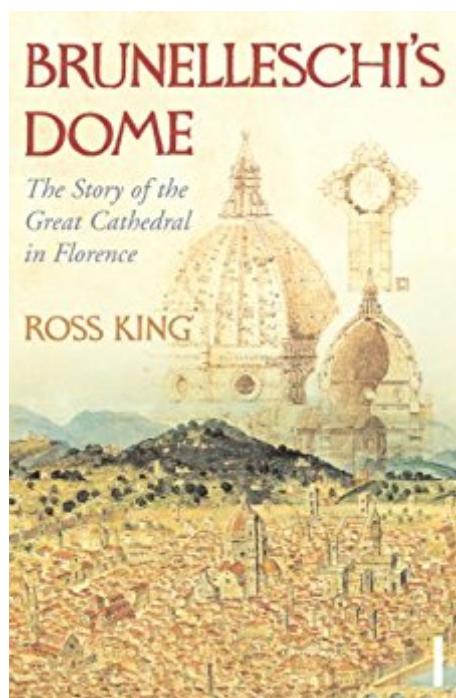


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Brunelleschi's Dome: The Story Of The Great Cathedral In Florence



Synopsis

Even in an age of soaring skyscrapers and cavernous sports stadiums, the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence still retains a rare power to astonish. Yet the elegance of the building belies the tremendous labour, technical ingenuity and bitter personal strife involved in its creation. For over a century after work on the cathedral began in 1296, the proposed dome was regarded as all but impossible to build because of its enormous size. The greatest architectural puzzle of its age, when finally completed in 1436 the dome was hailed as one of the great wonders of the world. It has gone down in history as a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture. This book tells the extraordinary story of how the cupola was raised and of the dome's architect, the brilliant and volatile Filippo Brunelleschi. Denounced as a madman at the start of his labours, he was celebrated at their end as a great genius. His life was one of ambition, ingenuity, rivalry and intrigue - a human drama set against the plagues, wars, political feuds and intellectual ferment of Renaissance Florence, the glorious era for which the dome remains the most compelling symbol. Brunelleschi's Dome was voted Non-Fiction Book of the Year by American Independent Booksellers.

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Customer Reviews

The title of a non-fiction book should be a contract: here, the terms of Ross King's deal are, "I will tell you all you ever wanted to know about the great dome of Santa Maria del Fiore, and, as specified in the subtitle, I will leave you feeling you know how Brunelleschi 'reinvented architecture.'" I enjoyed this book immensely, but King delivered on neither clause. I found myself puzzling over his technical explanations, rummaging through my library for a superior cutaway of the dome to better visualize his wordy exegesis. Oddly, each of the three well-known books I turned to - Murray's *Architecture of the Italian Renaissance*, Kostof's *History of Architecture*, and Hartt's *History of Italian Renaissance Art* - had precisely the same superb cutaway of the dome within a dome, showing Brunelleschi's Gothic vaulting underneath the classically inspired outer dome. "Mirabile dictu, so that's it!" This is only one of many instances where King created confusion where he might have parted the technical mists, with clearer text or with a better mating of text to illustration. A corollary to this concern: for a book that has a fair number of illustrations, I found these, for the most part, woefully chosen. I appreciated the reproductions of period etchings and drawings, but these should have been supplemented with additional helps for the text. And at the very close, as a veritable punchline to the short book, King provides one small photograph of the dome in middle distance - no angles, no details, no close-up of the lantern, no full-page, no color. For readers who have neither been to Florence and seen the magnificent Santa Maria del Fiore in its urban context nor seen many illustrations or aspects of the dome, these are galling omissions.

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