

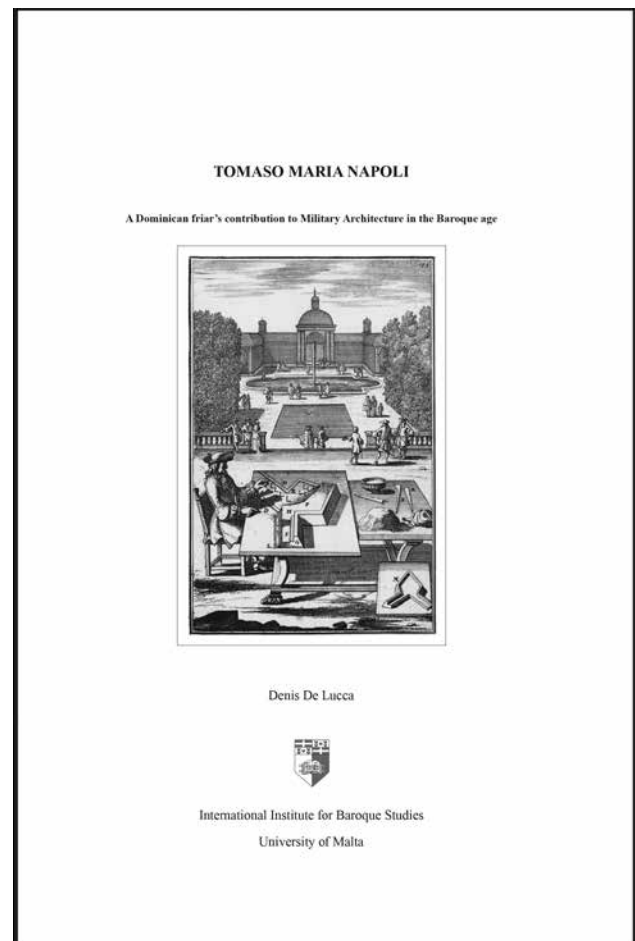
Tomaso Maria Napoli: A Dominican Prior's Contribution to Military Architecture in the Baroque Age. Denis De Lucca, International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta, 2015. 254 pp. ISBN:978-99957-0-837-5

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Professor Denis De Lucca's pioneering research work over the past number of years has served to challenge the notion that the design of fortifications, particularly during the age of Baroque, was restricted solely to military circles. His seminal work on the role of the Society of Jesus, otherwise known as the Jesuits, in spreading knowledge about fortifications and military architecture, entitled '*Jesuits and Fortifications: The Contribution of the Jesuits to Military Architecture in the Baroque Age*' and published by Brill in 2012, however, drew attention to the manner in which a very influential religious institution used its educational faculties to teach the subject of fortification to the nobles of Europe while its learned members published treatises on fortification theory and even provided consultancies on the subject to warring princes.

De Lucca's latest study on Tomaso Maria Napoli now shows that the Jesuits were not alone in the pursuit of the study and teaching of military architecture. The Dominican Order of Preachers, founded by the Spanish priest Dominic de Guzman in France in 1216, was another. By the seventeenth century, the Dominican friars excelled at the teaching of mathematics and geometry, the very basis of the art and science of fortification. Some of its members were actively consulted to review and design new works of fortification. Few know, for example, that Vincenzo Maculano da Firenzuola, the architect of the Sta. Margherita enceinte built by the Hospitaller Knights to protect their Grand Harbour in Malta in 1638, was a Dominican friar. Moreover, he was the same Firenzuola – Il Cardinal Maculano – who examined Galileo Galilei during his trial in 1633, the episode dramatically represented in a painting by Cristiano Banti (1824-1904), reproduced in De Lucca's book.

