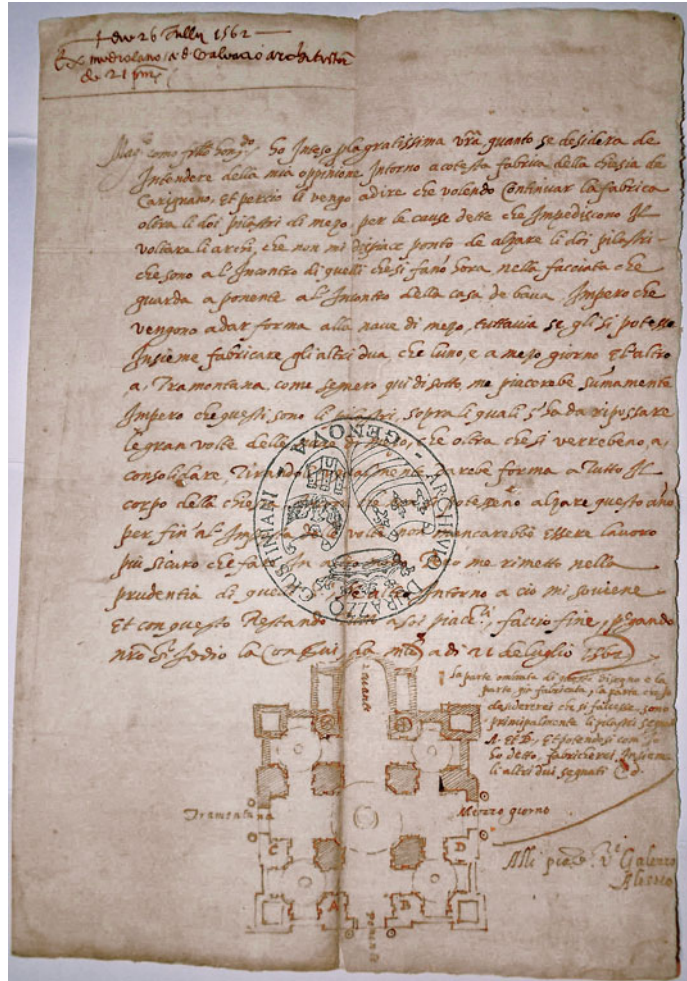


Fig. 1. Galeazzo Alessi, letter from Alessi to the Sauli, 26 July 1562 (Genoa, Archivio Durazzo-Giustiniani; with permission)

which proves that Alessi wrote it all himself, rather than just adding his signature to a letter produced by a notary or other figure, as seems to have been the case with some of the others in the archive. By comparing the handwriting in this letter with that found in the Ambrosiana folder and the *Libro dei Misteri* it becomes possible to demonstrate that Alessi was also responsible for the annotations to these drawings, and so move closer to a positive identification of Alessi as the draughtsman of both corpuses. For this comparison, there are two especially useful sheets from the two collections. With regard to the drawings for S. Maria presso S. Celso in the Ambrosiana folder, all these are annotated, but many of the annotations are brief in nature and just relate to technical information or cross reference other drawings in the collection; so, for the purposes of our comparison, we will focus of Folio 105 (Fig. 2), which shows the location of the planned Eucharistic tabernacle, because it includes a longer note than in the other

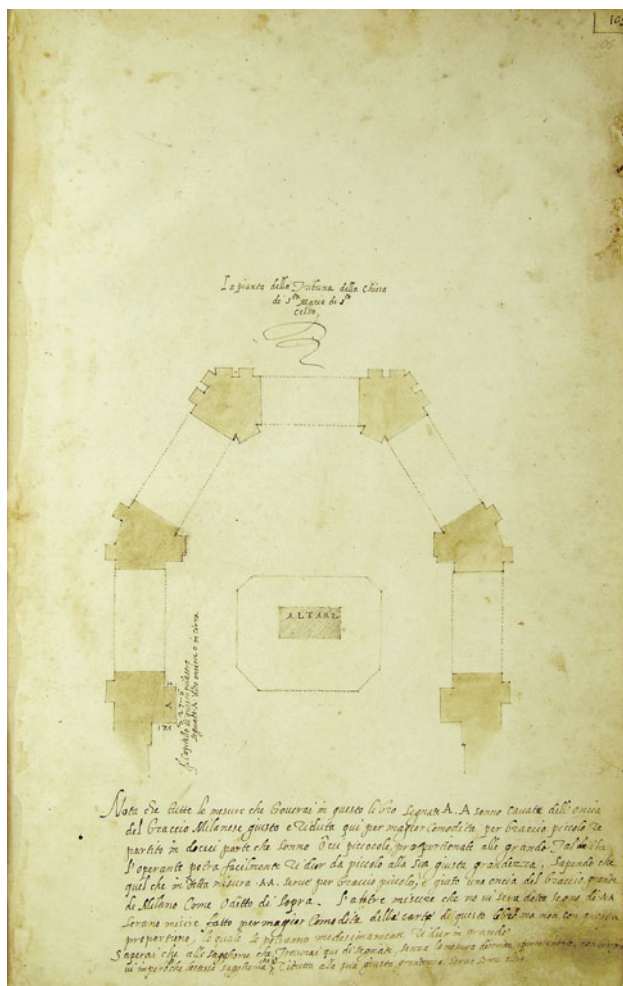


Fig. 2. Galeazzo Alessi, floorplan of the chancel of S. Maria presso S. Celso indicating the location of the high altar (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S.149 Sup. B, fol. 105; with permission)

folios.¹⁸ As regards the *Libro dei Misteri*, we will examine a page from the prologue, which sets out the reasons why the book was produced and which is written in the first person – a reason in itself for suggesting that Alessi must be its author (Fig. 3). The handwriting seen in the prologue is unquestionably the same as that of the annotations to the *Libro*'s 318 folios of drawings.

When these three documents are examined side-by-side, it is clear that there are some differences in the handwriting's general appearance. The writer of the Genoese letter – i.e. Alessi – was much more generous than the writers of the other two documents in the amount of spacing he allowed between individual letters and individual words, and the letters are in general much larger. In addition, the handwriting in the letter tends to curve more and slant more to the right. These differences, however can be explained

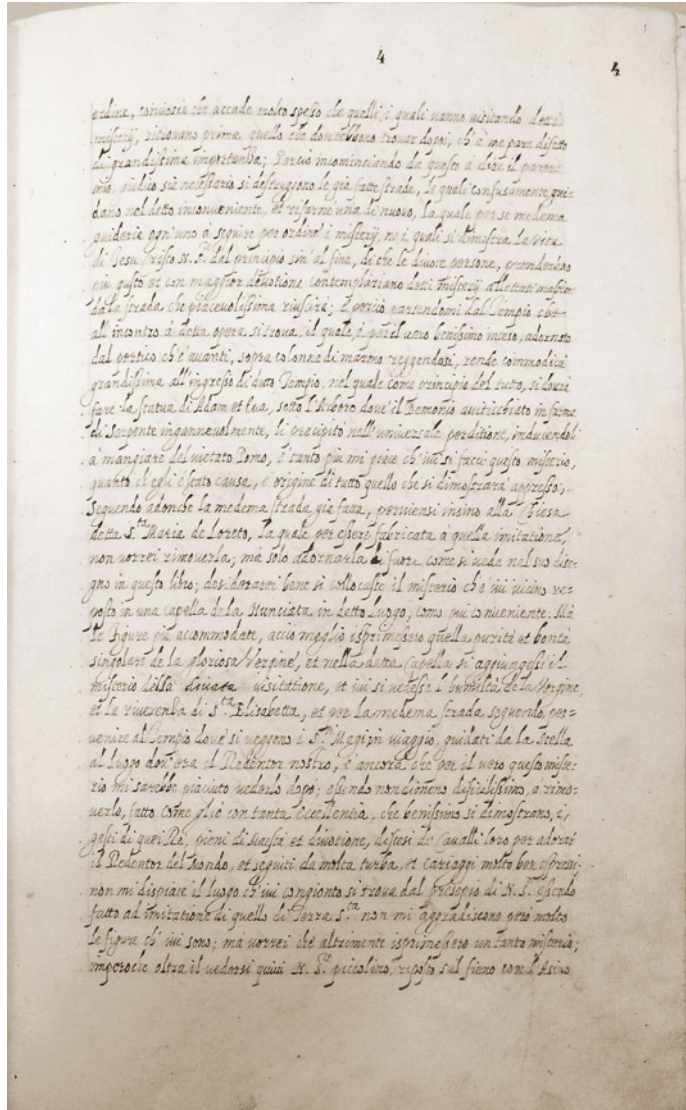


Fig. 3. Galeazzo Alessi, prologue to the Libro dei Misteri (Varallo, Biblioteca Civica, Libro dei Misteri, fol. 4; with permission)

by the letter's less formal nature, which did not require script of such care as that in the other two documents, which, as I will be arguing, belong to 'best versions' of compendia produced for presentation to the patron. Alessi's letter is also relatively short, written on a large piece of paper which gave him plenty of room to spread his writing out. This is in contrast both to the tabernacle drawing, where the draftsman needed to squash in his writing beneath the floor plan of the chancel, and to the Libro prologue, where the author had to fit his lengthy text between the narrow lines that are faintly scored into all the individual pages. The fact that the writing seen in the tabernacle drawing and

the *Libro* prologue was for a 'best version' and had to be fitted into a restricted amount of space, imposed restraints on the sizes of the letters and the amount of spacing between them, and it also encouraged a more perpendicular style.

When the formation of the individual letters is compared, however, it becomes very clear that the three documents are all in the same hand and that this is Alessi's. Alessi, for example, forms the letter 'h' in a very distinctive way, in that he does not take the stem of the letter down to the baseline, but finishes it instead some way above it, at the point of the horizontal bar, while the stem of the letter curves to the right, and this is especially evident in the word *che* that is found throughout all three documents.¹⁹ Also characteristic of Alessi's hand is his letter 'z', formed without a tail that descends below the baseline as is more usual for cursive text, and which can be seen again and again in his signature ('Galeazzo Alessio'), but also in the tabernacle drawing. In fact, when the formation of the letters 'i', 'd', 'l' and 'm', and almost every other letter of the alphabet, is analysed and compared across all three documents, it becomes abundantly clear that all three are in Alessi's hand. There can, admittedly be some occasional discrepancies, such as in the letter 'f', but in this case we find that Alessi had at least three different ways of forming that letter, all of which can appear within the same document. The inescapable conclusion to be drawn from all this, therefore, is that it is clear from viewing the three documents side-by-side that they are all in Alessi's hand, and that this distinctive hand is also identical to that seen in the annotations to all the other drawings in the Ambrosiana folder and the *Libro dei Misteri*.

As for the actual drawings, these can be analysed, in respect not only to their style of draughtsmanship but also to physical characteristics such as the types of ink and paper used, in order to show that it was Alessi who was responsible for all of these as well. All the drawings in the Ambrosiana folder are executed in the same brown ink on sheets of the same size (420 × 280 mm).²⁰ From watermarks that are visible we can see that the drawings were executed on two different types of paper. The watermark that appears most often in the Ambrosiana sheets is one of a gloved hand with a flower with six petals above the hand's middle finger, and this has been dated, on the basis of Briquet's compendium of watermarks, to the late 1560s.²¹ This same watermark is found on drawings held in the Varallo State Archive (*Archivio di Stato*), which are working drawings relating to those in the *Libro dei Misteri*, many of which are in all likelihood the work of Alessi too.²² Many of the State Archive drawings also correspond to those in the Ambrosiana folder in size, measuring between 430 and 450 mm in height and between 265 to 290 mm in width, which indicates that the Milan and Varallo drawings were all made on paper of the same type. The second watermark, which is found on Folios 54–69 of the Ambrosiana folder, is of a sun with a human face encircled by rays, which, again according to Briquet, dates from the 1560s to around 1580 and is associated with Vicenza, Reggio Emilia and Milan,²³ and this second watermark is also found throughout the *Libro dei Misteri*. The concurrence of these two watermarks and the close similarities in the size of the sheets indicates, therefore, that the two sets of drawings were produced by the same person during the 1560s using paper available in the Milan area.

