

ON BUILDING SITE IN EARLY MODERN FERRARA. TWO ARCHIVAL SOURCES ABOUT CONSTRUCTION PROCESS IN THE SECOND HALF OF XVITH CENTURY

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Abstract

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Two unpublished archival sources from the Estense Archive give us some interesting elements about the building site practice in Ferrara in second half of XVIth century. The first source is a letter written in 1560 by a ducal officer at the head of *Munizioni e Fabbriche*, the office that controlled all the building activities in the city, to the Duke Alfonso II d'Este to justify the orders given to craftsmen on building sites. It is a very important information source, because it explains a particular building site process and gives us a lot of information about practical building techniques. The second one, is a building regulation written in 1572 about the ducal officer behaviour on building site and about practical organisation and economic management of building activity in the city. These sources give us a clear portrait of design practices in relation to city transformation, in particular about specific aspects and roles:

- human behaviour: the relationship between patron and architect, between architect and craftsmen;
- economic aspects: purchase, provision and management of construction materials and manpower;
- construction processes: application, transformation and innovation of building technique and its relation with practical treatises of the time.

Keywords

Early Modern Ferrara, Building Site, Archival Sources

In 16th century, the Este court was a huge and sophisticated organisational structure and not only a creative and dynamic place for artists and scholars. Guerzoni's prosopographical studies help us to understand the administrative framework and its uninterrupted evolution to increase office logistics and economic efficiency. As far as the ducal architectural production is concerned, the related office *Munizioni e Fabbriche* administered the building process from material provision to building site execution. *Munizioni e Fabbriche* Office was created in 1465 by Borso d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara, Modena e Reggio from 1450 to 1471 and first Duke of Ferrara, Modena e Reggio from 1471, starting from a merger between other small offices related to building sites and building maintenance in the city and outside the city, shipyard and ship maintenance. Office employees controlled many building sites open inside and outside the city, they controlled repository material provisions (timber for construction, ironware, gunpowder, etc), they

managed building activities and supervised kilns activities in relation to bricks and lime production. Despite contemporary studies have widely clarified the leading role of this office in the construction site management, from Castello vecchio to Castelnuovo, from the city walls to suburban residential places also called *Delizie*, up to the Herculean Addition palaces, it is not yet clear if and how this administrative department influenced technical aspects regarding craftsmen work, practical execution and the choice of architectural solutions. Who decided how to build? Who was the construction site manager? Was it the supervisor of *Munizioni e Fabbriche* or an architect? Which of the two was more esteemed by the Duke? These two archival documents from the Estense Archive in Modena, give us a little help to understand human relationships as well as economical and technical aspects in this particular scenario: Este patron's building production in the second half of XVIth century. The first one is a letter by Alfonso Dal Corno to