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# BORROMINI'S BOOK

The "Full Relation of the Building"  
of the Roman Oratory

by Francesco Borromini and  
Virgilio Spada of the Oratory



Translated with a commentary  
by Kerry Downes

A NEW BOOK FROM  
**OBLONG**



## Borromini's Book: The "Full Relation of the Building" of the Roman Oratory by Francesco Borromini and Virgilio Spada of the Oratory

Borromini now stands as one of the greatest artists of the Italian Baroque.

The "Full relation" of the Oratory House in Rome was written down by Father Virgilio Spada but the voice is that of its chief architect. It was published only in 1725; this fully illustrated first English edition makes accessible in translation a unique and fascinating story of the architect's aesthetic and technical problems in taking over a project already under way, and his solutions.

The *Companion* to his story may be read, browsed, or accessed from the index. It draws on both previous and new research to place the Oratory building and its architect in context – historical, architectural, biographical and topographical. It leaves no doubt that Borromini was not mad, irrational or eccentric, accusations laid even in his life-time and still repeated. Although not a biography, the major sections cover his career, personality and early life, his sources and ideas, his unique approach to design and symbolism, and his relations with patrons and other architects, in particular the sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini, whose own architectural work appears in a new light.

The *Companion* also illuminates the distinctive life of his clients, the Oratorian Fathers, and their founder Saint Philip Neri, and not only describes the particular requirements for their home but sheds new light on the building of their mother church, the adjacent "New Church" (Chiesa Nuova) of Santa Maria in Vallicella.

One of the novel features of *Borromini's Book* is the presentation of the multi-dimensional narratives of both parts. Instead of conventional notes, boxes and sidebars, the supporting comments run in parallel to the main text but clearly distinguished. As well as historical and modern photographs and specially made explanatory drawings, the book includes accurate reductions of all the folio copperplates of 1725.

### KERRY DOWNES

Kerry Downes OBE DLitt is Emeritus Professor of History of Art in the University of Reading. He is an authority on Renaissance and Baroque art and architecture and has published numerous books on Sir Christopher Wren and his associates Sir John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, as well as a pioneering study of Baroque architecture in England and a monograph on the painter Rubens. He never forgets that architecture is a visual art, that buildings are designed, made, used and experienced by people, and that the materials impose their own conditions on the end product. He is able to evoke in the mind's eye an image of the object described, avoiding jargon and explaining technical matters lucidly with the support of pictures and diagrams.

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