Turning now to drawing style, it is very evident that in both sets this is very similar. The elevational representations in the Ambrosiana folder are unvaryingly drawn with

the light falling from left to right across the page, and a similarly consistent direction of light is seen in the drawings in the *Libro dei Misteri*. Although such lighting is a common convention in architectural drawings of this period, the consistency of the technique across both sets of drawings still adds weight to the argument that the drawings in both sets are the work of the same individual. Moreover, the shadows that are cast by this light are invariably created either by hatching (tightly packed horizontal lines in the case of vertical sections such as through a column shaft, or vertical lines for the shadows beneath a horizontal feature such as a cornice), or else by ink wash. The use of an ink wash can also be seen in the folios of the *Libro* and is, therefore, consistent with Alessi's technique, and so is not a reason to doubt his authorship of some of the drawings, as has been asserted by Scotti.²⁴

Another very characteristic aspect of Alessi's drawing style is to be seen in his depiction of figurative elements, such as the statues to be carved by sculptors that populate the niches of his façades, and architectural details such as caryatids and leonine heads, which are found on the drawings for the façade and choir of S. Maria presso S. Celso (Figs 4 and 5) as well as the particularly lively figure of an imagined organist included on a section drawing through the façade illustrating the relationship between exterior and interior (Fig. 6). This figure plays the organ with great gusto and well illustrates the playfulness that often characterises Alessi's work, as do the snarling faces of the lions that support the pediment of the exterior façade (see Fig. 17, later). Yet the technique used to capture such small-scale figures, and show the forms of their bodies, their fabric drapes and gesturing arms, is often one of remarkable economy involving only a few minimal lines, while facial features are often captured simply by two dots for the eyes and a slight shadow to indicate the nose and mouth. The same technique is to be seen in the sketches of the *tableaux vivants* scenes inside the Sacro Monte chapels in the *Libro dei Misteri* (Fig. 7).²⁵

When it came to depicting the facial features of figures on a slightly larger scale, Alessi did something that seems to be peculiar to him: he created the eye using a form not dissimilar to today's '@' symbol, where the 'a' in the middle forms the eye, and the curve around the edge creates the eyebrow and sometimes also defines the length of the nose. This '@' feature, which is very distinctive and helps to confirm his authorship of the drawings both in the Ambrosiana folder and the *Libro dei Misteri*, is restricted to figures of a certain size, where a small dot will not suffice and where greater detail is not possible. It is seen, however, in many of Alessi's accepted drawings, such as one for a Eucharistic tabernacle in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, where it is used for the cherub supporting the figure of the crucified Christ (Fig. 8). It is also seen in drawings for S. Maria presso S. Celso, in Folio 2 (for the female masks in the frieze below the façade's main pediment), Folio 3 (for the heads of the caryatids of the first level), as well as Folios 9 and 11 (Figs 4, 9 and 10). The same eyes again can be seen in a drawing of a fountain for the Sacro Monte di Varallo illustrated on the *Libro dei Misteri's* Folio 138 (Fig. 11).

Other typical features of Alessi's drawing style are recognisable in figurative elements represented on a much larger scale and therefore in much greater detail, such as the series of female heads on drawings for the interior façade and choir of S. Maria presso S. Celso. These drawings reveal a very sophisticated understanding of how to model

faces in light and shade so as to appear truly three-dimensional, as well as a remarkable ability to give expressive form to faces as they scowl at us from the sheet (Fig. 12). Also characteristic of Alessi's style is the way of representing non-architectural details such as flames, as seen for example in Folio 2, which shows the exterior façade, and Folio 91 which shows the choir's back wall (Figs 4 and 13). With their lively flickering, these flames, which are depicted with a few simple sinuous strokes, are very similar to those in drawings from the *Libro dei Misteri*, for example Folio 81 which depicts the screen for the chapel that houses the scene of the 'Son of the Widow' (Fig. 14). It thus appears that the drawings in the two collections have such a consistency of draughtsmanship that they must be considered to be the work of one hand, and that this consistency, when considered in conjunction with the handwriting and the similar use of ink and paper shows conclusively that they are the work of Alessi.

ARCHITECT AS DRAUGHTSMAN AND THE USE OF DRAWINGS AS 'REMOTE CONTROL'

Having therefore established that all of the folios in the Ambrosiana folder and the *Libro dei Misteri* are autograph drawings by Alessi, we can now turn to a detailed examination of the two collections. By examining the way in which the collections of drawings are arranged, the way Alessi employed an alphanumerical system to link one drawing to another, and the type of drawings deployed by Alessi (i.e. plan, elevation and section), it is possible reach conclusions about how Alessi used such architectural drawings in his practice. What is more, by looking at the two collections in relation to other drawings Alessi produced earlier in his career, it will be possible to outline the way in which drawings took on an increasingly important role in his architectural practice, as a means of managing remotely several architectural sites at the same time. This change will be linked to the development of the role of the architect more generally in this period and the growing separation between masons, who were involved in the actual construction, and architects themselves, who were responsible for the conception of the design.

Let us start then with an examination of the contents of the Ambrosiana folder which, as will now be seen, follows an orderly sequence. The pagination of each folio is indicated at the top right of each page, but in some cases the original page number has been crossed out and changed. The crossing out is in Alessi's hand and seems to reflect instances where changes have been made to the project and new drawings added. The collection begins with Folio 1, a drawing of the floor plan for the church. Since Alessi had been brought in to complete S. Maria presso S. Celso rather than rebuild the church, the floor plan was included at the start in order to provide context for the façades, choir and tabernacle that Alessi designed for the church and which are illustrated in detail in the drawings that follow. Next come drawings of the exterior and interior façades (Folios 2 and 3), and a series of cross section drawings taken through the façade at various different points (Folios 4–6), which show how the exterior and interior façades correspond with each other (Figs 4, 6 and 9). We then have drawings of the details of the exterior and interior façades, including of the organ housing that was to be inserted into the interior elevation. This is followed by twenty drawings relating to the choir, including two drawings that show the choir stalls and choir wall in their entirety



Fig. 4. Galeazzo Alessi, exterior façade of S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 2; with permission)

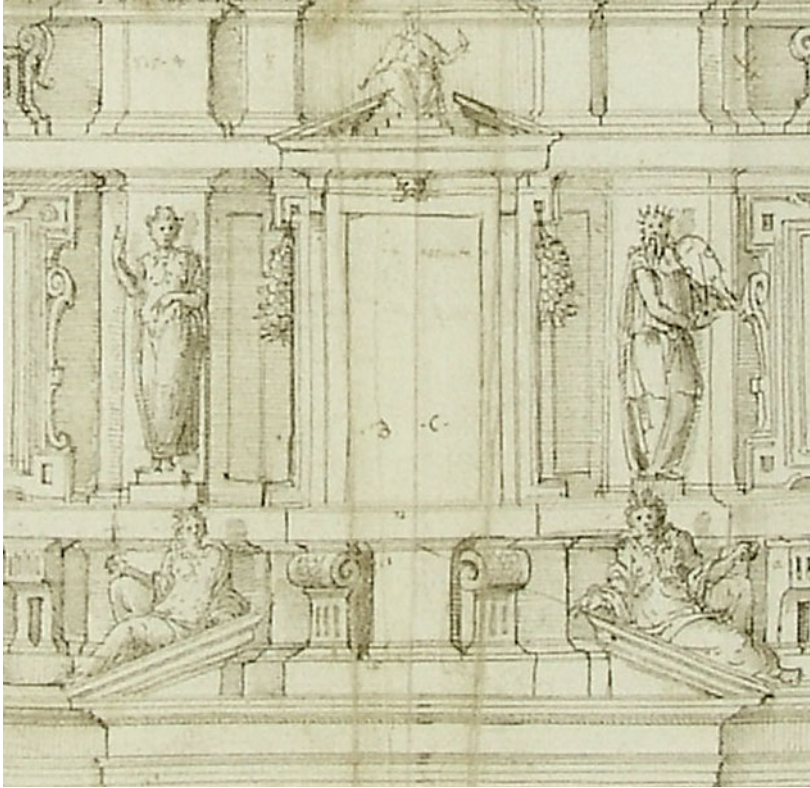


Fig. 5. Galeazzo Alessi, *Detail of the exterior façade of S. Maria presso S. Celso* (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 2; with permission)

and a series of drawings detailing the component parts that make the stalls and wall (Fig. 13). Finally, the last group of drawings in the Ambrosiana folder features the Eucharistic Tabernacle (Figs 2 and 19, later).

Amongst the drawings in the Ambrosiana folder, four stand out as being of key importance: Folios 2, 3, 85 and 91. These folios present overall schemes for an architectural element (exterior façade, interior façade, choir stalls and choir wall, respectively) to which subsequent drawings are related by way of an alphanumeric referencing system (Figs 4, 9 and 13). The use of such a referencing system was not unique to Alessi and had been used most notably by Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola in his *Regola delli cinque ordini d'architettura*, published in 1562, just a year before Alessi began work at S. Maria presso S. Celso. The use of an alphanumeric referencing system can also be found in a drawing of the tomb and balustrade for the Capella Ricci in S. Pietro in Montorio in Rome, which has been linked to Daniele da Volterra and is found today in the Royal Library at Windsor.²⁶

Folio 2 is the largest drawing in the collection, as extra paper has been added to the top and the right-hand side. The drawing is labelled down the right-hand side with

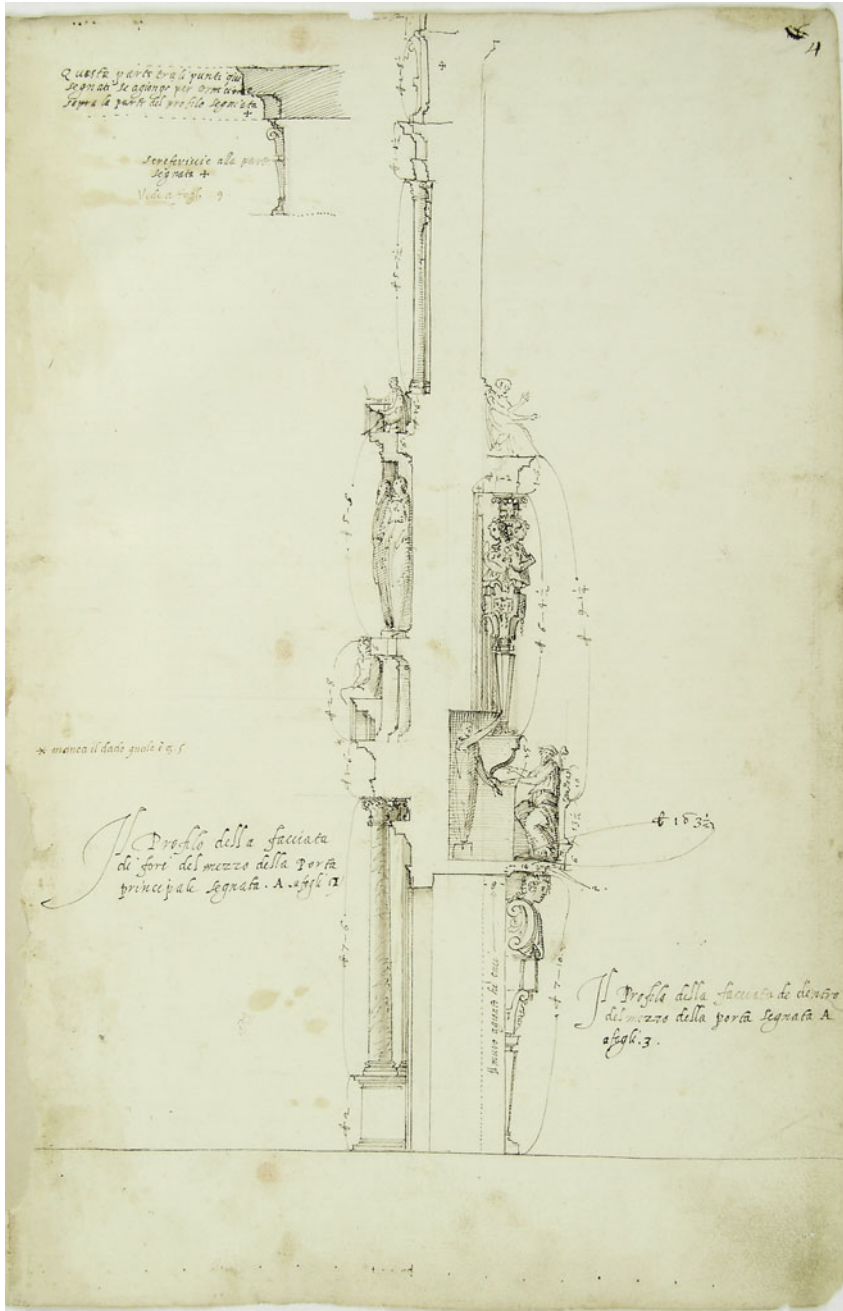


Fig. 6. Galeazzo Alessi, cross-section through the centre of the exterior and interior façades of S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 4; with permission)



