Figure 1 Luigi Vanvitelli, plate XIII of Dichiarazione dei disegni del Reale palazzo di Caserta (1756) (Collection of the author). See JSAH online for high-resolution, zoomable image

Figure 2 Vanvitelli, Royal Palace of Caserta, 1752–72. See JSAH online for high-resolution, zoomable image
From the Library to the Printing Press
Luigi Vanvitelli’s Life with Books

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Luigi Vanvitelli (1700–1773) loved books.¹ They were among his most numerous and prized possessions, and he spent lavishly on them, valued the weight of good paper, scrutinized the impressions of engravings, and insisted on fine bindings. He trusted only the most reliable booksellers, and wrote to a network of dealers, friends, family, and authors to procure the most recent volumes. The seven full shelves in his study bore a life’s labor of collecting.²

Interest in book culture among architectural historians has yielded new information about library inventories, manuscript notations, and the architect as reader during the years 1400–1800.³ These investigations have enriched our understanding of the intellectual formation of artists by providing insight into how the books and prints that filled their studies shaped their theory, design, and practice. Books were not merely sources for design; there were complex motivations for reading, and how readers interpreted texts was governed by many factors.⁴

An architect’s reading could be as broad as his ambitions. Vitruvius had advised knowing science, history, mathematics, medicine, music, and philosophy. Early-modern architects relished his challenge and responded by building their libraries, bolstering their learning, and elevating their status. Christy Anderson has shown how Inigo Jones’s Italian books helped launch his career as well as spur and guide classical architecture in Britain. Jacques Lemercier’s enormous library reveals a mind bent on encyclopedic knowledge; he created a paper palace of Italian architecture in Paris. And Nicodemus Tessin the Younger traveled through France and Italy not only to see the monuments of the ancients and moderns, but also to acquire a bounty of drawings, prints, and books for his collection in Stockholm. In 1712 he published an inventory of his library. The list reads like Vitruvius’s prescription for a learned architect, with multiple titles in all subjects.⁵

The same year the great Swede printed his catalog, the young Vanvitelli received perhaps the finest library ever bequeathed to a future architect. When he was only twelve, his maternal grandfather, Giovanni Andrea Lorenzani, left him the most important manuscripts and printed books from his library of 2,848 volumes. A brass maker, artist, amateur dramatist, and poet, Lorenzani had amassed one of the largest collections of books, medals, and art objects in Rome.⁶ He gave the cream of it to Vanvitelli, and with these books he ignited a lifelong passion for collecting in the young Luigi.

Vanvitelli’s library might have been forgotten had he not left Rome in 1751. In that year he moved to Naples to become court architect to Charles Bourbon, King of the Two Sicilies (1734–59). He served the king until his death in 1772, designing and building his masterpiece, the royal palace at Caserta (1752–72) (Figures 1, 2). But the architect...
left behind in Rome the world of ancient monuments and modern buildings that inspired his designs. Printed materials became crucial aids, and Luigi wrote to his younger brother, Urbano, to send him volumes from the library he had built before leaving for Naples. His letters to Urbano specify the titles that were packed into crates and shipped south, on subjects from architecture, engineering, and art, to science, history, and poetry. The inventory reconstructed from these letters and other sources show that many of the titles he owned and subjects he explored were similar to those of other architects of the period.

Yet Vanvitelli’s letters to Urbano provide more than a list. Unique for an architect of his time, they give insight into how Vanvitelli procured and used books. They offer a glimpse of him in his study, browsing its bookshelves, opening volumes, studying them, and making annotations. His copiously documented experience with books show that he was not a mere product of their effects. Some books left no trace on his architectural practice, while other had and early and lasting impact. For example, Vanvitelli gained little from what he read on science, but poetry deeply influenced his approach to architectural decorum. Nor did the architect accept everything he read. The books he owned on French architecture did not inspire an admiration of it. He likewise used architectural treatises selectively, and rejected the stringent application of theory. Like Carlo Ginzburg’s analysis of Menocchio, a sixteenth-century Italian miller, a study of Vanvitelli’s reading habits reveals that his own opinions conditioned whether he copied, assimilated, or rejected texts. Other architects likely shared his method of selective reading, but none is documented as well as Vanvitelli. He is the best example of the early-modern architect as reader.

An understanding of Vanvitelli as an archetypal reader contributes to a better understanding of the architecture of his generation. Like many Italian architects of the eighteenth century, particularly his rival Ferdinando Fuga (1699–1781), Vanvitelli shifted between severe and ornamental manners, leading some to argue his buildings embody budding Neoclassicism while others mark them as the end of the Baroque. Seeing Vanvitelli through his books clarifies the reasons for his various stylistic approaches. Books refined his intellectual sociability. They increased his awareness of historical context, exposed him to other modes of thought, allowed him to compare buildings across the Continent, and sharpened his critical abilities. Fuga stated that good taste is “perfected through good study,” and designs were refined “by comparing them with existing buildings.” Vanvitelli’s reading reflects such comparison and evaluation. His activity in the library parallels his stylistic versatility at the drafting table. His buildings, while varied in appearance, share the quality of being literate responses to setting, function, historical examples, and practical techniques.

Vanvitelli’s letters offer similarly rare insight into how an architect created books. After he set its foundations in stone in 1752, Vanvitelli would set the royal palace at Caserta in print in the Dichiarazione dei disegni del Reale palazzo di Caserta in 1756 (see Figure 1). The Dichiarazione joined a distinguished company of books written by architects over the previous century and a half. From the self-promotional swagger of Domenico Fontana’s Della trasportazione dell’obelisco vaticano (1590), to the scientific exactitude of François Blondel’s Réolution des quatre principaux problèmes d’architecture (1673), to the neo-Palladian bias Colen Campbell gave the Vitruvius Britannicus (1715–25), architects’ voices reverberated through the libraries of Europe. These practitioners undoubtedly learned to write by reading, and they must be studied as both. Yet scholars have generally examined the architect as author and reader separately. To date, only the work of Leon Battista Alberti and Nicodemus Tessin the Elder have integrated study.

Luigi Vanvitelli’s endeavors as an author were bound up with his experience as a reader. A love of poetry and language readied him for the proper rhetoric of dedications and descriptions. His desire for texts to explain images conditioned his labeling and layout of plates. And his appreciation of French printing and engraving led him to emulate their standards. Vanvitelli used his extensive knowledge of books to create one. Behind the suggestive, but ultimately mute inventory of his library stands a garrulous individual whose activities embody the potential and limitations of books in the practice of architecture.

Vanvitelli in His Library

The first books Vanvitelli knew were not volumes on architecture. Poetry and music filled the house where he grew up. During his childhood, he and his parents lived with his grandfather, and evenings were animated by lively literary debates and performances. Recital was as important as writing to Lorenzani, and the poetry readings in his home on the Via dei Coronari drew artist and nobleman alike. On occasion, Lorenzani even directed impromptu dramas with his family playing key roles. He shared this zeal for performance with his brother Paolo, who had been a composer at the court of Louis XIV before returning to Rome as maestro of the pope’s Cappella Giulia.

Surrounded by poetry, drama, and music, Vanvitelli imbued the rhythms of words and verse at an early age. The sounds of beautiful language took root in young Luigi’s
mind, and remained with him. Later in life the architect would quote poetry with dexterous ease. Lines from Petrarch and Dante pepper his letters. Reflecting on diplomatic struggles between Rome and Spain, he mused on Petrarch: “Il mal mi preme e mi spaventa il peggio, /Al qual veggio sì larga e piana via” (My ills oppress me; I’m terrified by worse, / toward which the way is broad and smooth, I fear).16

On another occasion he urgently sought a royal dispatch of employment, and quipped “quod haec occasio calva” (from behind she is bald), which was Cato’s epigrammatic admonition to catch Fortune by her forelock before she passed.17

In addition to hearing, reciting, and memorizing such lines, Vanvitelli probably owned volumes of favorite writers’ works. He also kept notebooks in which he likely transcribed pithy quotes.18 Active readers and observers stocked their notebooks with an arsenal of quotations that they corralled into subject headings. Vanvitelli kept a special commonplace book with gold binding in his bedroom. He probably used that precious volume sparingly, and had less costly notebooks for everyday use.19

Poetry remained a constant companion in Vanvitelli’s life and library. In his correspondence he mentioned a book of Pope Urban VIII’s poetry and Lillo Giraldi’s lives of Renaissance poets. He had Giovanni Cinelli Calvoli’s collections of Florentine poetry, copies of his grandfather’s printed and manuscript works, and the poems of Pietro Metastasio. In addition, he regularly requested that opera libretti be sent to him from Rome.20

Literary pursuits required tools, and Vanvitelli kept an Italian and Latin dictionary at hand. He could use them to unlock the lyric and allusive language of poetry, as well for the more practical tasks of crafting and translating mottos for building dedications. For the foundation ceremony at Caserta, Vanvitelli translated a Latin motto sent by his friend Porzio Leonardi, and had both the original and his Italian version printed in the Dichiarazione. Indeed, his Latin and Italian were so refined that when he donated the hammer and trowel used for the ceremony to the Roman Oratory, Vanvitelli wanted to approve the inscription before it was engraved.21

Friendships with poets such as Leonardi reinforced Vanvitelli’s ties to the literary world. He maintained contact with writers throughout his life, and they named him a member of their Academy of the Arcadians in Rome. This renowned circle of artists, poets, and musicians advocated the revival of Renaissance and classical verse in hopes of conveying moral truths through beautiful language. Other architects were also members, but Vanvitelli’s association was uniquely close. The custodian of the Arcadians, Michel Giuseppe Morci, dedicated a book to him in 1764, to which the architect himself contributed a sonnet. And Vanvitelli owned volumes of poems by his fellow members, notably the court poets and opera librettists Metastasio and Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni.22 Most importantly, the attention to decorous language and good taste that the Arcadians advocated influenced both Vanvitelli’s architecture and writing. Vanvitelli believed that a building’s ornament and external form should express clearly its function.23 His lazaretto in Ancona was therefore soberly astylar, while his palace for Caserta was lavishly outfitted with columns, marble revetment, and sculpture. When writing, he similarly molded his language to achieve the proper tone for the chosen theme.

