

Designs for the church of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini

The church of the Florentines in Rome, conceded to them by Leo X Medici, had a troubled gestation. The initial project, entrusted to Jacopo Sansovino, went no further and the one by Antonio da Sangallo was not realized owing to the social and political upheaval provoked by the Sack of Rome. After a long delay, first Julius III and then the Florentine colony itself, with the aid of Cosimo I, gave the task to Michelangelo. With his usual creativity, he made several different designs, all based on a central plan but round, multilobate, or in the shape of a Greek cross with large chapels around the edge. The perfectly hemispherical dome must have been a free interpretation of that of the Pantheon, given that Michelangelo, according to Vasari, had boasted to the representatives of the fabric that he could surpass any example of Greek or Roman architecture. His work on the church soon came to a halt owing to the infirmities of old age, with the result that the final plans and wooden model were made by Tiberio Calcagni. In 1562, work on the project was stopped owing to a lack of funds on the part of the Florentine colony in Rome. The present church, dedicated to John the Baptist, the patron saint of Florence, was begun in 1582 by Giacomo della Porta, who gave it a Latin-cross plan, and was continued and almost finished by Carlo Maderno. The eighteenth-century facade was executed by Alessandro Galilei.