Fig. 7. Galeazzo Alessi, interior of chapel dedicated to the Baptism of Christ (Varallo, Biblioteca Civica, Libro dei Misteri, fol. 40; with permission)



Fig. 8. Galeazzo Alessi, design of 1569 for a tabernacle surmounted by Christ on the Cross and praying figures (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org)

references to the three levels and what Alessi calls the 'parapet' zones, which run between each level, plus the 'frieze', which we might more readily identify as a Leonine order, below the crowning pediment. Many architectural elements are given a letter or letters, for example the large frame in the second level above the central entrance is labelled 'B.C.' (although this coupling remains unexplained). As mentioned, this use of letters to identify various architectural elements can be found in the drawings of other sixteenth-century architects, but in this example we can see just how important they were. Each of the letters refers to a later drawing in the collection, which shows the same feature, but in greater detail and sometimes with modifications, so Folio 2 was the key for anyone trying to understand the relationships between all the various parts. There are also notes in Alessi's hand on this sheet, which stipulate the subjects of the sculptural works that were to be housed within the architectural frames.

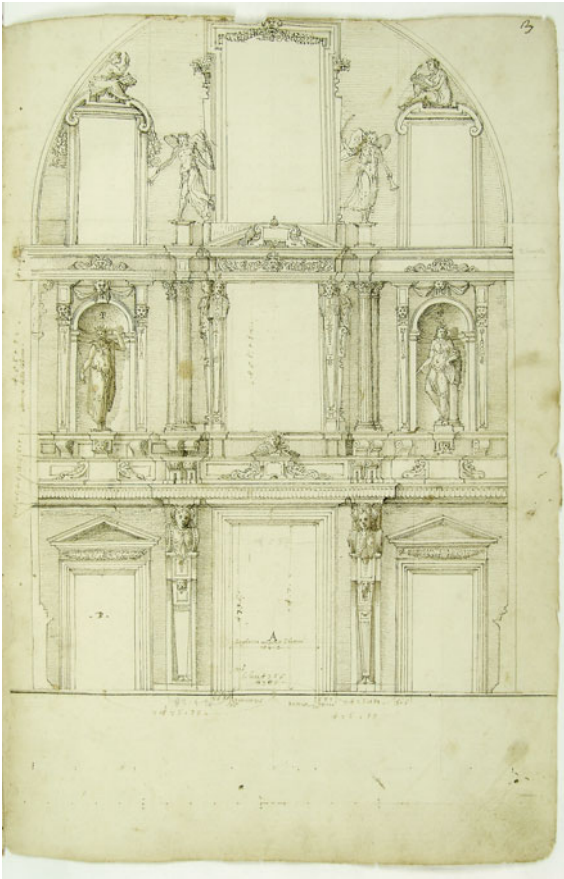


Fig. 9. Galeazzo Alessi, interior façade of S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol.3; with permission)

This system of labelling the architectural features with letters, sometimes in combination with additional notes referring to related drawings, enables the reader to find what they are looking for.

Thus, following Folio 2, there are then fifty-one other drawings depicting the various individual architectural elements that make up the external façade. Many of these drawings represent the principal architectural elements, for example the sculptural frame with its pediment in Folio 7 which shows the feature on Folio 2 marked as 'B.C.', and this is then followed, in Folio 8, by a detail of its supporting 'parapet', to use Alessi's phrase (Figs 15 and 16). Alessi also produced supplementary drawings that recorded any changes made to particular elements. For example, Folio 7 includes a note, in Alessi's hand, that this drawing is no longer needed because it has been changed, and reference is made to Folio 11. Folio 11 does indeed show the same frame 'B.C.', but now with changes (Fig. 10). For example, the garlands that had previously hung down the side of the frame have been removed and the brackets previously supporting them have been made more ornate.

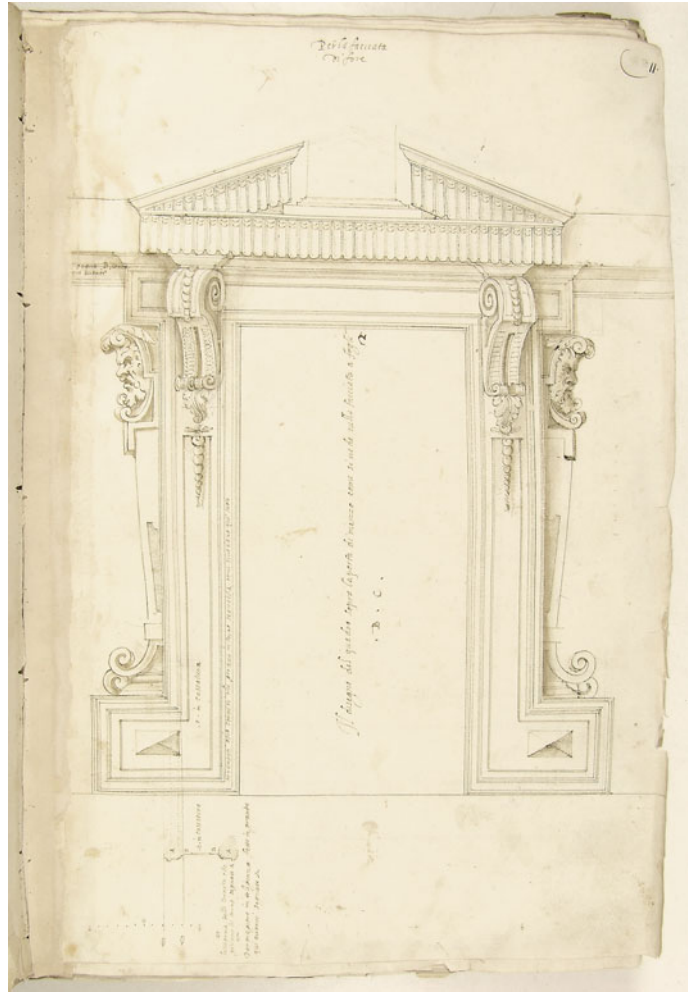


Fig. 10. Galeazzo Alessi, frame marked B.C. for exterior façade of S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 11; with permission)

Folio 11 also includes a small drawing of the profile for the cornice of this window frame, which is marked A, and is accompanied with a note indicating that it is also shown in an enlarged drawing later on.²⁷ Also included in the collection are full-size drawings showing the profiles of features such as entablatures and the mouldings for frames and, in one remarkable case, the profile of the moulding that supports the snarling jaws of the leonine order found under the main pediment (Fig. 17). These life-sized drawings could then be recreated as templates in paper or wood for translation into stone.²⁸

We also know from Alessi's notes that these drawings were to be used in conjunction with wooden models. On Folio 29, which depicts a niche marked as 'F' on Folio 2, the note explains that the niche has been altered and that a model of the façade should be



Fig. 11. Galeazzo Alessi, drawing showing the fountain of the Probativ Pool (Varallo, Biblioteca Civica, Libro dei Misteri, fol. 138; with permission)

consulted instead.²⁹ Alessi had produced a model of the whole façade when he first received the commission in 1563, but he also made supplementary models of parts of it as construction progressed. What we see from drawings such as Folio 29, therefore, is that Alessi's design evolved over time and that smaller models were produced to offer up-to-date representations of particular parts of the façade that included any changes to the original model. The drawing annotations also reveal that Alessi updated his drawings so as to track the church's evolving design. For example, Folio 7 includes two annotations, the first crossed out but still legible, informing the reader that the drawing is of the frame above the central door as shown in Folio 2 (that is, frame 'B.C.'), and the second that replaced it explaining that this drawing is no longer of use since the frame has been changed in the way now shown on Folio 11



Fig. 12. Galeazzo Alessi, female head for a cartouche in the choir of S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 95; with permission)

(Fig. 15).³⁰ Folio 11 does indeed show a revised version of frame 'B.C.', which is closer to the one on the actual building, indicating that it must be the updated drawing that Alessi was referring to (Figs 10 and 18).

The drawings of the details of the exterior façade are followed by drawings of the individual features that make up the interior façade, which are similarly linked to the master drawing in Folio 3 again through an alphanumeric system (Fig. 9). However there are far fewer drawings for the interior façade than there are for the exterior; just twenty-one in comparison to the sixty-one drawings that survive for the exterior. Those drawings that are included illustrate elements from the inner façade's first and second levels, but there are none for its third level.³¹ Alessi must have produced drawings illustrating the remaining parts of the inner façade, but what has happened to them

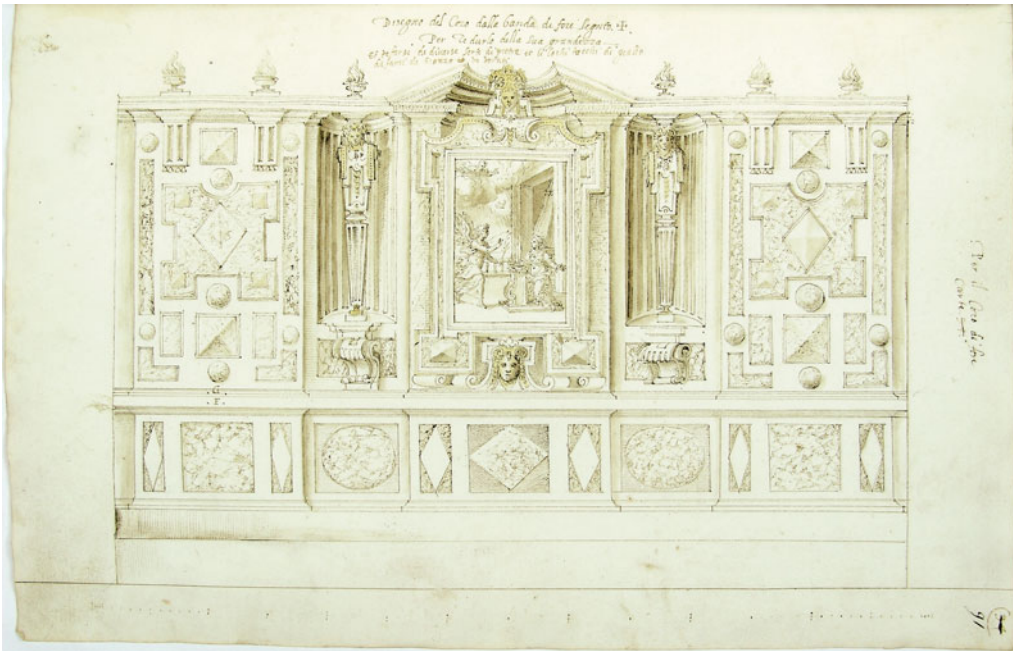


Fig. 13. Galeazzo Alessi, choir wall for S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 91; with permission)

is hard to say. They may have been destroyed or bound in a separate book that has gone missing, but they certainly were not part of Ferrari's collection. The Ambrosiana folder also contains sets of drawings for the choir stalls and choir wall, which follow the same system of a master drawing followed by individual architectural features again identified alphanumerically. The last set of drawings in the collection is for the Eucharistic tabernacle, and these drawings are rather different to those we have seen previously. Rather than showing a master scheme with an associated set of drawings of details, Alessi instead produced five drawings of the tabernacle's different elevations, both interior and exterior, as well as two floor plans and a floor plan of the choir in which the tabernacle was to be situated (Figs 2 and 19).