As Vanvitelli began his architectural training in Rome, he balanced the rhythm, meter, and scan of poetry with the statics and force of engineering. While his grandfather introduced him to poetry, his father, Gaspar van Wittel, exposed him to technical knowledge through hydraulics. Although van Wittel became famous as a view painter, or vedutista, when he first arrived in Rome he found work collaborating on a book on water. That treatise, L’arte di restituire à Roma la tralasciata navigatione del suo Tevere, written and published by Cornelius Meijer in 1683, proposed specific solutions for making the Tiber navigable and explained broadly applicable engineering techniques. Meijer examined currents, bends in the river, silt, and rocky outcroppings. He advised dredging parts of the river, and lifting boats over cataracts. Yet the riverbed could not contain Meijer’s interests, and his advice spilled over into ways to enhance the Piazza del Popolo, to raise Trajan’s column to street level, and to reassemble an obelisk of Augustus. Those curious about hydraulics, commerce, engineering, astrology, urban planning, obelisks, and how to identify false silver or gold coins using a glass of water would find much of interest. Vanvitelli was aware that many of the plates that accompanied Meijer’s text were by his father. He therefore knew this book better than most of his volumes; he cited specific passages and wrote of conversations he had with Meijer about the water systems and aqueducts of Rome.24

Early exposure to hydraulics proved important for Vanvitelli’s career. To supply the fountains at Caserta, he would design one of the largest aqueducts since antiquity. Constructing an aqueduct remained one of the greatest engineering challenges for early-modern architects. One of Charles Bourbon’s other court architects, Antonio Canevari, had come to Naples after he was dismissed for faulty planning of the Aguas Livres for the king of Portugal.25 Therefore, Vanvitelli engaged in an encyclopedic consultation of books and prints on hydraulics. In addition to a print of the Pont du Gard, the architect had no less than six books on channeling

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water.26 He used these volumes with critical precision, extracting specific bits of information and dismissing less important parts, and his mastery of the field was not confined to the materials in his own library. For example, although he did not own Carlo Fontana’s *Utilissimo trattato dell‘ acque correnti diviso in tre libri* (1696), he recalled it well enough to send a friend to the library of Cardinal Alessandro Albani to copy what he needed. He asked that the chapter on pipes be transcribed, with careful notes on their quantity and circumference; but the rest of the book he discounted as useless.27

Poleni matched his knowledge of hydraulics with a strategic and practical command of statics. During the eighteenth century architects had to buttress their technical assessments with greater mathematical and mechanical evidence. The demand for builders who could apply the latest mechanical knowledge bolstered the role of the engineer in the practice of architecture.28 Though Vanvitelli carried out the duties of engineer and architect, his approach to mechanics was practical rather than theoretical.

For example, he owned four books on mending cracks in St. Peter’s dome, where fissures were observed as early as the seventeenth century.29 Vanvitelli, as architect of the *Fabbrica*, examined and wrote reports on the damage and its possible causes, and supervised the repair during the 1740s in consultation with the Paduan mathematician Giovanni Poleni. Poleni and Vanvitelli’s work went against the opinions of some of Rome’s most learned scientists. At Pope Benedict XIV’s behest, the mathematician and architect published a justification of their methods, titled the *Memorie istoriche della gran cupola del tempio vaticano e de’ danni di essa, e de’ ristoramenti loro* (1748).

Poleni opens the text by reviewing the debate among scientists and architects. He scrupulously recounts their opinions and the evidence they mustered. He identifies the physicists and mathematicians they cited, and then leads the reader through this labyrinth of proposals and counterproposals with secure and balanced assessments of their merits and shortcomings. His rhetorical technique inspires confidence, and the more one reads, the more one relies on his guidance. Like Dante’s Virgil, Poleni makes himself indispensable, which enables him to convince the reader of his own conclusions.

Poleni claims that he and Vanvitelli successfully resolved the structural problems by placing chains at the base of the dome. He explains their diagnosis, and invites scrutiny by suggesting that the reader take up and consider every piece of evidence. Yet each component is framed so that logic can only lead to the conclusion that Poleni and Vanvitelli were correct.

The interplay of text and illustration helps make the cognitive process transparent. Poleni posits that “fantasy helped by Designs, and the intellect helped by Writings, should assure the proper perceptions.”30 Only with “these two lights” did Poleni believe he could reach a conclusion.31 Vanvitelli’s illustrations are therefore essential, and Poleni assigns them the same authority as textual proofs. Yet the two media needed to be altered in order to work in tandem. Written information had to be reduced to short captions that referred to specific parts of drawings, and drawings had to be as clear as the text, sacrificing purely artistic qualities. Poleni therefore instructed Vanvitelli to redraw his painterly illustrations for the *Memorie istoriche*, draining their chiaroscuro to leave behind contours of skeletal clarity (Figure 3).32 Vanvitelli met the need for greater mechanical information through detailed survey drawings, but he relied on Poleni to justify their approach, revealing his limited knowledge of mathematics.

Equally important, the integration of image and text in the *Memorie istoriche* shaped the way Vanvitelli subsequently approached book illustrations. When reading books dominated by images, he desired a text. When composing the *Dichiarazione* he united both components in common cause. While Vanvitelli admired Poleni’s melding of text and illustration, he disagreed with the way the mathematician promoted discussion and gave dissenting opinions.33 In his own publication, he rejected multiple voices in favor of a clear theme.

The other books on math and science in Vanvitelli’s collection reflect both professional needs and general interests. He owned books of geometry, requisite for all architects. He gave one volume on that subject to his young sons, and had probably learned from such a book himself at an early age.34 More adventurous was a book on Isaac Newton’s theories. Since Vanvitelli would have struggled to understand Newton’s difficult prose and theorems, he urgently requested that his brother ship to him an Italian translation of Henry Pemberton’s “clear exposition” of Newton’s philosophy, which he wrongly believed to contain the text of Newton’s *Optics*. Thanks to the accessible mediation of writers like Pemberton, Newton had revolutionized thinking in fields well beyond optics and calculus. His theories permeated European intellectual life, and Naples, home to Newton advocates like Celestino Galiani, was one of the centers for Newtonian thought during Vanvitelli’s time.35

Optical observation was one of Vanvitelli’s principal scientific interests. He was the son of a *vedutista* who was known as Gaspar “degli Occhiali” for wearing spectacles and possibly using a camera obscura.36 Like his father’s paintings, Vanvitelli’s architecture exploited perspectival effects, and the *Dichiarazione* would include two *vedute* of Caserta. Vanvitelli’s gaze extended to the heavens as well.
He had remodeled the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome with its famous astronomical meridian line (1700–1721), and perhaps because of that experience became interested in the positions of the sun and stars. He owned Eustachio Manfredi’s books that recorded observations using a meridian in Bologna, and mined them for data recorded between 1740 and 1745. He was also interested in medical writings, as his manuscript copy of Felice Roseti’s report on the Ospedale degli Incurabili in Naples attests.

Despite owning these books, Vanvitelli was not an architect cum scientist like Christopher Wren, Claude Perrault, or François Blondel. He revealed much when he discounted the abilities of a particular group of military engineers by stating that “[they] know as much about Architecture as I do of Astronomy or differential calculus.” He engaged the scientific milieu of his time only generally; with the exception of adopting the language of medical texts when writing a report of the Ospedale degli Incurabili, Vanvitelli did not turn to science to help him design.

