

Formal analysis - foundling hospital brunelleschi essay examples

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The Ospedale degli Innocenti, or 'Hospital of the Innocents,' is an historical building designed by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1419. Located in Florence, its original purpose was that of a children's orphanage, and exists as a prime example of the tenets and forms of the architecture of the early Italian Renaissance. The patron of the building itself is the Arte della Seta of Florence, one of the wealthiest guilds in the city, which focused on philanthropy. To that end, the Foundling Hospital was created to house orphans from all over Italy. The uniquely classical design, the low height and the sprawling facade are used to convey a rare sense of modesty in the wake of the fine marble and decorative inlays of the building, as composed to the increased modernity of the rest of Florence.

The building itself features a loggia, featuring nine bays, which face the Piazza SS. Annunziata. These semicircular arches are supported by Composite columns, which complete the facade of the hospital. In keeping with the classical style of the building, the arches are not pointed, instead completely circular. The function of the building is heavily accented within the architecture of the place; glazed blue terracotta roundels live in the spandrels of the arches, with reliefs of cherubic babies within the roundels. A tabernacle window sits above every semicircular arch, each topped with a triangular pediment.

Of particular interest is the tondi, which lie above each column in the hospital. Brunelleschi intended them to be blank, but they were filled in circa 1490 to feature a baby on a wheel, dressed in swaddling clothes, which is meant to represent the spinning wheel in which the babies were deposited. A

basin that is placed at the front portico is where children would be abandoned for the nurses and nuns to pick up and take care of these new arrivals. The building permitted the utmost discretion, as a door with a horizontal wheel allowed parents to put the children in the basin and spin the door, avoiding the shame of being seen by anyone else. This vehicle for anonymity made the Foundling Hospital a uniquely practical building, in spite of the classical architecture (Furnari, 1995).

The building itself focuses greatly on the horizontal rather than the vertical, due to the longer area of the building as compared to its height. The building altogether focuses on a clear and classical sense of proportion, with the practicalities of the building showing through in its emphasis on space. Every column is at the exact same height, and the intercolumnation and the arcade's width are just as much as the column's height, forming a cube for each bay (Jones, 2000). This demonstrates a unique sense of symmetry that brings a sense of calm and peace to the architecture. As this was meant to be a building that dealt heavily with the safety of children, this focus on safety, symmetry and security was likely paramount.

The ethos behind this building is a dramatic departure from the rest of Florence's architecture; while the buildings and areas around it were opulent, ornate and full of pomp and circumstance, the simple proportions the hospital had a clear order and a practicality to it that was likely refreshing, a unique contrast to the rest of Florence. At the time the loggia was a building type that was commonly in use; however, the Foundling Hospital's use of round columns, especially Composite Order type columns, was particularly

innovative, as was the circular nature of the arches; most of them had pointed arches. The proportional nature of the Foundling Hospital was also a new innovation; most Renaissance-era buildings did not have the fastidious symmetry that the Foundling Hospital does, with perfect cubes set up in each alcove. This attention to detail and focus on geometric order was to become an important priority for future examples of Renaissance architecture in the future (Furnari, 1995).

In conclusion, the Foundling Hospital was a welcome introduction to a newfound sense of symmetry, geometry and modesty in Renaissance architecture in Florence when it was built. The building combines elements of Gothic, Renaissance and Italian Romanesque architecture, as well as Classical Roman, to create a blend of varying styles that has a pattern all its own. The basis and theory for the architecture revolved around combining simplicity with intricate reliefs and artwork, intermixing simple columns with delicate, ornate depictions of babies spaced out with mathematical specificity (Cunningham and Reich, p. 285). The innovation of perfectly measured alcoves, the care taken in creating the basin mechanism for anonymously depositing children, and the use of Composite Order columns noted a new trend for curves and symmetry in this type of architecture. These elements helped to create a unique and supremely functional building that represented a new focus on order and exactitude in form for the Renaissance.

References

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