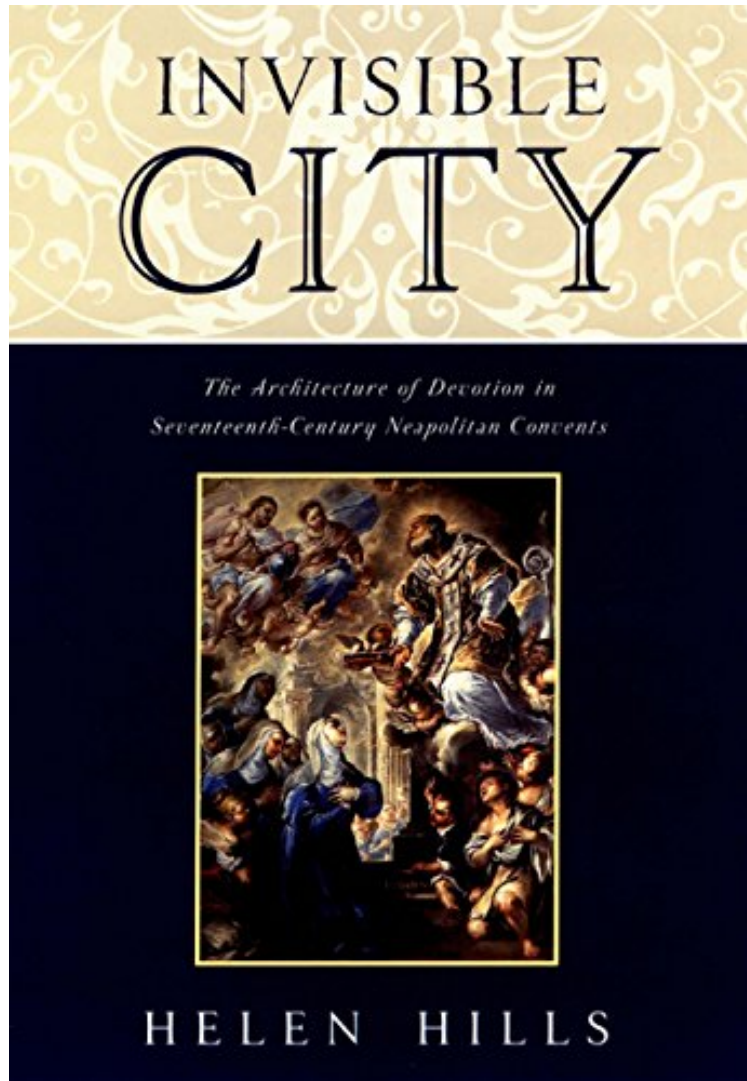


(Free) Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents

## Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents

*Helen Hills*

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**Helen Hills : Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents:

More than any other European city, Baroque Naples was dominated by convents. Behind their imposing facades and highly decorated churches, the convents of Naples housed the daughters of the city's most exclusive families, women

who, despite their cloistered existence, were formidable players in the city's power structure. *Invisible City* vividly portrays the religious world of seventeenth-century Naples, a city of familial and internecine rivalries, of religious devotion and intense urban politics, of towering structures built to house the virgin daughters of the aristocracy. Helen Hills demonstrates how the architecture of the convents and the nuns' bodies they housed existed both in parallel and in opposition to one another. She discusses these women as subjects of enclosure, as religious women, and as art patrons, but also as powerful agents whose influence extended beyond the convent walls. Though often ensconced in convents owing to their families' economic circumstances, many of these young women were able to extend their influence as a result of the role convents played both in urban life and in art patronage. The convents were rich and powerful organizations, riven with feuds and prey to the ambitions of viceregal and elite groups, which their thick walls could not exclude. Even today, Neapolitan convents figure prominently in the city's fabric. In analyzing the architecture of these august institutions, Helen Hills skillfully reads conventual architecture as a metaphor for the body of the aristocratic virgin nun, mapping out the dialectic between flesh and stone.

"...this masterful synthesis is a model for excavating the complexities of premodern convent life and suggestions of intriguing possibilities for future research. The extensive selection of plates included will prove particularly useful for those unfamiliar with the visuals of monastic architecture."--Confraternitas"Aside from bringing to our attention a series of striking buildings that have never before been considered as a coherent group, one of Hills's major contributions is her archival work and her fascinating analysis of convents in the context of urban life and the social and economic structures of seventeenth-century Naples."-- s in History"Hills's extraordinary study is a nuanced and innovative incarnation of the secular city from its sacred recesses that should have broad appeal and wide-ranging influence. *Invisible City* is a brilliant, stunning book."--John A. Marino, University of California, San Diego"A significant contribution to the field.... *Invisible City* is replete with new ideas and is exemplary in its archival depth."--Emma Stirrup, *Oxford Art Journal*About the AuthorHelen Hills is Reader in History of Art at the University of York. She is the author of *Inlaid Polychromatic Marble Decoration in Early Modern Sicily: Invention and Identity* and the editor of *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*.