The drawings in the *Libro dei Misteri* are arranged in a similarly logical manner. The book covers each of the chapels that were to line Alessi's new pilgrimage route around the hilltop above Varallo, both the new chapels designed by Alessi himself and the pre-existing structures relating to previous incarnations of the site. Each chapel is illustrated in turn, following the order in which they were to be encountered on the *Sacro Monte*, taking the reader through Alessi's new monumental entrance to his chapel of Adam and Eve, and then past the series of chapels that snake up the hillside relating to the early life of Christ, and thereafter proceeding through the *Porta Aurea* to the summit of the *Monte* itself with its chapels devoted to the Passion of Christ, and to a third and final area dotted with chapels concerning the judgement of man – the Final

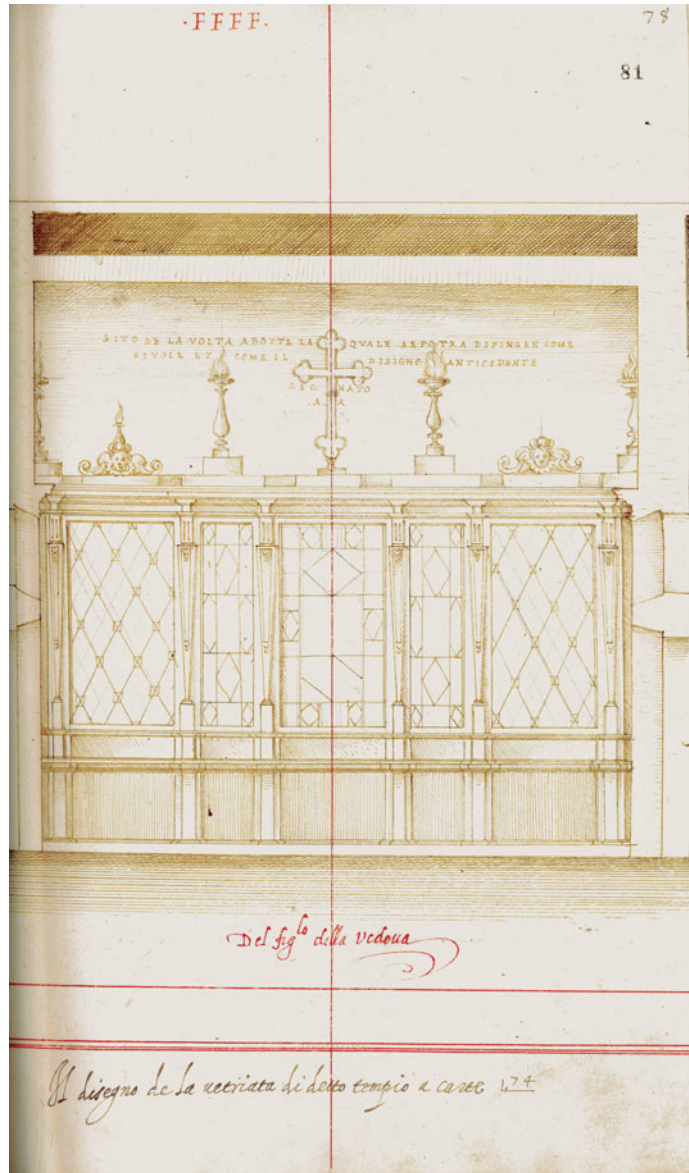


Fig. 14. Galeazzo Alessi, screen for the chapel of the Son of the Widow (Varallo, Biblioteca Civica, Libro dei Misteri, fol. 81; with permission)

Judgement, Purgatory and Hell.³² Each chapel is represented by its own set of drawings, which always include a floor plan, exterior elevation, interior elevation, and view of the *tableau vivant* scene that depicts the episode after which the chapel is named.³³ Other folios can show details such as the entrance, the vitrine housing the sculpted scene, or the lantern capping the chapel, as well as profiles of mouldings for doorframes and entablatures, drawn almost at full size. These drawings were often associated with one

another through an alphanumerical system, just like that used at S. Maria presso S. Celso.

At the start of each group of drawings there is, on the left-hand page, a paragraph in Alessi's distinctive hand, describing the mystery or subject depicted in a chapel, and imparting pertinent information about the chapel's form and the materials to be used. For example:

The floor plan which you can see opposite is for the building of the temple in which the paralytic is lowered to the floor in order to seek grace from Our Lord Jesus Christ for his sanctity. This temple will have cornices under the roof and cornices on the interior which support the vault; the door is [to be done] in marble but the rest can be done in pretend [marble] because it is not necessary.³⁴

The description is then followed on the opposite page by the floor plan, normally accompanied by a scale bar, drawn in red ink and measured in Milanese *braccia*, together with the title of the chapel's mystery or subject, likewise written in red ink. Further labels appear on the drawings, in the same brown ink as the drawings themselves, which identify their subjects, for example 'the profile of the cornice of the previous temple', and give some limited technical information such as 'the ornaments must always match the moulding [of the cornice] in the most correct way'.³⁵ A comparison between the red- and brown-ink handwriting reveals that it is in the same hand and that there is, therefore, no reason to doubt, as Stefani Perrone did, Alessi's authorship of some of the *Libro* drawings.³⁶ Each page is divided by two ruled lines in red ink, one running vertically down the middle of the page, and the other crossing it horizontally towards the bottom.

Despite her doubts over Alessi's authorship of every drawing in the *Libro*, Stefani Perrone still recognised that there are numerous similarities between the Varallo drawings and those Alessi produced for S. Maria presso S. Celso.³⁷ Apart from the close analogies in handwriting and drawing style, outlined above, she drew attention to the close resemblance of two particular folios as evidence of Alessi's involvement in both projects. These are Folio 111 in the Ambrosiana folder, which shows his tabernacle for S. Maria presso S. Celso, and Folio 170 in the *Libro*, which depicts the exterior of the Temple of the Oration (Figs 19 and 20). As she recognised, one design is clearly derived from the other and, although there are some differences between them, for example in the arrangement of openings and in the pediment which in the tabernacle drawing rises above and behind the half dome, they are compositionally almost identical in most other respects. Admittedly the method of indicating shadow is different, in that hatching is used for the Temple of the Oration and ink wash is employed for the tabernacle, but this is not a reason to doubt Alessi's authorship of either because, as was discussed above, Alessi regularly used both techniques for shadows; but the fact that the shadow falls in the same place in both drawings, and with the same levels of light and shade, indicates that they are the work of the same person. A comparison of the way in which the Corinthian capitals have been drawn, with their distinctive narrow volutes and curly-edged acanthus leaves, further indicates Alessi's authorship of both.

An interesting difference between the two sets of drawings, however, is that Alessi placed a greater emphasis in the Sacro Monte drawings on the combination of plan

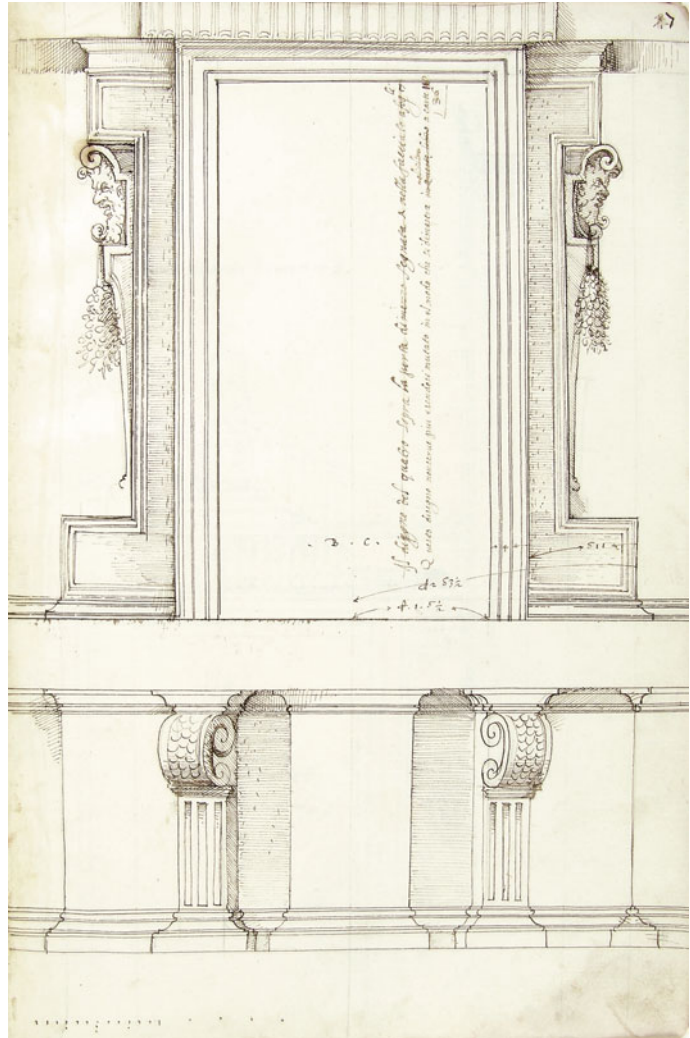


Fig. 15. Galeazzo Alessi, frame marked B.C. for the exterior façade of S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 7; with permission)

and elevational drawings – façades and sections – in order, evidently, to capture the essential characteristics of the various chapels. This practice is different for the S. Maria presso S. Celso drawings, which include only one floor plan of the church on Folio 1 at the front of the folder. However, this reflects the fact that Alessi was only completing the Milanese church and was not responsible for the entire building and so did not need to produce many plans. Earlier architects had of course made use of plans, elevations and section drawings, a practice seen in the early sixteenth-century Codex Melon (also known as the Menicantonio Sketchbook held in The Morgan Library and Museum, New York), and represented too in the drawings by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger in the Uffizi, which attest to his frequent use of all three drawing types.³⁸



Fig. 16. Galeazzo Alessi, frame marked B.C. with its pediment for the exterior façade of S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 8; with permission)

What is different about the Sacro Monte drawings, however, is Alessi's consistent and repeated use of all three types, each given its own dedicated page, for every single new chapel he designed for the site.³⁹ This new reliance upon the plan, elevation and section to convey the essentials of a design, also seen in Andrea Palladio's *Quattro libri dell' architettura*, published in 1570 and so some five years after Alessi started work on the Sacro Monte, thus heralds a more general change in practice during the second half of the sixteenth century.

