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Ruined and Rebuilt: Constructing the Ideal Baroque City after Natural Disasters

This dissertation will address the effects of natural disasters on urban planning and architecture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Italy and Iberia, responses to natural disasters in urban planning and building practices, as well as the evolution of architectural building practices and techniques, centering the term “Earthquake Baroque” and applying this term to various centers.

Disasters, especially earthquakes, were not only damaging and deadly, but provided opportunities to rebuild composite cities to fit current ideals with modern construction practices and methods. Among the elements that can be identified in new ideal city planning are: grids, various geometric plans such as radial and orthogonal, and straight streets that led to open views within the city, the staging of city squares, and the creation of the illusion of open space between buildings. While the majority of natural disasters in Italy and Iberia were not strong enough to affect the built environment on a large scale, earthquakes like those felt in Sicily in 1693 and Lisbon in 1755 utterly changed the landscape, to a degree not seen since the famous 79-CE volcanic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in the ancient period.

The methods employed in this project will pull from different models and apply them across the previously named case studies. First, the concept of Earthquake Baroque proposed by Pál Kelemen will be discussed and then used as a model to investigate defining moments with the restructuring of cities after major natural disasters.

To assist with the design of the new Baroque city, Spiro Kostof’s model of the “urban process” will act as a key framing mechanism for my approach to urban history. As a way to connect the Baroque city to urban history, I will incorporate environmental and ecocritical studies of urban reconstruction and planning for natural disasters, calling attention to those relating to southern Italian regions like Apulia and Sicily, Portuguese cities like Lisbon, and countries under the dominion of the Spanish Empire. The methods employed in this project will pull from different models and apply them across the previously named case studies.

This research project will trace signs of Earthquake Baroque in the Mediterranean, focusing on southern Italy and Sicily. The cities of Lecce in Apulia and Grammichele, Sicily will provide case studies as both regions were affected by earthquakes that resulted in the rebuilding of both cities. As a resident at the Centro per la Storia dell’Arte e dell’Architettura delle Città Portuali, I would utilize resources at sites, archives, and libraries in and around Naples. In order to consider the overall architectural history of Naples, I will examine five key buildings: the Royal Palace of Caserta, Castel Nuovo, Santa Maria Egiziaca a Pizzofalcone, San Lorenzo Maggiore, and the former monastery and current museum Certosa di San Martino. In addition to these buildings, I will also engage with the cityscape itself, seeing the Baroque *piazze* like the Piazza Gesù Nuovo and the Piazza Bellini, and earlier established *piazze* like Piazza San Domenico Maggiore.