History would be more influential. Vanvitelli’s era was marked by sharply divided opinions on history and its role. Antiquarians interested in reconstructing the past came under increasing fire from philosophes seeking solutions to present-day problems. At the same time, querelles erupted over the virtues of ancient over modern artistic accomplishments. And in architecture the acceptance of ancient Roman examples faced criticism from champions of Greek art. Vanvitelli owned books on both Greece and Rome, and while he respected history, he ultimately believed that modern monuments surpassed those of the past.
Vanvitelli’s father had been renowned for his historical erudition, and his grandfather was expert in the annals of the church. Lorenzani wrote accounts of various conclaves, crafted a series of medallions representing the popes, and wrote a twenty-two volume *Giornali ossia Annali dei Pontefici Romani* now in the Vatican Library. Unsurprisingly Vanvitelli owned Giuseppe Orsi’s meticulous *Della storia ecclesiastica* (1744–62), which in twenty-one volumes had only reached the sixth century, as well as Giovanni Francesco Caccioni’s *Roma sacra, e moderna* (1725). In addition to inheriting Lorenzani’s papal medallions, Vanvitelli owned two volumes by Filippo Buonanni on papal numismatic history from the time of Pope Martin V to the end of the seventeenth century. He respected the architecture of papal Rome, and his buildings were largely inspired by deep study of the city’s past, from Bramante to Bernini. Vanvitelli’s love of history also helped him design within the context of older structures. He would shore up the royal palace in Naples without altering its sixteenth-century appearance, add a bell tower to the sanctuary of Loreto that echoed its Renaissance façade, and make Gothic style designs for the façade of Milan’s cathedral.

Deeply familiar with the history of the church, Vanvitelli kept up with recent events in Rome through the Chracas family’s *Diario ordinarium*. The *Diario* was a weekly journal that placed international news alongside reports about the aristocracy and city. Like the *Gazzetta di Napoli*, which Vanvitelli also read, it was a semiofficial government mouthpiece that detailed with relish the pomp of festivities. For better reports on the territorial conflicts that played out across Europe, Vanvitelli supplemented Italian sources with journals from Holland and Switzerland. This crowding of local and global events, along with court gossip and royal reports, immersed Vanvitelli in a soup of popular and elite news. The architect’s letters reflect a voracious appetite for all types of reports, and he mentions specific events such as Frederick II’s military victories in Silesia. Major happenings in the artistic world were also reported in newspapers, and by reading them Vanvitelli could keep abreast of rivals’ works and see himself as part of the Continent’s community of artists. Familiarity with journalistic practices made him aware that word of Caserta would spread across Europe, which would amplify its renown, but he also knew that inaccurate descriptions and reports were to be expected. Vanvitelli, along with the king and queen, therefore regarded the *Dichiarazione* as a tool to shape the perception and reception of the palace.

Vanvitelli’s interest in geopolitics was not governed solely by his professional ambition. He mapped and charted all manner of international events. Reading about the French loss of Pondicherry in 1761, the architect likely used a world map that he owned to locate the Indian colony. For happenings in Rome, he could consult Giovanni Battista Nolli’s *Pianta Grande* (1748), which he had bought from the engraver. Equally precise was Roger Boscovich and Christopher Mair’s carefully surveyed map of the Papal States from Rome to Rimini. Vanvitelli knew Boscovich and he owned a copy of the map and likely had the book that accompanied it. In the book Boscovich and Mair meticulously described their surveying: their tools, techniques, and the physical challenges of scaling mountains and weathering sudden storms. Their story informed Vanvitelli about the difficulties of plotting a course over difficult terrain, which would help him when he planned Caserta’s aqueduct. He therefore made cartography an integral part of his planning.

Despite interest in all things Roman, Vanvitelli mentioned few books on religion. His letters note the complete works of the ascetic preacher Paolo Segneri, a book of John Chrysostom’s theology, and a commentary on St. Paul’s Epistles. Perhaps he owned unrecorded titles on the subject, because he maintained close ties to the church. His brother Urban was priest at San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, two of his sons would become tonsured men of the cloth, and the architect donated the ceremonial trowel used for the foundation ceremony at Caserta to the Oratorians. While other architects, such as Bernini, also had surprisingly few religious books, Vanvitelli’s residence in Naples may help explain the limited number. Criticism of Rome escalated during Vanvitelli’s life, and anticlerical sentiment ran high at the Neapolitan court. This context is reflected in the architect seeking a license to read banned books and his ownership of several anti-Jesuit pamphlets. Many educated Italians sought such licenses and had similar books, including the architect Alessandro Galilei. After waiting a considerable time for official permission, Vanvitelli contemplated foregoing the license since Neapolitans “read whatever they please as if they were in London, Holland, Geneva, etc.” Enforcement of the Index was less vigorous in Naples. Censored titles such as Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* were first translated into Italian there, and the “paper war” over the Jesuit order reached its peak in the 1760s with southern Italy a primary battleground. Roman bookseller Nicola Pagliarini would eventually be exiled to Naples for his active promotion of anti-Jesuit propaganda, and Vanvitelli’s friendship with Pagliarini may explain why he requested such pamphlets. Regardless of his motivation, Vanvitelli did not follow the church’s guidelines on books.

Vanvitelli owned many books of ancient history, including Plutarch and Xenophon. The titles are not unusual, but his familiarity with some of them was deep. He knew Livy well enough to incorporate episodes from his *Roman History* in the *Dichiarazione*, and could quote episodes from
lesser-known Greek historians, albeit in Latin. In addition, at Clement XI’s behest, he copied some of the illuminations from the Vatican Library’s Carolingian manuscript of Terence, which appeared in a printed edition in 1736 (Figure 4). He must have read the text between periods of copying illustrations, since he quoted the *Heauton Timorumenos* on another occasion. Ancient history and literature may have shared a shelf in Vanvitelli’s library with books on classical art. Most of the nine titles on art that he mentioned treated monuments in Rome, such as the obelisk of Augustus and the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Owning such books did not change Vanvitelli’s preference for modern art over ancient works. Proud that his royal palace rivaled Roman imperial residences, Vanvitelli took Johann Joachim Winckelmann to Caserta for three days during the scholar’s stay in Naples rather than visit ancient monuments.

Nor did Vanvitelli share Winckelmann’s opinions on Greek art, even as he bought books on it. He never copied the architectural orders from the first volume of Stuart and Revett’s *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762), which he owned. This volume and John Wood’s *The Ruins of Palmyra, otherwise Tadmor, in the Desert* (1753) were among the few volumes he had on art of the eastern Mediterranean. The latter was expensive, and Charles’s First Secretary of State purchased the volume for him. Another obstacle for Vanvitelli was that the book was in English. He knew Latin, French, and presumably some Dutch from his father. When he hoped to follow the king to Spain in 1759, he picked up a primer of Spanish grammar and predicted he could easily acquire the tongue. His ease with languages placed him in league with a handful of polyglot architects including Christopher Wren, Nicodemus Tessin the Younger, and his own son-in-law Francesco Sabatini. English, however, was impossible, and Vanvitelli instructed his brother to insert blank sheets between each page of Wood’s text before it was bound so that he could have someone translate it into either French or Italian to make it “completely useful to me.” By insisting on access to both text and image Vanvitelli followed the lessons learned from Poleni, but ironically went against Wood’s professed aim. The Englishman wanted “in the RUINS OF PALMYRA, [to] refer our reader almost entirely to the plates, where his information will be more full and less circumstantial, as well as less tedious and confused, that could be conveyed by the happiest precision of language.” Yet Vanvitelli could not divorce reading illustrations and reading words, even at the author’s insistence.

Similar to viewing art required knowledge of its history. Vanvitelli had many biographies of artists including Lione Pascoli’s *Vite de’ pittori, scultori, ed architetti moderni* (1730–36) and Raffaele Soprani’s lives of Genoese painters. He never mentioned Giorgio Vasari’s *Vite* but noted his “dialogues,” or the *Ragionamenti sopra le invenzioni da lui dipinte in Firenze nel palazzo di Loro Altezze Serenissime* (second edition, 1762). In this book, which the author framed as a discussion between himself and Grand Duke Francesco I, Vasari explained the decorative program for the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. By unpacking complex allegories of just rule, Vasari gave an example to Vanvitelli, who would likewise...
describe the political dimensions of his decorations for the king's palace at Caserta in the Dichiarazione.

If Medici Florence provided him with programmatic models, so too did Bourbon France. Vanvitelli owned a history of Louis XIV's reign, and demonstrated a keen interest in the sun king's patronage. He mentioned a book by Félibien, but did not specify the title or whether it was by André or his son Jean-François. Based on Vanvitelli's physical description of two quarto-sized volumes, the book may have been André's *Des principes de l’architecture, de la sculpture, de la peinture, et des autres arts qui en dépendent* (1676), which contained a dictionary of architectural terms in the second volume. The theoretician André Félibien had fashioned himself Louis XIV's advocate on all artistic matters. His role at the court of must have resonated with Vanvitelli, since the architect often offered opinions on subjects from painting to archaeology for the sun king's descendant in Naples. Moreover, Félibien published a guidebook for the palace and grounds of Versailles, a volume with direct bearing on Vanvitelli's publication of Caserta in the *Dichiarazione*.59

To position himself as the Félibien of Naples, Vanvitelli avidly collected images of French buildings. He had the Grand Marot, probably in Mariette's reprint, with its illustrations of the Louvre, Versailles, the Tuileries, and Bernini's proposals for the Louvre, as well as Mariette’s additional volume with the Trianon and Orangerie at Versailles. Owning books on French architecture did not alter his tastes. Like Bernini, Vanvitelli admired Poussin but was unappreciative of designs that departed from Italian, and specifically Roman, precedents.60 He criticized the east façade of the Louvre, stating that its columns were ornamental and that it lacked windows. At one point he wrote that he would stop buying books on French buildings since “it is clear to me that the French will never do anything good in architecture.”61

Nor did any other northern European country seem capable of producing structures of merit. Examining them in prints, he judged Tessin's Royal Palace in Stockholm to be slavishly imitative of Bernini's Palazzo Chigi. David Häusser's Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen looked as if a lady or an adolescent designed it. And Gaetano Chiaveri's Hofkirche in Dresden was simply the “worst modern building in Europe.”62 Looking was not always an exercise in appreciation, and in these instances engravings allowed the architect to glance across the Continent at his competitors in order to reassure himself that none came close to his accomplishment.