In creating these two books of drawings, Alessi intended to illustrate every aspect of his two schemes, but the system he adopted for S. Maria presso S. Celso, with its master



Fig. 17. Galeazzo Alessi, life-size drawing of the moulding of the leonine order for the exterior façade of S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 51; with permission)

drawings and drawings of all the individual architectural elements and the details, also appears to have resulted from his experience of concurrently constructing S. Maria Assunta di Carignano in Genoa. Alessi had begun work on this church in 1549, but eight years later, before the project had even risen above the level of the floor, he had been summoned to Milan to design the Palazzo Marino there. Once in Milan, he found himself in high demand, working on a range of projects including the church of S. Maria presso S. Celso and the Sacro Monte di Varallo, just over 100 km northwest the city, as well as other Milanese schemes such as the church of S. Barnaba. Despite frequent entreaties from his Sauli patrons to return to Genoa so as to supervise the completion of their church, Alessi stayed in Milan, returning only sporadically to Genoa to



Fig. 18. Milan, S. Maria presso S. Celso: detail of exterior façade

oversee the work.⁴⁰ Thus, he was markedly absent from the building site of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano.

It is clear from various letters that Alessi had not left behind a coherent collection of drawings depicting every aspect of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano, like those he would later produce for S. Maria presso S. Celso and the Sacro Monte. By 1567, while he was in Milan, construction at S. Maria Assunta di Carignano had reached its most difficult and complicated stage: the raising of the main central dome. Letters written during this time between Alessi, his Sauli patrons and the master builder, Angelo Doggio, reveal a range of problems being encountered in trying to erect the dome without the direct supervision of the architect. In 1567, Andrea Rebecco, the Sauli's notary, wrote a list of desiderata and questions concerning this matter which, on behalf of Doggio, were needed to be put to Alessi.⁴¹ These included a request to have a model with measurements for the entablature of the drum, and inquiries about the measurements of the width of the drum's interior and exterior, and about how much light the windows should let into the dome. It appears, therefore, that Doggio was missing fundamental information, such as a comprehensive corpus of drawings detailing every aspect of the church's construction, and that this was precluding him from going ahead with the work; and that Alessi had, therefore, to provide additional information, in the form of written instructions, drawings and perhaps a model, so that the work could recommence.

In addition to Rebecco's list, there are two drawings in the Sauli archive that seem to address some of the queries that Doggio raised.⁴² One of these depicts a section of the drum and shows the entablature that was being built at the time, which according to Alessi's note on the drawing, was to be 3 *palmi* high so as to be level with the top of

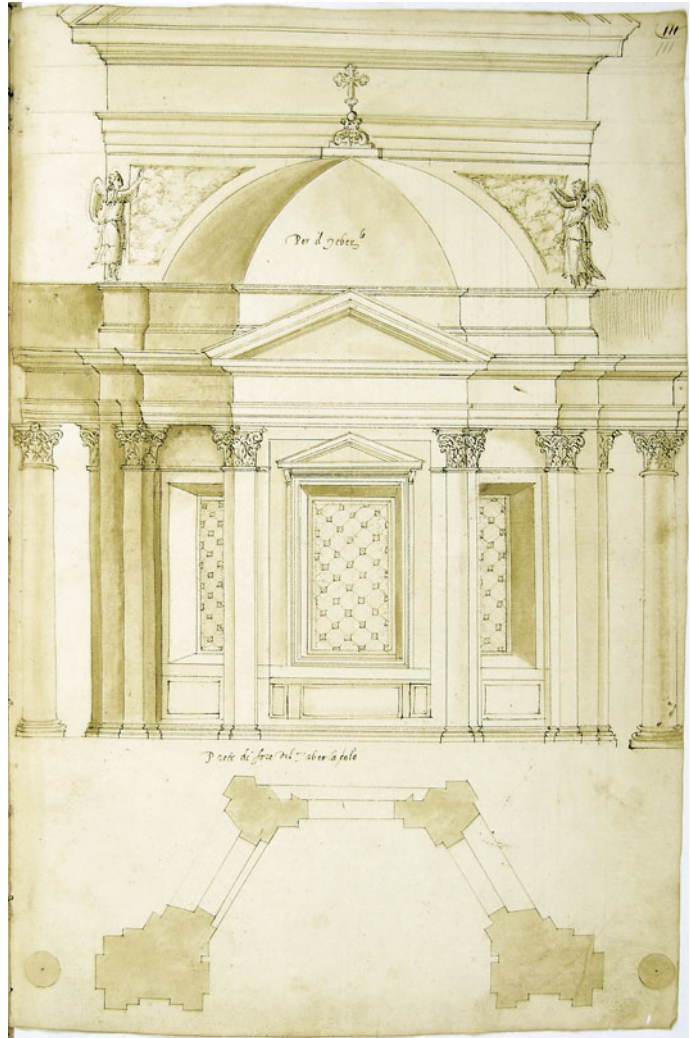


Fig. 19. Galeazzo Alessi, rear elevation of the Eucharistic tabernacle for S. Maria presso S. Celso (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B, fol. 111; with permission)

the roof (Fig. 21). This drawing may, therefore, have been supplemented by the requested model of the entablature, which would have shown its precise form. Alessi also labelled the entablature with a cross, which presumably refers to an additional drawing (now lost) showing the entablature in greater detail, rather in the manner of the alphanumeric system he would use for S. Maria presso S. Celso and the Sacro Monte. The second drawing shows the different skins of the drum (Fig. 22) and its articulation, which on the inside of the drum is in the form of paired pilasters alternating with rectangular windows and, on the outside is in the form of a series of Serliana openings. In respect to both the interior and exterior articulation of the drum, he provided measurements for the width of the windows or openings and, on the verso of the sheet,

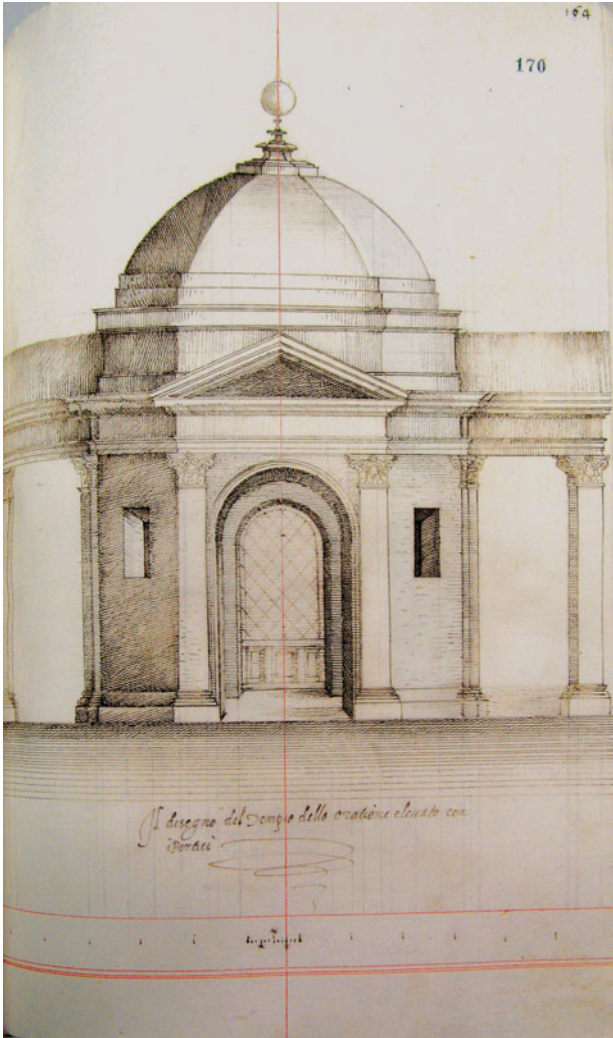


Fig. 20. Galeazzo Alessi, exterior elevation of the Temple of the Oration (Varallo, Biblioteca Civica, Libro dei Misteri, fol. 170; with permission)

he also gave measurements for the width of the skins of the drum specifying 4 *palmi* for each and indicating how the openings on the interior and exterior were to be aligned. These measurements, together with the instructions concerning the alignment of the windows, would seem, therefore, to answer Doggio's questions about the width of the interior and exterior walls of the drum and about the amount of light to enter the dome through the interior windows and exterior arches. This system, however, of sending supplementary drawings to enable the builders to continue construction in Alessi's absence was not foolproof, as mistakes could be made in interpreting his drawings. For example, on 25 August 1567 Alessi wrote to Doggio from Perugia about a misunderstanding of the measurements he had given in a drawing for the main dome.⁴³ It

seems from this that Doggio had taken a crucial measurement from in front of the drum's exterior arches rather than from behind them, and, as a consequence, had found it to be longer than the twelve *palmi* given by Alessi on the original drawing.

Alessi certainly produced far more drawings for S. Maria di Carignano than the few that happen to survive today, but, as the letters reveal, he had not yet developed, at this stage in his career, his eventual system of producing comprehensive books of drawings to illustrate every element of a building, like those surviving for S. Maria presso S. Celso or the Sacro Monte.⁴⁴ It may well be the case, therefore, that having learned the hard way at S. Maria Assunta di Carignano, he devised his comprehensive system, specifically so that he could be absent from site. These books of drawings thus gave Alessi the capability of working simultaneously on more than one project, and also to take on work in geographically remote locations, during what was his most prolific period as an architect. It was Wolfgang Lotz who in 1975 first termed the phrase 'remote control' to describe Alessi's ability to control the work proceeding at S. Maria Assunta through the correspondence sent between him and his patrons and master builders.⁴⁵ This idea was then taken up by Paolo Belardi, who concluded that this practice was something that Alessi had learned from Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, under whose direction Alessi had worked in the early 1540s at the Rocca Paolina, Perugia, and that Sangallo had learned from Raphael at St Peter's. It was a system that relied on highly skilled assistants who could interpret the drawings and proceed with construction in the architect's absence, but which also allowed the architects to work on several projects at the same time.⁴⁶

Whilst we know that Alessi used his drawings to control his projects from a distance, nothing has been established previously on how exactly his books of drawings were actually used in practice. The pristine condition of both sets points to the fact that they cannot have been used on site for construction purposes, for if that were the case they would show tell-tell signs of wear and tear or not survive at all. Yet their scale bars, and the annotations that give technical information about measurements and choices of materials, suggest that they would have been useful during construction. How then were these drawings used?

