

## RESTORATION OF THE MOSAICS ON THE DOME OF THE SS. SACRAMENTO CHAPEL

The dome of the chapel of SS. Sacramento is decorated by a mosaic depicting the mystery of the Eucharist, executed between 1656 and 1657 by artists from the Vatican



Mosaic Workshop on cartoons by Pietro of Cortona. Angels and blessed souls are portrayed offering vases of perfume, symbolizing the prayers of the faithful who are kneeling around the altar of the holocausts.

On the night of August 10, 1992, a considerably large piece of the mosaic decoration, including the lower part of the figure of the angel who is incensing the altar, came off the intrados of the dome.

The need to restore the huge gap as soon as possible was an opportunity for an in-depth study of the compositional technique and the state of preservation of the mosaic as a whole.

The work was done directly on the vault with

wedge-shaped tesserae thrust into a layer of stucco made of powdered travertine and linseed oil. This kind of stucco, having a longer drying time than common mortars, made it possible to add changes during the course of the work, so as to be able to obtain the desired chromatic effect. In order to improve the adherence of the stucco to the building support, many wide-head nails were used. Yet, the infiltration of rainwater from the terrace above and from the extrados of the dome over the centuries had caused many parts of the mosaic to lift off and become detached, while other areas showed examples of flaking of the stucco and the bonding mortar.

The analysis of the present state of the vault decorations reveals many additions to and interventions in past mosaic work with the insertion of numerous metal cramps, while several vast areas of the mosaic, held together through reciprocal counterposition, seemed to be at the point of coming off. Modern masters from the Vatican Mosaic Workshop conducted the work according to traditional techniques. A careful photographic

documentation and a relief preceded the mosaic restoration. Subsequently the vault was cleaned of smoke and deposits of oily substances.

It was necessary to remove a considerable part of the decoration. Its design was copied onto vegetable paper; it was then applied to the surface to be removed with «velatino» (veiling), a tightly meshed gauze covered by a thick, water-soluble glue, that the master mosaicists framed into 700 small parts, labeled according to a reference grid that followed the design of the decoration. Once the "spillatura" (tapping), or the removal of the stucco from the cracks of the tesserae, had been carried out, the restoration of the missing parts began, using ancient enamels in a range of more than 20,000 different colors kept at the Vatican Mosaic Workshop.

Today the mosaic shines anew from the height of the dome on the chapel of SS. Sacramento.