Vanvitelli seems to have been more interested in the modes of producing and publishing art under Louis XIV than in the works of art themselves. At Colbert's prompting, the French court had embarked on an ambitious program to glorify Louis XIV's patronage of the arts and sciences in print.63 When crafting the *Dichiarazione*, Vanvitelli and the Neapolitan court sought to rival the quality of these volumes from France's golden age. Among the most famous was Claude Perrault's edition of Vitruvius. Despite his disdain for French buildings, Vanvitelli exchanged an older edition he owned for Perrault's version. Lavishly printed and scrupulously annotated, it was the finest Vitruvius edition of its day. Holding the book, Vanvitelli could feel the high quality of its paper, scrutinize its engravings, and delight in its elegant typography. On the title page he could admire the buildings Perrault built in Paris: the triumphal arch of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the east façade of the Louvre, and the Paris Observatoire. He must have aspired to leave a similar mark on Charles Bourbon's Naples, both in stone and on paper.64

In addition to Perrault's editorial polish, Vanvitelli probably approved of the Frenchman's argument that Vitruvius's theory should support rather than guide practice. Rules were needed to justify proportion and beauty, and lacking a Cartesian “positive reason,” Perrault maintained that Vitruvius established conventions.65 Vanvitelli turned to Vitruvius in a similar way. When considering the foundations for the mole of Ancona, Vanvitelli justified his structural approach by citing Vitruvius. His recall of details from the treatise proved so thorough that when Ferdinando Galiani began to craft an annotated translation of it, he consulted with Vanvitelli.66 Yet the architect did not share Galiani’s antiquarian enthusiasm for the Roman author. He stated: “The theories of Vitruvius are great, but not applicable in all cases: and let’s speak honestly, privately between us, and without Vitruvian posturing, the cases are rare in which his theories can be adapted.”67 Vanvitelli's respect for classical models and authors did not supersede his value of practical solutions or his awareness of contemporary context.

Vitruvius spoke French in Vanvitelli’s library, but most of his architecture books were Italian. These included Francesco Borromini’s *Opus architectonicum* (1725), Guarino Guarini’s *Architettura civile* (1737), and Filippo Juvarra’s plans of the church of San Filippo in Turin.68 Vanvitelli admired these Italian predecessors, but did not entirely embrace their exuberant baroque style. Early in his career he would loosely model the counter-façade of Sant’Agostino in Siena on the façade of Borromini’s San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane. Yet twenty years later, when comparing his work to prints of Juvarra’s buildings, Vanvitelli thanked God that he was an architect “of less fire but more order.”69 Given his preference for a more deliberate and studied approach, one might suppose that Vanvitelli would find guidance in books of architectural theory. He owned treatises by Giovanni Battista Montano, Andrea Palladio, and Sebastiano Serlio. Yet Vanvitelli treated Serlio and Palladio as he did Vitruvius. They
provided justification rather than inspiration for his thinking, and he inserted them as strategic footnotes into explanations of his designs.70

Most of these treatises merely helped Vanvitelli sharpen his rhetoric, but Vignola’s *Regola delle cinque ordini d’architettura* (1562) underpinned his training as an architect. He owned multiple copies, and set aside one for his sons to use.71 Vignola’s treatise stood at the headwaters of architectural training, teaching the orders of columns and a proportional system for adapting them to any architectural circumstance. It instructed with images, and since it did not require “the great bother of reading,” it provided an easy point of entry for Vanvitelli’s children. As he had done, the architect instructed his sons to look at Vignola’s plates and draw its images.72 Vanvitelli also had his sons copy prints of the Carracci frescoes in Palazzo Farnese, drawings from the Accademia del Nudo on the Capitoline, and life studies by Marco Benefial and Pierre Le Gros the Younger.73 By copying, his sons mnemonicly encoded systems and exempa that would serve them throughout their careers. Such imitation was a staple of architectural training, particularly in the academies of Italy and France.74 Although an academy had been founded in Naples in 1752, Vanvitelli pulled books from his own shelf to create a curriculum for his children.

Copying architectural treatises had set the cornerstones of his career, and Vanvitelli copied from other books for specific needs.75 To design sculptures for the gardens of Caserta, he turned for guidance to the first two volumes of the *Museo Capitolino* (1741–59).76 He found models for an escutcheon for the Foro Carolino in Naples in Juvarya’s *Raccolta di Targhe* (1721). Portable and practical, Juvarya’s book accompanied Vanvitelli to the worksite. There he showed it to the sculptor Tommaso Solari and loaned him the book so that he could carve the coat of arms properly. The book went missing, and Vanvitelli accused Solari of failing to return it.77

At times Vanvitelli did not copy illustrations, but emulated them. Many drawings from his youth reveal him racing through variations on the angled stage sets illustrated in Ferdinando Galli-Bibiena’s *L’architettura civile* (1711). Although not documented in his collection, Vanvitelli did own a drawing by Bibiena, and it is clear from the large-scale arched openings, Solomonic columns, and angled perspectives in these sketches that Vanvitelli improvised with the Bolognese stage designer’s works in mind.78 This early absorption of Galli-Bibiena’s style had a dramatic effect on his architecture. The upper vestibule of the royal palace at Caserta is a permanent embodiment of the angled piers and oblique viewpoints that appeared in the *L’architettura civile*.

Whether copying, assimilating, citing, or rejecting what he read, Vanvitelli was always an active reader. Architecture books gave him foundational knowledge at the beginning of his career and supplied him with occasional technical solutions and ornamental motifs at its height. Like Tessin the Younger, he used books to recall works in Rome. However, books did not dictate Vanvitelli’s designs, nor did architectural theory guide his practice.79 Instead a sense of architectural propriety, inspired by ideas of poetic decorum that he learned from his family and friends, accompanied Vanvitelli throughout his career. In a century engulfed by questions of architectural decorum, Vanvitelli did not draw ideas from theoreticians like Boiffand, Blondel, or Laugier, but from his familiarity with literary works.80 This led him to produce designs of unprecedented variety: the severe lazaretto of Ancona (1732–43), Gothic designs for Milan Cathedral (1745), and the baroque interior of the Santissima Annunziata in Naples (begun 1757).

Vanvitelli’s library also reveals much about his activity as a courtier, an artistic advisor to the king, a friend, and a father. In order to be conversant at court, he stocked his shelves with books from all subjects. To offer an opinion on artifacts from Herculaneum, he needed multiple volumes on antiquity. He requested books of poetry from members of the Arcadian Academy in order to maintain ties with friends in Rome. And he purchased prints and books for his sons to copy so that they could become accomplished architects. In Naples Vanvitelli’s library expanded to meet his broadening responsibilities.

Few architects of the period from 1400 to 1800 knew history or poetry as well as Vanvitelli. Nicolas Hawksmoor was as deeply engaged in church history.81 Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, Julien-David Le Roy, Robert Adam, and Giovanni Battista Piranesi likely knew antiquity better. And John Vanbrugh, a playwright turned architect, undoubtedly had a keen command of literature.82 Yet none left behind as much documentation on how they used their books. Vanvitelli stands unique in the historical record, a singular representative of how learned early-modern architects interacted with the printed page.