A clue can be found in the prologue to the *Libro dei Misteri* where Alessi outlines some of his reasons for producing the volume:

And having been sought out by your lord to describe and draw all the buildings that are to be built on the Monte di Varallo, of many and diverse forms which are fitting and worthy, and the various mysteries which are to be sculpted and painted in order to express the marvellous gestures of the life, passion and death of our Saviour [...] I have therefore been inspired to show in this book all the drawings of the buildings which seem to me to be able to be comfortably understood at the summit of this Mount [...] and because for me it is possible that in the future, with the passing of many years, it must be put into work by different people, it is therefore necessary that I in particular narrate these drawings, so that those who come to bring the work to perfection will be well instructed as to what I desire, so that what they do conforms to the beautiful concept which the first founders had for this work.⁴⁷

Alessi, therefore, had clearly recognised the magnitude of the task in hand, which involved the construction or adaptation of some forty-three chapels, and he understood

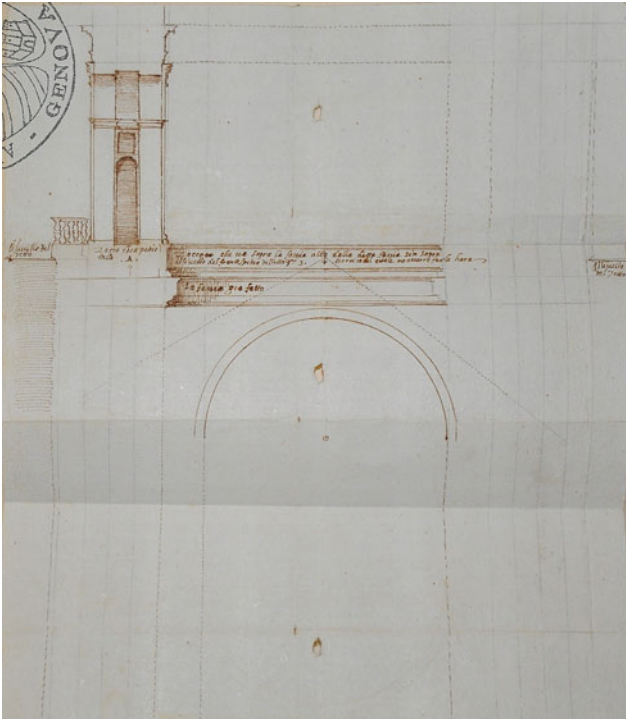


Fig. 21. Galeazzo Alessi, drawing of the drum of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano in Genoa (Genoa, Archivio Durazzo-Giustiniani; with permission)

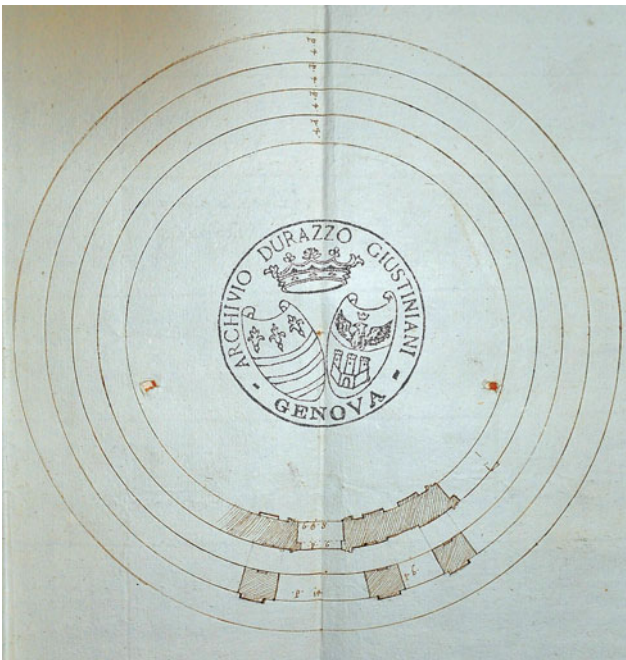


Fig. 22. Galeazzo Alessi, drawing of the skins of the drum of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano in Genoa (Genoa, Archivio Durazzo-Giustiniani; with permission)

that his project would be constructed by many different people over many years. With his drawings and instructions for all the chapels, however, he also realised that future builders could follow his designs and that his original concept would remain intact. It seems, moreover, that he was adopting a similar strategy for his work at S. Maria presso S. Celso, in that book of the drawings for it was produced to help those involved in the construction of the sanctuary not only during his lifetime but also after it. Indeed, it seems that Alessi had every reason to be worried about what would happen to his projects after his death, since both underwent major changes in the years after this occurred in 1572. As regards S. Maria presso S. Celso, a comparison between the upper sections of the extant façade and Alessi's project as illustrated by him in Folio 2 of the Ambrosiana folder reveals numerous departures, particularly in the area of the main pediment, that were all effected by his successor Martino Bassi. The story was even worse for the Sacro Monte where a whole series of changes were brought in under the direction of Carlo Bescapè.

We know that the *Libro dei Misteri* was commissioned from Alessi directly by Giacomo d'Adda, who was one of the *fabbricieri*, the committee of laymen elected by the citizens of Varallo to oversee the construction of the Sacro Monte.⁴⁸ This suggests that Alessi's patrons were also well aware that he would never be personally able to oversee the realisation of his vast project to redevelop the pilgrimage site, and that they asked him to produce a book to illustrate every aspect of his project so that it could still be completed. The *fabbricieri*, therefore, saw Alessi's role as an architect as that of conceiving a new plan for the Sacro Monte and illustrating that plan through his drawings. They thus valued his expertise as an inventor and draughtsman over his ability to manage a building site and oversee construction, tasks that could be carried out by others.

As Stefani Perrone has pointed out, Alessi's drawings in the *Libro* were given official approval by Alessandro Caimo, a figure who was also one of the deputies involved in managing the construction of S. Maria presso S. Celso.⁴⁹ It would, therefore, seem likely that the commission by Giacomo d'Adda of the *Libro dei Misteri* was prompted by the similar compendium of drawings produced by Alessi for the Milanese sanctuary, which Giacomo d'Adda knew of either directly, or via Alessandro Caimo. We also know, however, that Giacomo d'Adda stipulated in his will of 1572 that the *Libro* was to be kept, after his death, at the *Scuola di Carità* in Milan, which indicates that it was his personal property rather than in the general ownership of the Sacro Monte *fabbricieri*.⁵⁰ The will also suggests that the *Libro* was highly valued by Giacomo d'Adda and that he probably kept hold of it himself rather than leaving it on site in Varallo for day-to-day use. This is not to say that the *capomeastri* or other members of the *fabbricieri* were never allowed to consult it, and it probably served as a clean-copy of reference drawings. This possibility is rather confirmed by the presence, in the State Archive of Varallo, of other drawings, some in the hand of Alessi and some in the hands of his followers, which, as Stefani Perrone demonstrated, are evidently derived from drawings in the *Libro* although they are not exact copies. Indeed, the drawings in the *Libro* show no pinpricks or other signs of having been copied. The State Archive drawings are of a rougher nature than those in the *Libro* and they were surely destined for use on site. Some are scaled-up versions of architectural elements such as the mouldings of cornices, which have been cut out in order to form templates, and others have additional

annotations and calculations (Fig. 23).⁵¹ Some of them are in Alessi's hand, as is evident in the, by now familiar, drawing and handwriting style, although others are clearly by later followers who were employed to put some of Alessi's designs for the chapels into action. In fact, the drawing in the State Archive of the Temple of Solomon follows that depicted in the *Libro*, but the annotation on it, which is not in Alessi's hand, reveals that it is by someone else, 'following the drawing by Signor Galeazzo' (*secondo il disegno dil Sr Galeazzo*). This, therefore, suggests that a second group of working drawings was made for the actual construction of the chapels, some of which were done by Alessi before his departure from Milan, while others were the work of followers.

Having established that the *Libro dei Misteri* was produced for one of the Varallo patrons and was in all likelihood kept off-site and only consulted occasionally, it seems likely that the same may be true of the drawings in the Ambrosiana folder. We know that from 1564, at the start of his association with S. Maria presso S. Celso, payments were made for books for Alessi to draw in, and it seems likely that these books of drawings were presented to and kept by his patrons. In this case the patrons were a group of deputies who oversaw the running of the church and who, unlike the Varallo *fabbricieri*, were elected to the post for only a limited amount of time. If these drawings were indeed the property of the deputies, then they would have ensured that whenever new deputies were elected they could really understand what was going on in the construction and thus guarantee consistency. That these drawings were used as a reference tool by the deputies to keep track of construction is further supported by annotations on some of the folios, which inform the reader that, for example, niche B on Folio 17 is already under construction. We also know that Alessi was paid 150 gold *scudi* specifically for his drawings, suggesting that they were highly valued by the deputies and were considered separately from the actual building and the role he had in supervising its construction.

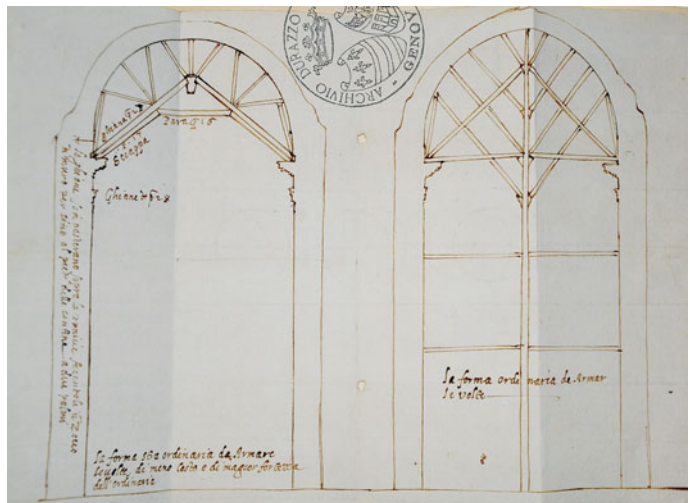
Like the folios of the *Libro dei Misteri*, the Ambrosiana drawings are very detailed, but do not show any signs of having been copied or used on site during construction. This means that in both cases another set of drawings must have been produced for use in construction, so that there would have been site drawings for S. Maria presso S. Celso similar to those that still survive for the Sacro Monte in the Varallo State Archive. This practice regarding the production and use of drawings is similar to that followed by Vignola and his team for the Palazzo Farnese at Piacenza, in that one group of drawings was sent to the patron Margherita of Austria in 1561 (which survive today in the Parma State Archive) while another, rougher, set of drawings seems to have been retained by the Vignola workshop (some of which can be found today in Royal Library at Windsor).⁵²

One of the reasons why Alessi's authorship of all the drawings in the two collections has been questioned in the past is because it was considered impossible for a single architect to produce so many.⁵³ The task was certainly enormous, particularly when it is remembered that in order to produce finished drawings, the architect would have first had to produce vast numbers of preparatory drawings, which, by and large, have not survived. Also to be considered is that Alessi was a very prolific architect who, at the same time as working on S. Maria presso S. Celso and the Sacro Monte di Varallo, was also involved with the church of S. Barnaba and Palazzo Marino in Milan, and

Fig. 23. Galeazzo Alessi, template for the pedestal moulding of the small columns belonging to the House of Pilate (Varallo, Archivio di Stato, Archivio d'Adda; with permission)



Fig. 24. Galeazzo Alessi, drawing of two types of scaffolding for S. Maria Assunta di Carignano in Genoa (Genoa, Archivio Durazzo-Giustiniani; with permission)



was still overseeing the completion of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano in Genoa. As Francesco Bernardino Ferrari commented in relation to the Milanese drawings when he owned them: 'it is too difficult that a man of that type, very busy, could have want for pure pleasure to turn his hand to doing many drawings which are finished with all their measurements and many observations'.⁵⁴ So how could such a busy architect have produced such a number of drawings?

The answer seems to lie in the type of architect that Alessi was and in the changing role of the architect in this period. Although there is much that we do not know about Alessi's early education and how he came to be an architect, it is still clear that he did not follow the more typical route of serving an apprenticeship in a related field.⁵⁵ Alessi had been born into a patrician family and it is possible that, after an education in the liberal arts, he received some sort of architectural training from the Perugian architect, painter and commentator on Vitruvius, Giovan Battista Caporali before 1536 when he moved to Rome.⁵⁶ There are no documents that cast light on his activities there but, as Gaetano Miarelli Mariani noted in 1975, one only needs to look at Alessi's later architectural works to see the influence that Roman architecture had on him.⁵⁷ In particular, he would seem to have gravitated towards the site of St Peter's and the figure of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, since, when he returned to Perugia in 1542 it was as an architect, assisting in the construction of the Rocca Paolina under Sangallo's direction. Unlike many of his contemporaries then, Alessi did not have a background in painting or sculpture, and nor was he like Antonio da Sangallo or Palladio in having a practical grounding in building.