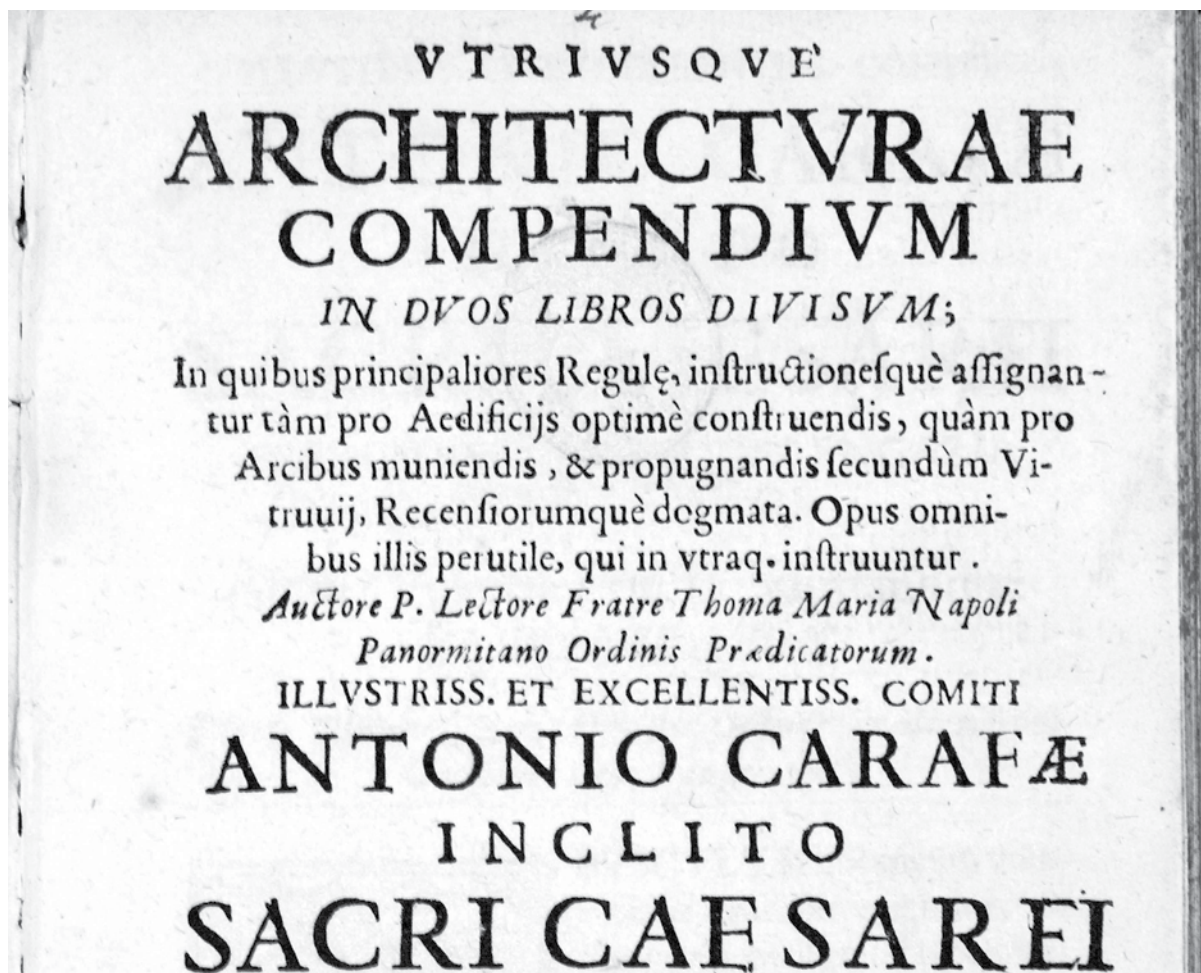
Indeed, the role of the Dominican Order in the teaching and practice of military architecture has remained largely uncharted territory and Denis De Lucca has taken a practically forgotten treatise authored by the Dominican



friar Tomaso Maria Napoli, published in 1722, as his stepping stone into an examination of this subject. Entitled, *Breve Trattato Dell'Architettura Militare Moderna cavato da' piu insigni Autori* and dedicated to Prince Eugenio of Savoy, this little booklet is actually 'a remarkable treatise' distinguished from others by its 'clear, concise and readable qualities' of its texts and diagrams.