**Borrowing, Lending, and Commenting**

Delinquent borrowers, like the sculptor Solari, did not diminish Vanvitelli’s willingness to lend. Inspired by his grandfather’s generosity toward him, Vanvitelli was always liberal with his books. In addition to loaning books to collaborators, Vanvitelli shipped a box of books to his daughter in Madrid, where they presumably found their way into the library of her husband, Francesco Sabatini.83 These books may have been gifts from Vanvitelli’s own shelves since, on another occasion, his son took five books when he packed for Spain.84
Vanvitelli did not always reach for his personal collection when presenting books as gifts. He knew the best dealers in Rome, and had his brother constantly trawling shops for the latest volumes. Urbano directed a steady flow of printed material to Naples to fill the needs of Luigi, as well as of his friends. He shipped copies of Nolli’s map of Rome, destined for court officials, procured a book on French gardening for a Neapolitan nobleman, and sometimes received books from Luigi with instructions to take them to the architect’s contacts in Rome.84 This book exchange was important because Naples, while home of a robust publishing industry, did not produce the same high-quality works on art and architecture that were printed in Rome. Vanvitelli augmented his library and acquired books on behalf of others from the German bookseller on the Corso, from French vendors near San Marcello, from the Calcografia papale, and from his friend Nicola Pagliarini’s printing shop near the Pasquino.85

Neapolitan friends trusted Vanvitelli’s counsel on the quality of books. The architect knew the touch of fine paper and had a sharp eye for skillful engraving. He voiced only tepid approval for Giuseppe Vasi’s etchings because of their inconsistent quality. Despite his original desire to have Vasi engrave the Dichiarazione, he came to prefer the clearer contours of Carlo Nolli. He also greatly admired the talent of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, and wrote him directly to request copies of his suites of etchings.86

If high-quality execution was important, accurate content was essential. False or erroneous information needled Vanvitelli, and the inaccuracies in Giovanni Gaetano Bottari’s Dialoghi sopra le tre arti del disegno (1754) enraged him. The author was a learned and skilled polemicist who was librarian to the Corsini family. His position and reputation made him one of the most important voices on art in Rome. Equal parts antiquarian and critic, Bottari called for preservation of ancient and Renaissance monuments and advocated an austere and rational style. He felt that the best architects were not trained as such, but came to the field instinctively after a firm grounding in drawing, or disegno. Bottari thus betrayed his roots in Tuscany, where disegno had been the cornerstone of Florentine art theory since the Renaissance.88

Vanvitelli distrusted Bottari for his prejudices and discounted his theories of architecture. He bristled at the writer’s evident favor for Florentines, both living and dead, including his championing of Vanvitelli’s Tuscan rival, Ferdinando Fuga. But his greatest anger was triggered when Bottari directly attacked Vanvitelli’s work.

In 1748 the Carthusian monks asked Vanvitelli to remodel their church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, which Michelangelo had formed within the baths of Diocletian in the 1560s.89 The famed Florentine had respected the immensity of the Roman baths, merely adding a deep choir to the east and two vestibules to the north and south. Admiring the power of its volume, he left the interior unadorned. Vanvitelli was asked to ornament it. He backed the existing colossal columns with polished marble pilasters, and connected them with a continuous entablature. He added segmental gables over the arched openings and stucco decorations to the thermal windows. To strengthen the spatial harmony of the church and increase the focus on the main altar, he closed Michelangelo’s northern and southern entrances and walled up four spaces opening off the sides of the transept.90

A number of critics and architects felt uncomfortable with the changes. Bottari hated every aspect of them, and unleashed his venomous prose in the Dialoghi. Among other faults, he accused Vanvitelli of exercising “an impudence so excessive that it maims such a great original thought, and so singular a one from Buonarrotti, by making . . . [a] hundred monstruosities that it would take too long to list them.”91 His stinging words alarmed other architects, who felt the attack unfair since Vanvitelli would likely not print a response.92 Unlike Piranesi, who relished printed quarrels, Vanvitelli avoided them.93 Yet he did fight back, albeit quietly. Picking up his pen, he emended his own copy of the Dialoghi (now lost) by noting Bottari’s errors.94 Vanvitelli’s rejoinders can easily be reconstructed from his letters. Uninformed about the original plan, subsequent interventions, and recent use, Bottari had wildly condemned him for changes that he did not make. The walling up of ancillary spaces had begun before Vanvitelli began work, and the doors to the north and south had already fallen out of use. However, Vanvitelli did not claim to have been piously respectful of Buonarroti. He pointed out that even if Michelangelo (“or Archimedes or Vitruvius”) did build the church, an architect’s renown did not excuse the plan’s manifest lack of symmetry.95

Vanvitelli did not put down his pen with these comments. He wrote remarks in the margins throughout his copy, pointing out Bottari’s missteps and glaring lack of practical experience. Theory and criticism had to be backed up with practice, and he sought to expose Bottari as someone who “wants to look like he is an expert in everything while he actually knows nothing; he seeks wonders where there are not any, does not understand Architecture, yet wants to talk about it.”96

Although he did not publish his counterattack, Vanvitelli showed his annotated copy to powerful friends in Naples. To make his criticisms known to a wider audience he procured an additional copy, duplicated his handwritten commentary, and sent it to his brother in Rome.97 Urbano could disseminate Luigi’s response beneath Bottari’s nose.
Vanvitelli waged a hushed battle, telling his brother to allow Nicola Pagliarini to read his comments, but cautioning him not to let Pagliarini have the copy lest the bookseller print his postili. Although campaigning without the aid of print, by May of 1757 Vanvitelli could claim that he felt vindicated both in Rome and Naples.

Emulating the Caracci who had furiously emended Vasari’s Lives to note the Florentine bias of the author in the margins of their copy, Vanvitelli unmasked the campanilismo of Bottari. Such conversations and debates, recorded on the edges of pages, gave Vanvitelli’s books a living role in his creative and professional process and among a community of readers and friends. His reading and collecting took place in the spirited concourse of Neapolitan and Roman literati, among whom books were shared.

Vanvitelli in the Printing House

As Vanvitelli read and exchanged books, he was learning about the complex and collaborative efforts required to make them. Charles had founded the Stamperia reale in Naples to publish the discoveries emerging from Herculaneum. Rather than rush these magnificent frescoes, sculptures, and objects to print, the court thought to collect and publish them systematically in a lavish multivolume series.

Ottavio Bayardi was called from Parma to coordinate a team of antiquarians, artists, and engravers. Frustratingly slow, Bayardi further displeased the court by composing a tedious five-volume prologue. Eventually the king dismissed him and established a fifteen-member Accademia Ercolanese, with minister Bernardo Tanucci at its head, to produce a new multivolume publication titled Delle antichità di Ercolano (1757–92). While no more rapid than Bayardi, the academicians ensured accurate illustrations and correct interpretations. To make certain that none preempted the academy’s official publication, Charles severely restricted access to the finds until they appeared in the Antichità. This tight control and slow pace of publication angered antiquarians and prompted Winckelmann to write an attack on the excavations.

The king knew that the siren city’s many presses could not produce the quality of books the court desired, but only in 1748 did he establish the Stamperia palatina, which in 1749 became the Stamperia reale. Charles recognized that the success of the press would depend upon the collaboration of many. He had ministers procure movable type from Venice and Holland, and commissioned Roman-trained type founders to cast Hebrew and Greek letters. He set up a school for engraving near his palace at Portici. Nor was he beyond pressing others to assist. In 1752 Raimondo di Sangro, Prince of Sansevero, was forced to sell his personal press to the crown. This remarkable machine, capable of printing in multiple colors, had produced Sansevero’s interesting and entertaining book on the meaning of Incan quipu.

Vanvitelli helped this endeavor, procuring the finest paper and inspecting the engravings and impressions. As the first volume of the Antichità neared completion, the king asked him to design the capital letters that opened each chapter. Common features of fine books, iniziali parlanti depicted a letter on a square ground backed by an acrophonic depiction. Long associated with architects, these letters were part of the earliest published architectural treatises. Indeed, in 1683 Joseph Moxon had argued that initial letters should be designed on Vitruvian principles of proportion with an architect supervising their design.

Vanvitelli’s letters embodied architectural rigor (Figure 5). As Giulio Pane suggested, the architect probably derived his typography from the inscription on the base of Trajan’s column, which he could have copied from a book on the monument that he owned. To enhance their elegance and delicacy, Vanvitelli added curved serifs to these exempla, and with painterly care integrated each letter with its vignette. Bunches of grapes (uva) sag into the cradling U, the outstretched wing of an eagle (aquila) reinforces the A’s upward sweep, and the C encircles a crown (corona) (Figure 6).
In addition to these iniziali parlanti, the king asked Vanvitelli to design an appropriate frieze for the opening page of the Antichità. Drawing on his father’s career as a vedutista, Vanvitelli displayed an erupting Vesuvius spewing ash skyward and loosing streams of lava on the towns below (see Figure 6). While he could have modeled this veduta on one painted by his father, he had described and sketched such an eruption himself in 1754.111 The engraving emphasizes the volcano’s ferocity, which Vanvitelli heightened by setting the scene at night when bolts of lightning and streams of lava punctuated the darkness. The care he lavished on these small details helped make the volumes of the Antichità some of the finest books of the century, and the experience helped prepare him for the crafting of the Dichiarazione.