As a result of this unconventional education in architecture, it may well be that Alessi did not have much of a practical knowledge of construction and engineering. He was, however, not so unusual in this regard since, as James Ackerman has noted, many sixteenth-century architects had trained in one of the sister arts and sometimes also lacked an understanding of structural matters, which they generally left to the masons and carpenters who worked under their supervision.⁵⁸ Such an arrangement certainly seems to have been in place on the building sites of Alessi's projects, as is attested to by a letter relating to the construction of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano, written by Alessi in Milan to his Sauli patrons in Genoa.⁵⁹ In this letter, Alessi informed his patrons that the scaffolding for the choir vault was not to be erected in the 'normal' way, but would be done 'in a new way which I have described in detail to master Bernardino', that is Bernardo Cantone who was overseeing the work while Alessi was in Milan, 'and of which I have included a sketch' (Fig. 24). Alessi then added that 'because this form [of vaulting] is probably not used any more in Genoa it might seem difficult, but he has informed master Bernardo Spacio, who affirms he has seen it [the scaffolding] elsewhere and who has offered his help if you need it'. The sketch which Alessi included with the letter, however, is just that, a sketch to indicate what the scaffolding should look like but not how to erect it. This lack of detail, therefore, in combination with Alessi's recommendation that if they have any problems they should ask Bernardo Spacio, would appear to indicate that Alessi himself did not have the necessary practical understanding of the scaffolding in order to explain how to erect it. It would thus seem that while Alessi was very capable of drawing the scaffolding, which he had probably

studied first-hand at St Peter's, he still needed to rely upon others to supply the practical know-how.

This lack of practical knowledge goes hand-in-hand with the fact that many of Alessi's buildings were executed in his absence. Scotti has recently established that, in Genoa, Alessi had a trusted group of assistants who all worked on his projects for S. Maria Assunta di Carignano, the Villa Giustiniani, the Porta del Molo and the Strada Nuova, and it seems likely, therefore, that he had a similar group working for him in Milan, and so was not much involved in the actual construction of his buildings.⁶⁰ If this is so, as I believe it is, then why could he not have been responsible for producing the hundreds of drawings required to construct his buildings in his absence? This suggests that Alessi was spearheading a new emphasis on the production of drawings as a means of transmitting his ideas to the teams of master masons, stone cutters and carpenters involved in his projects, an emphasis in keeping with the developing role of the architect more generally in sixteenth-century Italy, in relying on drawings to communicate his ideas to those responsible for the actual construction rather than being constantly present at the stone yard or building site.⁶¹

The value placed on drawing also accords with the elevation of architecture as a liberal art and the increasing professionalisation of the architect. Previous artist-architects, most notably Raphael and Michelangelo, were valued for their ability to conceive a work of architecture, rather than their ability actually to construct it. The act of conceiving an idea, *invenzione*, and transmitting it through drawing, *disegno*, had been at the foundation of attempts to elevate architecture, like painting and sculpture, to the level of a liberal art, and to separate it from the manual, mechanical, work of the carpenter or stonemason. In this regard, therefore, Alessi's role in coming up with the concept for a project that was then transmitted through his hundreds of architectural drawings, and in taking a hands-off approach to the project's actual realisation, is not only in keeping with the developing professionalisation of the architect, but actually at the forefront of such a change. This new way of working would have been especially encouraged, moreover, by the fact that Alessi was born into a patrician family and received a liberal education before embarking on an architectural career, since this places him in the realm of the gentleman architect. In fact, his status as a gentleman is frequently acknowledged in documents that refer to him not as *mastro* but as *messer* or *signore*.⁶² Being an educated figure of this status, therefore, he was inclined to view his profession very differently from his architect predecessors, and to operate in a way that was far removed from the dust and physical labour of the construction site, endured by the *maestri* who executed his designs. It was thus as this new kind of architect that Alessi was commissioned to conceive his projects for S. Maria presso S. Celso and the Varallo Sacro Monte, and to produce multitudes of drawing for them so that they could be realised by skilled groups of craftsmen. It was also as this new kind of architect that Alessi paved the way for others to follow his example and for the profession of architect to be changed irrevocably.

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BIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines drawings associated with the sixteenth-century Italian architect, Galeazzo Alessi, focusing primarily on two important collections: the 112 folios held in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan for the Milanese church of S. Maria presso S. Celso and the so-called *Libro dei Misteri* in Varallo's Biblioteca Civica, which contains 318 drawings for the pilgrimage site of the Sacro Monte there. By comparing Alessi's handwriting and drawing style across a variety of different letters and drawings present in archives in Genoa, Milan and Varallo, it is argued that all the drawings held in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana folder and in the *Libro dei Misteri* must be the work of Alessi himself. The article then moves on to a discussion of Alessi's use of drawings in his practice and the developing role of the architect in the sixteenth century, which, it is argued, was increasingly defined by the ability of the architect to invent and to draw rather than to build.

NOTES

¹ Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Raccolta Ferrari S. 149. Sup. B [hereafter 'Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B']

² Varallo, Biblioteca Civica, Libro dei Misteri [hereafter 'Libro dei Misteri']. The common title given to this bound volume is derived from Alessi's note in the prologue to the drawings, in which he states that the chapels were to contain the mysteries of the Life of Christ.

³ Milan, Archivio Diocesano, S. Maria presso S. Celso [hereafter 'Archivio S. Maria presso S. Celso'], Amministrazione Contabilità Cassa Registri, Libro Maestro 1563–1569, 3 April 1563: 'E piu a messer Cesaro agente del signor Galeazzo perosino 6 scudi doro in oro per sue mercede del depingere il disegno della facciata

della giesia della maestro de comissione del signor Alessandro Caimo lire 35 soldi 8'. For more information on the construction history of S. Maria presso S. Celso under the direction of Galeazzo Alessi, see N.A. Houghton Brown, *The Milanese Architecture of Galeazzo Alessi* (New York, 1982); and Rebecca M. Gill, 'Galeazzo Alessi: Church Architecture and Church Reform 1548–1569' (doctoral thesis, University of Reading, 2012), pp. 216–334.

4 'Archivio S. Maria presso S. Celso', Amministrazione Contabilità Cassa Registri, Libro Maestro 1563–1569, 15 July 1564: 'E piu spexi in un Libro comprar per il capo maestro per designar lire 1, soldi-, denari 4'. This document was previously cited by Houghton Brown, but she mistakenly assumed that this book was for the engineer Schala. However, given the existence of the drawings in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana it seems clear that it must have been purchased for Alessi.

5 The following annotation in 'Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B', f. 105, suggests that there were at least two separate books: 'Nota che tutte le misure che goverai in questo libro segnate A.A sonno cavate dell oncie bel braccio Milanese'.

6 'Archivio S. Maria presso S. Celso', Amministrazione Contabilità Cassa Registri, Libro Maestro 1558–1576, 10 May 1568, f. 127v: 'Lo ditto lire 295 per 50 scudi doro l'oro datti a bon conto al signor Galeazzo Perosino per disegni de la fasciata choro organo et tabernaculo al come folio 126. Lire 295'.

7 'Archivio S. Maria presso S. Celso', Amministrazione Contabilità Cassa Registri, Libro Maestro 1558–1576, 10 June 1568, f. 131v: 'Ditto lire 295 contate al signor Galeazzo perosino per suo saldo de 100 scudi per la fattura de li disegni et modelli de la fazata de la gesia et fu sui adì 17 magio[...] Lire 295'.

7 'Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. A', Index: 'Libro di disegni attinenti alla chiesa di S.M. presso S. Celso e massime della facciata, fatti tutti da Martino Bassi. Che questi disegni siano tutti del Bassi lo indicano chiaramente le note di sua mano, che si trovano su di essi, e il modo, la franchezza, e la bellezza del disegno tutto suo proprio carattere. Se poi siano tutti di sua invenzione non voglio aserirlo con certezza, non avendone una prova sicura. L'opinione comune si è che la facciata sia disegno di Galeazzo Alessio perugino, benchè anche di ciò non vi sia prova di sorta alcuna. Comunque sia convien dire, che in tutte le opera qui 'csegnare, se il Bassi non ne fu l'inventore almeno ne fu l'esecutore, perchè troppo è difficile che un uomo di quella sorta, e tanto occupato abbia voluto così per un solo e semplice piacere porsi a fare tanti disegni sì finiti e con tutte le loro misure e tante ovverrenze: oltre che in vari luoghi di essi vi si scorgono delle variazioni: cosa che avviene nella esecuzione. In tanti luoghi poi, e nè suoi scritti sene desumono altre migliori prove, e se si aggiungerà ancora che non vi sono altri disegni di altro autore, parmi che si toglierà del tutto ogni dubbio.'

8 'conforme al disegno fatto dal Sig. Galeazzo Alessio perugino, qual si trova nel libro di cartone signato A', originally cited in Costantino Baroni, *Documenti per la storia dell'architettura a Milano nel Rinascimento e nel Barocco* (Florence, 1940), Volume I, Edifici Sacri, Parte I, doc. n. 337, p. 263, dated 5 September 1570. For Rocco's attribution of the drawings to Alessi see Giovanni Rocco, 'Galeazzo Alessi a Milano', in *IV Convegno nazionale di storia dell'architettura Milano*, ed. Comitato Ordinatore presso la R. Soprintendenza ai Monumenti Milano (Milan, 1940), pp. 8–9.

9 Augusto Cavallari-Murat, 'Il "libro dei misteri" e gli architetti del Sacro Monte di Varallo (I progetti dell' Alessi e del Tibaldi)', *Atti e Memorie del congresso di Varallo Sesia* (Turin, 1960), p. 91.

10 Maria Luisa Gatti Perer, 'Fonti per l'architettura Milanese dal XVI al XVIII secolo: Francesco Bernardino Ferrari e la sua raccolta di documenti e disegni', *Arte Lombarda*, 9 (1964), pp. 173–222.

11 Aurora Scotti, 'I disegni alessiani nelle collezioni milanesi', in *Galeazzo Alessi e l'architettura del Cinquecento: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi Genova, 16–20 aprile 1974*, ed. Ennio Poleggi (Genoa, 1975), pp. 467–78.

12 Houghton Brown, *The Milanese Architecture of Galeazzo Alessi*, p. 486.

13 Stefani Perrone based her convincing argument for Alessi's authorship of the 1560s project to redesign the Sacro Monte on three archival documents: a list of the chapels for the Sacro Monte in the d'Adda Archive in the Archivio di Stato, Varallo which records the 'Order of the mysteries which are on the Sacro Monte, where there is the Holy Sepulchre of Varallo in Valsesia, from a drawing done by signor Galeazzo Alessi Perugino most excellent architect [...]'; a plan of the central area of the Sacro Monte which contains the note 'according to the drawing by signor Galeazzo'; and a drawing done after Alessi of the Temple of Solomon labelled '4 braccia according to the drawing by signor Galeazzo'. Documents cited in Anna Maria Brizio and Stefania Stefani Perrone, *Libro dei misteri progetto di pianificazione urbanistica, architettonica e figurativa del Sacro Monte di Varallo in Valsesia (1565–1569)* (Bologna, 1974), p. 10 and Stefania Stefani Perrone, 'L'urbanistica del Sacro Monte e l'Alessi', in *Galeazzo Alessi e l'architettura del Cinquecento: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi Genova, 16–20 aprile 1974*, ed. Ennio Poleggi (Genoa, 1975), p. 506.

14 Stefani Perrone, *Libro dei misteri*, p. 22. The letter which Stefani Perrone refers to was published by Santo Varni, *Spigolature artistiche nell'archivio della basilica di Carignano* (Genoa, 1877), pp. 46–48. Galeazzo Alessi to

Andrea Rebecco (the notary to the Sauli family), 18 February 1568: '[...] et a me serà caro per la comodità che mi trovo qui di persona che potrà lavorare se me parrà che occorre [...]'].

15 For a fuller analysis of the handwriting evident in the *Libro dei Misteri* drawings see below in this article, at n. 20.

16 Aurora Scotti, 'Paesaggi sacri tra Piemonte sabauda e Lombardia borromaica: il contributo del Libro dei Misteri di Galeazzo Alessi', in *L'architettura del Sacro Monte storia e progetto*, ed. Isabella Balestreri and Maurizio Meriggi (Assago, 2012), p. 31.