Divided into two *libri* (based on four and eight chapters respectively) Napoli's *Breve Tatto* deals with both the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject, giving considerable importance to the mastery of the geometrical problems involved in the design of fortifications on plan, the use of a scale, and the compilation of tables and clear diagrams to assist the design of multi-sided regular polygonal forts. His thirteen 'maxims', those rules-of-thumb so beloved by military engineers and practitioners of fortification, laid out in the tradition of Errard¹ and those who followed him in France provide the 'mix', in the words of Janis Langins, of the 'geometrical principles and practical tips that were [then] becoming to be considered the

1 Jean Errard (1600) *La fortification démontrée et réduite en art.*



basis of the science of fortification'.² Napoli's booklet was truly a military engineering pocket hand-book. In this respect, it was a good idea to include a facsimile copy of the *Breve Trattato* in the appendix. As a matter of fact, De Lucca's book is also well illustrated with various images, including portraits of the main characters shaping Napoli's narrative, diagrams and extracts from contemporary treatises and other relevant images that are very useful in setting the scene and capturing the 'spirit of time and place'.

One of the more interesting aspects of the *Breve Trattato*, as De Lucca points out, are the many references to works of the leading military theorists of the Baroque age that pervade its pages, showing that Napoli was not only well versed in the science of fortification but also in its history and in the diversity of the schools of thought and the ongoing contemporary discussions fashioning the quest for the optimal fortress design. From Errard de Bar-le-Duc, through to Caude Milliet, Jose Zaragosa, Matthias Dogen, Blais Francois de Pagan,

Antoine de Ville and down to *il Marescial di Vauban*, Napoli employs each experts' arguments to examine the various problems of fortification facing military engineers in the early eighteenth century, such as the issues influencing lines of defence, bastion design, the advantages of second flanks, the use of terreplein, and the design of traverses and covered ways, to mention but a few.

Napoli's interest, however, extended beyond the world of fortifications. He was in fact, an accomplished architect. De Lucca's book takes a good all round look at Tomaso Maria Napoli's career and achievements and the historical milieu that influenced his formation as both an architect and military engineer. Born in Palermo in 1659, Napoli received his architectural formation under the renowned architect Andrea Cirrincione when a novitiate in the Convent of San Domenico. He then travelled to Naples, Rome, Vienna, and Ragusa (modern Dubrovnik). When in Rome, he penned his first treatise on military and civil architecture entitled *Utriusque architecturae compendium in duos libros divisum* (1699). Napoli visited Vienna on many occasions, and in 1687 even joined the

² J. Langins (2003), *Conserving the Enlightenment*, 59.

Imperial army as a chaplain and took part in the military campaign in Hungary that led to the Second Battle of Mohacs.

From 1689 to 1700, he was appointed official architect of the Republic of Ragusa and assisted in the reconstruction of that city following the devastating earthquake of 1667, where he contributed significantly to new cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. He returned to Palermo by 1711 and was appointed as military architect and later as *Architetto del Regno e della Real Camera*. His best known works today are two villas in Bagheria, Sicily, together with the façade of the Church of San Domenico in the heart of old Palermo and the *Colonna dell' Immacolata* embellishing *Piazza Imperiale*.

Indeed, Tomaso di Maria, to cite De Lucca, 'emerges from the mist of time as a unique person, demonstrating, beyond a strict adherence to his religious vows, a rare balance of interest in both military architecture – concerned with the honour of several Baroque cities in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – and civil architecture – concerned with embellishment issues'.

It is interesting to note that Napoli's *Breve Trattato* also wielded a degree of influence over other military theorists. In 1733, a younger colleague friar of Napoli, Benedetto Maria del Castrone, published a treatise entitled *L'Ingegnoso ritorvato di fortificare co in mirabilis attezza ogni sorta di poligono regolare sopra l'idea del Signor di Vauban* which was clearly influenced by Napoli. Less known, and perhaps the subject of further research, is the influence that Napoli's work may have exerted on the military engineers working on the fortifications of the Knights a few miles away farther to the south, on the island of Malta. An annotated copy of his book was, after all, once kept in the *Biblioteca Annunciate Conv. Victoriosae*. Did this ever come to the attention of Charles François de Mondion, for example, then engaged as the Order's resident military engineer?

De Lucca's new book on Tomaso Maria Napoli is a welcome addition to a new type of literature in the study of the history of military architecture that has begun to look beyond the fortress and explore the very formation of the military engineers and architects themselves. Students of the Baroque world and military architecture will benefit greatly from this very readable and well-researched publication.