The Dichiarazione described in both word and image the vast royal palace that Vanvitelli designed for Charles and Maria Amalia in 1751 and built from 1752 until his death in 1773. The architect wrote the text, supervised the engravings, and organized them into a coherent whole. His creativity guided the book at every stage, and he thought himself its author.112 Yet authorship during the eighteenth century was a complex concept.113 The adventures of Tristram Shandy, Lemuel Gulliver, and Tom Jones were all published without mentioning Sterne, Swift, or Fielding. The eighteenth-century author was often not a single person, particularly in the case of lavish court publications such as the Dichiarazione. Monarchs, court ministers, artists, and engravers all contributed to such books, and Naples was no exception.114 Vanvitelli shepherded the Dichiarazione to completion, yet the king insisted that details be added, Minister Bernardo Tanucci reviewed his text, and engravers made copper plates of his drawings.115 Indeed, Vanvitelli only made the Dichiarazione at the monarchs’ request. In January of 1752 they asked him to have engravings made of his designs so that they could send them to the queen’s father, the king of Poland.116 The architect’s suite of drawings, presented in December 1751, corresponds exactly with the book’s illustrations.117 To engrave these designs, the monarchs dispatched intaglio masters from Portici. They authorized the use of expensive imperial folio sheets, making the plates among the largest architecture engravings of the century. They gave the Dichiarazione priority at the royal press, and it would precede the long-awaited Antichità by a few months. And Charles himself was present to inspect the first pages in a gesture that recalled Lorenzo de’ Medici receiving the first printed sheets of Alberti’s De re aedificatoria.118 Given the effort and expense of the court, the king ordered that all copies of the prints be under tight control until the complete book could be sent to courts throughout Europe.119

Despite Vanvitelli’s awareness that the Dichiarazione was a court publication and the product of a collaborative process, he sharply insisted the book was his. He resented the court’s control over the list of those who would receive copies, and thought Tanucci, who regulated the shipment of the books took complete credit for the Dichiarazione.120 None of this friction emerges in its pages. Charles and Maria Amalia are heralded in large cursive letters on the title page and lauded throughout the text. Vanvitelli is noted for having invented and drawn each plate, but beyond these requisite mentions, the architect saw his name only at the end of the dedication, where he is “the most humble, most devoted, most obsequious servant and subject, Luigi Vanvitelli.”121

Vanvitelli’s authorial pride must therefore be balanced with the fact that the monarchs made the most important decisions about the Dichiarazione. They wanted their palace to surpass all others in Europe and desired a book that would stand out among similar publications.122 In addition
to lavish folios from the reign of Louis XIV, they likely examined Girolamo Tezi’s monograph on the Palazzo Barberini (1642) and marveled at Jean Marot’s exhaustive visual presentation of the Château Richelieu (1660). Monographs on German princes’ commissions also must have provided models, including books by Salomon Kleiner on the Lustschloss Favorite (1726), Schloss Weißenstein (1728), Schloss Seehof (1731), and the Hofbibliothek of Vienna (1737). In addition, the views from Paul Decker’s imaginative Fürstlicher Baumeister (1711–16) might have provided some representational models. Above all, Matthäus Daniel Pöppelmann’s book on the Zwinger in Dresden (1729) was most relevant because the Dichiarazione was born from the sovereigns’ desire to send it to that court.

Although larger in format than all of these books, the Dichiarazione is organized in a similar manner. It is divided into a dedication, a description of the territory and foundation ceremony, and an explanation of the plates followed by the images themselves. An engraved title page precedes the entire work. The wording of the title is unprecedented for a book of architecture. Some architectural books announced that they would establish rules or provide instructions with words such as regola or istruzioni. Considerably more volumes incorporated the word “treatise,” or trattato, while a few indicated they would be collections or catalogs of works—raccolta or opere. None used a word so pregnant with possible meanings as dichiarazione. This implies both a declaration and a clarification, suggesting that the book proclaims and explains, or perhaps proclaims by explaining, since understanding the plans would increase admiration.

The book opens with a dedication to the sovereigns. The artful flattery of dedications was difficult to craft. Samuel Johnson, who excelled in this “courly species of composition,” often wrote them for others. Vanvitelli composed his own flattering language by modeling his text on the Narrazione delle solenni reali feste (1749), which described and illustrated the festivities held after the birth of the royal heir. Similar to the opening lines of the Narrazione, Vanvitelli’s dedication states that the Dichiarazione will increase the renown of the monarchs. Likening the book to a mirror, he declares that the king and queen will admire their grandeur in its pages. He goes on to state that their works equal those of the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. Vanvitelli’s grandiloquence fits the ambition of his architecture. The royal palace at Caserta would be the largest built since antiquity, and would indeed rival those of Roman emperors. His language, by mimicking the celebratory language of the Narrazione, associates itself with the standard rhetoric that magnified the artistic achievements of Bourbon rule in Naples. Indeed, he states in the dedication that the Dichiarazione should complement other texts that celebrated his sovereigns’ grandeur. Vanvitelli’s desire to augment the older books that celebrated the monarchy must have been inspired by Colbert’s printing campaign for Louis XIV, which likewise aimed to create a corpus of publications that glorified the king.

His dedication is also strikingly similar in length, tone, and the use of historical comparisons to Pöppelmann’s book on the Zwinger in Dresden, and seems crafted to reflect a Bourbon-Wettin alliance. Indeed, an engraved frieze of their combined coats of arms precedes the dedication (Figure 7). Vanvitelli claimed that it was one of the most difficult parts of the book to design. He united two curving escutcheons bearing the king and queen’s respective Bourbon and Wettin crests. Above the escutcheons putti support a sheltering mantle. Laurel, palm fronds, roses, and lilies surround them, while a twining acanthus envelops the entire frieze. Vanvitelli
began the dedication with a finely crafted capital letter, not acrophonic, but depicting, “a town with Architecture, Fountains, and things that correlate with the work.”

Vanvitelli’s preoccupation with properly representing the monarchs continues in the following section of the book, which opens with an engraving of the foundation medal, bearing portraits of Charles and Maria Amalia on the verso (Figure 8). The medal depicts the palace on its recto, foreshadowing a description of the palace’s foundation ceremony in the following text. Yet before describing the ceremony, Vanvitelli tapped his knowledge of ancient authors to write a history of the site. Caserta was originally a sacred grove of Diana, he reports, but the chaste goddess could not prevent retreating Romans from camping there in the Second Samnite War, or keep Hannibal from establishing headquarters in the area when he raised a siege of nearby Capua. Vanvitelli relied on Livy for these details, and he also consulted his friend Leonardi, who edited the text and provided insight into the area’s mythological past.

Vanvitelli then recounts the foundation ceremony of 20 January 1752. He vividly details each moment: the soldiers marking the plan of the future palace, the blessing of the site by the papal nuncio, the laying of the first stone by Charles, the salvos of gunfire, the cheering of people, and the music that accompanied the event. The reader can easily imagine the ceremony and become a virtual bystander. To produce this account, which is more extended and detailed than those in similar books, Vanvitelli likely combined his own observations with the reportage of newspapers and a printed program of the ceremony issued by the court.

The description of the ceremony constitutes a second foundation for the palace, reaffirming the sovereigns’ commitment to finishing the edifice. Vanvitelli boasts of the rapid pace of construction in the Dichiarazione, noting that the foundations were complete by 19 June. This clever dovetailing of physical and printed foundations must have deeply pleased the monarchs. Bernardo Tanucci also approved the text, and lauded Vanvitelli for his clarity and brevity.

Vanvitelli was succinct in his explanation of the plates. While preparing the accompanying text, he called it an index, and it lists the functions of rooms and describes decorative features. Far briefer than Vasari or Tezi, Vanvitelli explicated the symbolism of ornaments on the façade, in the central vestibule, and around the principal staircase in a manner similar to Fischer von Erlach in his book on the Hofbibliothek of Vienna. He expanded upon the themes of royal grandeur set out in the dedication, describing, for example, how a statue representing Royal Majesty communicated the monarch’s far-reaching knowledge and complete command of his subjects.

Vanvitelli surpassed his peers in arranging plates with a clear visual logic. He knew how to impress patrons with suites of drawings, and he had earlier convinced the king and queen to approve the final designs of Caserta by framing and displaying them against a crimson velvet backdrop. He had also witnessed the rhetorical power of carefully arrayed engravings when working with Poleni, and likely noted the merits and drawbacks of the order of plates in other books of architecture. Like most volumes on royal palaces, the Dichiarazione began with plans, proceeded through elevations, and finally presented sections. Perspective views, which many authors inserted near the beginning of books, were withheld until the end of the Dichiarazione. This arrangement was designed to educate without confusion, for while one may wish to flip back to situate each new part in relation to what came before, the reader is not distracted by vedute from a methodical progress through the palace.

The architect opens with a plan that situates the structure on the site. The rectangular palace stands at the head of vast gardens, and fronts a new city whose avenues radiate from it. Turning the page draws the reader down to the ground floor to examine the entry corridor, lower vestibule,
and offices of court ministers. On the next page one ascends to the piano nobile, containing the royal apartments and chapel (Figure 9). Vanvitelli uses the text and image to walk the reader through four enfilades designated for the king, queen, crown prince, and crown princess, noting the ceremonial role of each room. Much like Borromini in his Opus, Vanvitelli also reveals rooms hidden to visitors.136 His plates show secret corridors and staircases that allow servants to pass unseen between rooms. In the fourth plate Vanvitelli exposes the warren of small chambers on the upper floor where servants and court officials resided.