17 Genoa, Archivio Durazzo-Giustiniani, Archivio della basilica [hereafter 'Archivio della basilica'], 105 Foliazzo della fabrica dell'anno 1560 à 1569, 12: Galeazzo Alessi to the Sauli, 26 July 1562.

18 'Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B', f. 105.

19 Admittedly, there are occasions in the tabernacle drawing, where the stem of the 'h' does come all the way down to the baseline, but this is typical of the slight variations that can sometimes be witnessed in the way Alessi forms his letters.

20 There are two exceptions to this: f. 2 and f. 9 which have had extra paper added to the top of the page.

21 Cavallari-Murat first identified the watermark in 'Il "libro dei misteri"', p. 88, with reference to C-M. Briquet, *Les Filigranes dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600; avec 39 figures dans le texte et 16, 112 fac-similés de filigranes* (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1923).

22 These drawings were published by Stefani Perrone, *Libro dei misteri*, pp. 56–59.

23 Cavallari-Murat, 'Il "libro dei misteri"', p. 88.

24 Scotti suggested that fols 86–94, 98 and 99 must be by Alessi because of the harder line that is used and because of the employment of a wash, which is used to create a more plastic effect; Scotti, 'I disegni alessiani nelle collezioni milanesi', p. 469.

25 This similarity between the way that figures are depicted in the *Libro dei Misteri* drawings and the drawings in Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B was recognized by Stefani Perrone, *Libro dei Misteri*, p. 23.

26 Paul Davies and David Hemsoll, *Renaissance and Later Architecture and Ornament: The Paper Museum of Cassiano del Pozzo*, ser. A, no. 10, 2 vols (London, 2013), I, pp. 228–31.

27 'Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup B', f. 11: 'lasagoma delle cornice che girano in torno segnata A. per maggiore intelligenza fatte in grande qui avanti segnate A'.

28 Examples of such paper templates can be found amongst the documents relating to the Sacro Monte di Varallo, held in the Archivio di Stato di Varallo, suggesting that this was a typical practice used by Alessi, see Fig. 24.

29 'Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B', f. 29: 'serferisca al modello di relevo della facciata' (it refers to the model of the façade), 'Nota che in el modello grande se è alterato e a quello se à da referire' (note that in the large model it [niche F] has changed and you should refer to that one [i.e. the version shown in the large model]).

30 'Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B', f. 7: 'Il disegno del quadro sopra la porta di mezzo segnata A nella facciata a fog.li 2' (The drawing of the frame above the central entrance marked A in the façade on f. 2), 'Questo disegno non serve piu esendosi mutato in el modo che si dimostra in questo libro a carte 11' (this drawing is no longer needed because it has been changed in the way shown in this book on page 11).

31 'Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S. 149 Sup. B', fols 66–83.

32 For a reading of the new pilgrimage route, see Rebecca M. Gill, 'Galeazzo Alessi and the redevelopment of the Sacro Monte di Varallo in Tridentine Italy', in *AID Monuments: Galeazzo Alessi architetto-ingegnere*, ed. Claudia Conforti and Vittorio Gusella (Rome, 2013), pp. 101–13.

33 The one exception to this is the set of drawings for the Church of Madonna of Loreto. This was a pre-existing chapel which Alessi adapted and reconfigured and which necessarily required a different set of drawings to those chapels that he was planning to build from scratch.

34 'Libro dei Misteri', f. 68 r. 'La pianta che qui all'incontro si vede serve all'edefitio del tempio nel quale si vede il paralitico farsi calar dal tetto per impetrar gratia dal S.r Iesu Christo per la sua santità il qual tempio haverà le sue cornici sotto il tetto, et quelle di dentro ch' impostano la volta, et la porta di esso di marmo il resto potrà farsi finto; non essendo necessario.'

35 'Libro dei Misteri', f. 74 v, 'La sagma de la cornice de l'antedente tempio', and f. 107 v: 'Gli ornamenti si doveranno sempre reportare alle sagome come piu giusto'.

36 See above at n. 14.

37 Stefani Perrone, *Libro dei Misteri*, p.23; and Stefani Perrone, 'L'urbanistica del Sacro Monte e l'Alessi', pp. 508–09.

38 Hans Nachod, 'A Recently Rediscovered Architectural Sketchbook of an Intimate Assistant of Bramante in the Construction Office of St Peter's in Rome', *Rare Books: Notes on the History of Old Books and Manuscripts*, 8

(1955), pp. 1–11; and Rudolf Wittkower, *Idea and Image: Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1978), pp. 91–107. According to Wittkower the drawings in the sketchbook date to between 1513 and 1520 and are attributed to Menicantonio who seems to have operated in the circles of Bramante and Raphael. Of particular interest from the point of view of the use of the plan, elevation and section, see Roman Sketchbook of Menicantonio, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, fols 6v–7r, 8r–9r, 39r, 56v–58r, 60v, 62v–65r, 69v–70r. For Antonio da Sangallo's architectural drawings see *The Architectural Drawings of Antonio da Sangallo The Younger and His Circle*, ed. Christoph L. Frommel and Nicholas Adams, 2 vols (Cambridge and London, 1994).

39 For those chapels that already existed on the Sacro Monte before Alessi's arrival, most notably the Bethlehem complex, Alessi supplied perspectival drawings of the pre-existing structure and small details of the features he wished to change, such as the entrance to the house of Loreto which was to benefit from a new triangular pediment.

40 In 1565 the Sauli drew up a new three-year contract with Alessi in which he was obligated to return to Genoa every year for seven months to personally oversee the construction. This arrangement lasted only until 1567, when Alessi broke the terms of his contract and returned to Milan. Contract between the executors of the building and Galeazzo Alessi: 'Archivio della basilica', 105, Foliazzo della fabrica dell'anno 1560 à 1569; 12 June 1565. For more information the construction of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano see, Andrea Ghia, 'Il cantiere della Basilica di S. Maria di Carignano dal 1548 al 1602', *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria*, 39 (1999), pp. 263–399; and Rebeca M. Gill, 'Galeazzo Alessi: Church Architecture and Church Reform 1548–1569', pp. 23–129.

41 'Archivio della basilica', 105 Foliazzo della fabrica dell'anno 1560 à 1569, 12.

42 'Archivio della basilica', 105 Foliazzo della fabrica dell'anno 1560 à 1569, 12: two drawings relating to the drum of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano.

43 'Archivio della basilica', 105 Foliazzo della fabrica dell'anno 1560 à 1569. 12: Galeazzo Alessi to Andrea Rebecco, 25 August 1567.

44 The surviving drawings for S. Maria Assunta di Carignano were published in Andrea Ghia, "'Casa con villa delli signori Sauli" piante e disegni dell'archivio Sauli: catalogo', *Atti del Società Ligure di Storia Patria*, 49 (2009), pp. 87–385.

45 Wolfgang Lotz, 'Introduzione ai lavori del Convegno', in *Galeazzo Alessi e l'architettura del Cinquecento: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi Genova, 16–20 aprile 1974*, ed. Ennio Poleggi (Genoa, 1975), p. 10.

46 Paolo Belardi, 'Disegno architettonico e remote control nei carteggi di Raffaello, Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane e Galeazzo Alessi', in *Il disegno di progetto dalle origini al XVIII secolo: atti del convegno Roman 22–24 aprile 1993*, ed. Michela Cigola and Tiziana Fiorucci (Rome, 1997), pp. 47–50.

47 'Libro dei Misteri', f. 3 v: '[...] e' percio essendo stato ricercato da V.S. di descrivere, è disegnare tutti gli edefitii che sono et s'haveranno da edificare nel Monte di Varallo, di tante, et si diverse forme, quanto conviene a si degni, e varii misterii che in quello doveranno essere scolpiti, e' depinti; isprimendo con essi; i meravigliosi gesti della vita, passione, e' morte del Redentore n'ro; [...] e' percio son venuto in isperianza di poter mostrare in questo libro tutti i disegni de gli edifitii che a me sono parsi di poter commodamente capire nella sommita di questo Monte; et perche doveranno essere tante, e', di cosi varie forme ridotte con proportion e misure, alle correspondentie delle lor grandezza; con tutto l'ordine, e' decoro d'architettura che si conviene, et a me sia stato possibile' et che per avventura dovranno essere con lo spatio di molti anni da persone diverse poste in opera; sarà necessario che' io particolarmente venghi narrando sopra detti disegni; [...]; acciò quelli che verann, a ridure l'opera a perfettione, restino bene instrutti di quanto io desidero, che in tale cosa si facci, accio si conformi col bel concetto che mostrono havere quei primi fondatori di cosi s.ta opera [...].'

48 Stefani Perrone, 'L'urbanistica del Sacro Monte e l'Alessi', p. 501.

49 According to the inscription on his portrait medal in the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna, Alessandro Caimo was a Milanese jurist.

50 Will cited by Stefani Perrone, 'L'urbanistica del Sacro Monte e l'Alessi', fn 8, p. 512.

51 Stefani Perrone, *Libro dei Misteri*, especially pp. 16–22.

52 Paul Davies and David Hemsoll, *Renaissance and Later Architecture and Ornament*, I, pp. 46, 211–219.

53 This particular point was raised by Francesco Benelli at the conference, 'Drawings and the Italian Renaissance Architect', Rome Center, Washington State University, 8 December 2011, but it is also inferred in the work of Aurora Scotti, for example, Scotti, 'I disegni alessiani nelle collezioni milanesi', pp. 467–478.

54 Although Ferrari thought that these drawings were by Bassi, the issue he raises can be equally related to Alessi.

- 55 For the most recent account of Alessi's early life see Claudia Conforti, 'Galeazzo Alessi e il suo tempo', in *AID Monuments: Galeazzo Alessi architetto-ingegnere*, pp. 23–28; and Micaela Antonucci, 'Galeazzo Alessi: l'estro silenzioso di un maestro dell'architettura del Cinquecento', in *AID Monuments: Galeazzo Alessi architetto-ingegnere*, pp. 29–39. See also Emmina De Negri, *Galeazzo Alessi Architetto a Genova* (Genoa: 1957), pp. 23–26; and Giuliana Algeri, 'Alessi in Umbria', in *Galeazzo Alessi e l'architettura del Cinquecento: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi Genova, 16–20 aprile 1974*, ed. Ennio Poleggi (Genoa, 1975), pp. 193–201.
- 56 According to Alessi's early biographer Pascioli, Alessi studied theory, military and civic architecture with Gio. Battista Caporali. L. Pascioli, *Vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti moderni (1730–1736)* (Perugia, 1992), p. 383.
- 57 Gaetani Miarelli Mariani, 'Aggiunte e notazioni sulla formazione di Galeazzo Alessi', in *Galeazzo Alessi e l'architettura del Cinquecento: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi Genova, 16–20 aprile 1974*, ed. Ennio Poleggi (Genoa, 1975), p. 203.
- 58 J.S. Ackerman, 'Architectural Practice in the Italian Renaissance', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 13 (1954), p. 3.
- 59 'Archivio della basilica', 105 Foliazzo della fabrica dell'anno 1560 à 1569, 12: Galeazzo Alessi to the Sauli, 30 November 1560.
- 60 Aurora Scotti, 'Prefazione', in *AID Monuments: Galeazzo Alessi Architetto-Ingegnere*, p. 17. According to Scotti, Alessi's team in Genoa included Bernardino Cantone, Bernardo Spazio, Giovanni Ponzello and Giovanni Battista Castello, to which I would like to add the name of Angelo Doggio, who was involved in the construction of S. Maria Assunta di Carignano from at least 1552.
- 61 Catherine Wilkinson, 'The New Professionalism in the Renaissance', in *Sixteenth Century Italian Art*, ed. Michael W. Cole (Oxford, 2006), pp. 260–61.
- 62 Antonucci, 'Galeazzo Alessi: l'estro silenzioso di un maestro dell'architettura del Cinquecento', p. 32.