From this focused reading of plans the reader’s attention must then shift to the elevations. Vanvitelli presented the street façade first, followed by the garden front. He then sliced open the structure with four sections. The first cuts laterally through the courtyards, while the second, on the same east-west axis, lays open the central arm of the structure with its elaborate stair hall and chapel.137 Views of the cellars were added to this section at the king’s suggestion. The architect follows this broad cutaway with a closer one of the stairs and apartments, but taken on a perpendicular axis (Figure 10). This shift to the north-south axis allows him to show the suite...
of rooms leading toward the façade as well as make the transition to the final section, which is taken of the courtyards on the same axis.

Sections offer enticing views into the heart of the structure, and Vanvitelli rewards the reader’s curiosity with the next two plates. On one sheet he provides three enlarged sections of the stair hall, along with its plan (Figure 11). As the most complex space in the palace, it merited these close views (Figure 12). With them, the reader can imagine how a visitor would proceed up the dramatic flights and into the magnificent upper vestibule. Vanvitelli heightens the sense of discovery by adopting a common eighteenth-century device of unrolling the plan on a fictive piece of parchment, making it seem as if the reader had been given the original drawings.

Vanvitelli employs the same representational technique for the following plate, which presents the royal chapel in plan and three sections (Figure 13). He surrounded the curled ends of its plan with slabs of stone, a trowel, a shovel, a bishop’s miter, and a crosier. These are the implements that were used in the foundation ceremony, which took place on the site of the future chapel. Such visual revenants reference the textual description from earlier in the book and knit image and narrative together into a coherent whole.

Vanvitelli concludes the book with an astounding visual coda of perspective views (see Figure 1). Pulling away from the scrutiny of the preceding pages, he soars to a birds-eye distance. Views of yet-unrealized architectural schemes were common in commemorative books of the eighteenth century. Marc Antonio Dal Re represented numerous Lombard villas that were never completed; Fischer von Erlach crafted impressive prospects of Schönbrunn; and Salomon Kleiner

Figure 11 Vanvitelli, “Taglio per il Lato maggiore della Scala Regia,” plate XI of Dichiaraione, 1756 (collection of the author). See JSAH online for high-resolution, zoomable image

Figure 12 Vanvitelli, Scala Regia, Royal Palace at Caserta, 1752–72. See JSAH online for high-resolution, zoomable image
made equally impressive ones of Pommersfelden and the Residenz of Würzburg. Like Kleiner, Vanvitelli adopted an oblique angle for his views. Yet like Gabriel Perelle’s prints of Versailles, he employed a low horizon line that showed the palace within the surrounding landscape. The first view presents it from the south, where the cascade, formal garden, palace, and piazza are aligned in a graceful whole (see Figure 1). Soldiers assemble to greet an arriving cavalcade while observers of all social classes admire the edifice. The final plate displays the palace from the garden and includes a plunging veduta of the landscape beyond. The reader’s perspective, until now contained within Caserta’s walls and grounds, is released into the sunny distance. Metaphorically, too, one is freed to reflect on the palace and what lies beyond, on how a new golden age of Bourbon rule will spread over the kingdom.

The Dichiarazione was distributed across Europe and revised in two subsequent editions. In the second, Vanvitelli added the court theater and made changes to the chapel. Foundations in print were always less firm than stone, and some elements, such as the towers at the corners and the dome over the center, would never be constructed as they are depicted in the book. In the third printing Vanvitelli added plates of Caserta’s aqueduct, which he had promised to publish as a separate volume in the earlier editions. He probably returned to his many books on hydraulics to prepare its text, yet only Boscovich and Maire’s surveying tools made their way into the illustrations, which show engineers laying out the route of the aqueduct across valleys and through mountainsides.

Without the promised independent book on the aqueduct, Vanvitelli might have felt that his publishing enterprise was incomplete. But it did not change the important role that books had played in his career. From his youth to his maturity the architect regarded books as the medium for a generous concourse of ideas. His architecture reflected this same openness. Vanvitelli’s style shifted according to circumstances. His buildings are intelligent adaptations of architectural precedent without being imitative. And he manifested a precocious sense of architectural decorum that was not narrowly theoretical. The eclectic qualities of his structures are closely related to the qualities of an architect who picked up books for various reasons; whether to engage the intellectual world of his time, search for a specific motif, or respond to criticism. Vanvitelli’s biblio-biography demonstrates the diversity of reading modes just as his architectural oeuvre manifests a variety of styles.

Books provided inspiration, solace, knowledge, and training. Vanvitelli valued their editorial and rhetorical techniques, emulated their publication standards, and responded to their arguments. He never wearied of collecting, reading, and responding. As Petrarch famously declared: “books thrill you to the marrow; they talk to you, counsel you, admit you to their living, speaking friendship. Nor do they insinuate themselves alone into the reader’s spirit; they introduce other books; each one creates a desire for another.”

Vanvitelli welcomed books that led him to other books. Poleni could introduce Newton, or Meijer could show him to Fontana. Books also counseled him, challenged him, and shaped him into a keen author. Poetry attuned him to
language and rhetoric. Volumes on Louis XIV set a standard for editorial achievement. And collaborations showed him how to integrate text and image. By observing these interactions we come, as Petrarch would claim, closer to the speaking friendship of Vanvitelli. No artistic peer offered as many introductions to his chain of bookish knowledge, and none reaches across history so easily.

Appendix A
Books Vanvitelli Authored or Collaborated on

Poleni, Giovanni, Memorie storiche della gran cupola del tempio vaticano e de’ danni di essa, e de’ ristoramenti loro (Padua: Stamperia del Seminario, 1746).


Vanvitelli, Luigi, Dichiarazione dei disegni del Reale palazzo di Caserta (Naples: Regia stamparia, 1756).

Appendix B
Reconstruction of Vanvitelli’s Library
The following list has been reconstructed from Vanvitelli’s letters and other sources. It is only part of the extensive repertoire of books and prints that the architect knew and consulted. Vanvitelli’s notes on format and size help identify the exact editions. When no specific edition is discernable, the edition closest to the date when Vanvitelli noted the book has been listed.

Books Vanvitelli Owned or Wanted Purchased for Him


Bottari, Giovanni Gaetano, Le lettere, 1: 378.)


Calepino, Ambrogio, Septem linguarum dam tres non amplius ulnas patente commentarius. (Rome: Jo. Jacobi de Rubeis, 1686). (Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 2: 72.)


Charlton, Caritate Afradisius De’ racconti amorosi di Cherea e di Callirro, trans. Michelangelo Giacomelli (Rome, 1752). (Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 1: 194.)


Devoti, Fabio, Fabii Devoti in Arminia Damaetar e carlo spatio in titre quibusdam tres non amplius ulnas patente commentarius (Rome: Ex typographia Marcii Paraelarnii, 1751). (Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 3: 145.)

Dotti, Carlo Francesco, Esame sopra le forze delle catene e braga con che si mostrano le bragature essere inutili per reggere l’urto degli archi e volte e come poza reggere la simplex catena horizontale, posta nella sommità degli archi senza bragature, come anche tante fabbriche munite con dette catene a braga, che reggono fino al giorno d’aggi possano essere un argomento forte, per dimonstrarle valide, come viene creduto da molti (Bologna, 1730). (Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 3: 417; Morelli, “Appunti bio-bibliografici su Gaspar e Luigi Vanvitelli,” 134.)

Félibien, André, Des principes de l’architecture, de la sculp-
Appendix C

Books Vanvitelli Procured for Others


Notes

1. I would like to thank David Brownlee and the JSAH anonymous reviewer for their many insightful comments and suggestions. Part of this essay was presented at the Renaissance Society of America conference in 2010. Many thanks are due to my fellow panelists, particularly Marta Cacho Casal and Susanne Meurer. Thanks as well to Joseph Connors, Christopher Drew Armstrong, Claudia Funke, and Sandra Stelts, who each provided help with specific facts and illustrations. Most of all, I thank Cali Buckley for her assistance in researching and editing this article. Much of this research was conducted as a postdoctoral fellow at the Bill and Carol Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry at Emory University. My deep thanks to the center’s director, Martine Brownley, and its staff, particularly Keith Anthony, for the support they provided.

2. A notary recorded the “seven shelves full of books” (“sette scanzine piene di libri”) at Vanvitelli’s death in 1773. This report is transcribed in Chiara Garza, Note Vanvitelliane (Naples: Società Editrice Napoli, 1979), 17.


5. Anderson, Inigo Jones, 49–212; Avon, “La biblioteca,” 179–96; and Tessen the Younger, Sources, Works, Collections.


21. Luigi Vanvitelli, Jr., Vita di Luigi Vanvitelli, ed. Mario Rotoli (Naples: Società editrice napoletana, 1975), 29–30; Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 1: 121. Vanvitelli also had Michelangelo Giacomelli edit the Latin inscription, but warmed his brother not to allow Leonard or Giacomelli to discover the other’s contribution. See ibid., 1: 76. Vanvitelli also demonstrated his proficiency in Latin by criticizing a translation of Horace Wielopole’s inscription for a bas-relief of Pope Benedict XIV. Ibid., 2: 116.


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26. The Pont du Gard print had belonged to his father. See Vanvitelli, *Le lettere*, 1: 149. The other books were by Giovanni Battista Barattieri, Bernardo Forest de Belidor, Carlo Fontana, Domenico Guglielmioni, and Antonio Lecchi. See Appendix B.


34. Ibid., 1: 310. If he had not learned it early on, Vanvitelli could have done so at the Accademia di San Luca. On its teaching see Henry A. Miller, *Filippo Juvarra: Drawings from the Roman Period 1704–1714* (Rome: Edizioni dell’elettrone, 1989), xxii–xxiii.


36. Some have proposed that Van Wittel also used a camera obscura to compose his views. See Fabio Benz, “Idea e metodo nella pittura di Gaspare Vanvitelli ‘degli Occhiali’: Progetto e sistema nell’invenzione della veduta moderna,” in *Gaspare Vanvitelli e le origini del vedutismo* (Rome: Viviani arte, 2002), 26–32.


38. Vanvitelli was interested in Rosetti’s opinions for ensuring proper air and sunlight in hospitals. The manuscript is now in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, X.A.8 bis.


44. Ibid., 1: 310, 2: 731.

45. Ibid., 1: 617, 615.


47. On his brother, sons, and donation of the ceremonial trowel see ibid., 1: 7, 42, 121, 391. On Bernini’s library see McPhee, *Bernini’s Books*, 442.

48. “Leggono quello che gli pare e piace, come si stasse in Londra, Olanda, Ginevra, etc.,” (Vanvitelli, *Le lettere*, 2: 767). On Galler’s licence to read
books on the Index, see Heather Hyde Minor, The Culture of Architecture in Enlightenment Rome (University Park and Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 244, no. 31.


50. For Vanvitelli’s view on reading prohibited books see Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 2: 767.


52. This edition of Terence was part of Clement XI’s program to print some of the Vatican Library’s most important manuscripts. For Vanvitelli’s contribution see L’esercizio del disegno, 81. He cited the playwright in documents transcribed by Nino Carboneri, “La polemica intorno al progetto del Vanvitelli per la facciata del Duomo di Milano,” in Luigi Vanvitelli e il ‘700 Europeo: Congresso internazionale di studi. Atti (Naples: Istituto di storia dell’architettura, Università di Napoli, 1979), 1: 48–49.


54. Vanvitelli may have heard of Wood and his companions when they gathered in Rome or departed from Naples. On Wood’s travels and publications see C. A. Hutton, “The Travels of ‘Palmyra’ Wood in 1750–51,” The Journal of Hellenic Studies 47 (1927), 102–3; Claire Pace, “Gavin Hamilton’s Wood and Dawkins Discovering Palmyra: The Dilettante as Hero,” Art History 4 (1981), 271–90. On Foglioni buying his copy see Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 1: 425. Foglioni must have had a special interest in the Eastern Mediterranean since he is listed along with Vanvitelli as a subscriber to Stuart and Revett’s Antiquities of Athens. I thank Christopher Drew Armstrong for informing me that Vanvitelli was listed as a subscriber to this work.


64. Vanvitelli mentions Louis XIV’s architectural patronage as an important precedent in the Dichiarazione, dedication. He also likened Charles’s minister, the Marquis of Squillace, to Colbert in Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 2: 477.


68. Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 2: 516.

69. Ibid., 2: 498.


71. Vanvitelli noted that one copy lacked plates of Caprarola and the Cam- paghio, hinting that his other edition was more complete. Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 2: 24, 251; 3: 125. The Caprarola portal was added to early editions of Vitruvius where Michelangelo’s Capitoline doors were added after 1610. See Maria Walcher Casotti, “Le edizioni della Regola,” in Trattati (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1985), 533–37.


74. Millo, Filippo Jorcarra, xxi–xxv. Vanvitelli’s father had also copied the Caracci frescoes, perhaps setting a family precedent. One of Van Wittel’s drawings is reproduced in L’esercizio del disegno, 42.

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76. This was not the only instance in which he copied from sculptures from the Capitoline. Vanvitelli won a prize in the third class of the Accademia di San Luca for drawing the head of Urania in the Capitoline Museum. See L’Esercizio del disegno, 115–16.

77. The replacement copy that Vanvitelli received from his brother was unsatisfactory. Vanvitelli knew that the original edition had red lettering on the title page, and this edition lacked it. See Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 412, 420, 426. Vanvitelli’s library seems to have been unorganized. His children had misplaced Juvarra’s book on a previous occasion, and in another instance Vanvitelli feared he had lost his copy of Guarini’s treatise only to discover it in his house. See ibid., 1: 116; 2: 258. Other architects also lost books: notably, John Vanbrugh lost his copy of Palladio when building Blenheim Palace. See Vaughan Hart, Sir John Vanbrugh, Storyteller in Stone (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 141.

78. See Luigi Vanvitelli, 193–202; and Anna Maria Matteucci Armandi, “Luigi Vanvitelli e il Biblioteca,” in de Seta, ed., Luigi Vanvitelli e la sua cerchia, 19–45.


82. On how literature influenced Vanbrugh’s architecture see Hart, Sir John Vanbrugh.


84. Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 3: 222.


91. “Un ardire così eccessivo di storiare un pensiero cotanto grande, e perigerno d’un Bourbono, con fare per incidenza cento altre monostasie, che troppo lungo sarebbe il solo accennare,” (Giovanni Bottari, Dialoghi sopra le tre arti del disegno [Lucca: F. M. Benediti, 1754], 45).


95. Ibid.

96. Ibid., 1: 382.

97. Ibid., 1: 384.

98. Ibid.


100. Ibid., 2: 67.


103. Vanvitelli was familiar with Bayardi’s Prodoemo della antiquitate d’Ercolano (1752), noting that its five volumes cost ten ducats while his single-volume Diccionario would probably cost twelve. See Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 1: 549, 2: 13–14.


105. The court was particularly distrustful of Winckelmann, fearing he might publish accounts of the finds before their own volumes appeared. The cold reception they gave him fueled his discontent and led to his damaging “open letter,” Sendrachen von den herculanischen Entdeckungen (1762), its Parslow, Rediscovering Antiquity, 215–32.


108. Ibid., 1: 573.


111. Two views of Vesuvius by Van Wittel were in the collection of the Duke of Medina-Celi. One was a nocturnal scene. See Ludovica Trezzani, “Gaspare Vanvitelli, il ‘pittore di Roma moderna’,” in Gaspare Vanvitelli e le origini del vedutismo (Rome: Viviani arte, 2002), 39.


115. For example, the king insisted that the plates representing the section of the palace be revised to include the cells. See Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 1: 489, 2: 25.


117. For these drawings and the corresponding plates see de Setta, ed., Luigi Vanvitelli, 87–90, 262–72; and “Introduzione,” in Luigi Vanvitelli, La Reggia di Caserta: Dichiarazione dei disegni del Reale Palazzo di Caserta 1756 (Milan: Il polifilo, 1997), 17–18.


119. Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 1: 570.

120. Ibid., 1: 570; 2: 143–44.

121. “umilissimo, devotissimo, ossequissimo, servo e suddito Luigi Vanvitelli,” (Vanvitelli, Dichiarazione, dedication).

122. Charles and Maria Amalia, often with Vanvitelli, compared prints of other European palaces with their own. See Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 1: 531.


125. Vanvitelli wanted his text compared to the “libro delle feste fatte in Napoli,” which is likely the Narrazione since it described such festivities and was the finest book produced for the king and queen prior to the Dichiarazione. Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 1: 113.

126. Vanvitelli, Dichiarazione, dedication.


129. Vanvitelli worried that the king’s large nose might appear too prominent on the medal portrait. Ibid., 1: 96.

130. Leonardi’s insights were considered so valuable that the architect thanked him with a precious gold box. Ibid., 1: 113, 175, 391, 395, 404. On Leonardi and Vanvitelli’s collaboration see Fagiolo dell’Arco, Dichiarazione della pittura della cappella del Collegio Clementino di Roma (Rome: Gio. Giacomo Komarek Boemo, 1695). Francesco Ferrari, Dichiarazione degli emblemi contenuti in una cornice d’antaglio dorato (n.p., n.d. Publication location and date unknown); P. Alotragore and Elia Ballarini, Dichiarazione della santissima macchina eretta per festa di fumi . . . (Milan: G. P. Malatesta, 1716).

131. On the court’s program see Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 1: 105.

132. Ibid., 1: 358, 489.

133. Ibid., 1: 562.

134. Vanvitelli, Dichiarazione, XVIII.


137. Vanvitelli added sections of underground cellars to the second plate at the king’s suggestion. See Vanvitelli, Le lettere, 2: 24–25.


139. For a fine analysis of the social significance of incidental figures illustrated in book illustrations of the period see Harris, The Nature of Authority, 62–89.

140. Vanvitelli, Dichiarazione, dedication.