

FRANCESCO PAOLO DI TEODORO, *LETTERA A LEONE X DI RAFFAELLO E BALDASSARRE CASTIGLIONE*, LEO S. OLSCHKI, FIRENZE 2020 (BIBLIOTECA DELL'ARCHIVIUM ROMANICUM, SER. I: STORIA, LETTERATURA, PALEOGRAFIA, 503), PP. XII + 72, ISBN 9788822266774.

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The publication of this book by Professor Francesco Paolo Di Teodoro (University of Turin) is framed within the numerous cultural events organised on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of Raphael Sanzio celebrated in 2020. It is part of the ambitious programme of bringing out the special edition of *Scritti di e per Raffaello* (Olschki), planned for this year, also carried out by Di Teodoro. As a selected sample of such material, the *Letter to Leo X*, written by Raphael and Baldassarre Castiglione in 1599, constitutes an invaluable piece of information, while expecting to have access to the complete volume.

Given the nature of the present book, the main text is preceded by a critical introduction by the editor consisting of a historical contextualisation and comparative study of the original core documents used in the publication: the manuscripts of the *Lettera a Leone X* from Mantua (State property and Private property), Munich and Padua. Despite some exceptions, the fate of these documents had been to fall into oblivion for many centuries, until when, in 1799, the *Lettera* was rediscovered by Daniele Francesconi. In his *Congettura che una lettera creduta di Baldesar Castiglione sia di Raffaello d'Urbino*, Francesconi validated the Raphael-Castiglione binomial as joint authorship. In order to reclaim the importance of the work, Di Teodoro prepared this new and revised edition which updates the version that he himself published in 1994.

As the editor remarks, the *Lettera* is particularly relevant in order to analyse the theoretical side of 'the divine' Raphael as well as to evaluate his detailed expertise in classic architecture, especially his in-depth knowledge of Vitruvius. What Raphael addresses to the Pope Leon X is basically the project of creating a map of the most celebrated monuments in ancient Rome, including aspects taken from archaeology, architecture, decoration, etc., in the attempt to combine both the antique city, that is, the pagan Rome, and the Renaissance city, considered as the heart of Christianity. This highly transdisciplinary project, born from Humanistic influence, remained unfinished due to the early death of the artist.

One of the most singular elements of the project, as reflected in the *Lettera*, is the central role of drawings. It could be stated that Raphael intended to develop a sort of *restauro grafico* of the city of Rome. « Restituire graficamente all'Urbe il suo antico splendore vuol dire anche consegnarla all'eternità immutabile [...] » (p. 26). To this end, he divided the city into 14 regions so as to draw the orthogonal representation of their buildings. This implied a methodical process of collecting data and translating every mathematical value into graphical shape according to *sezione*, *pianta* and *prospetto*. In Raphael's view, this designing process, based on the *disegno prospettico*, followed the same method used by Vitruvius. Di Teodoro claims that it is in the *Letter to Leo X* that this designing method is systematised and consolidated, in the sense that the project conceived by Raphael was not only architectural but eminently pictorial.

In this scenario, the *Lettera* appears as a true outline for a systematic text about architecture which reminds major Renaissance treatises. Briefly, Raphael distinguishes three types of buildings: those built by the ancient Romans, those by Barbarians, and finally the contemporary edifications of Renaissance style. It goes without saying that the first ones are, in his opinion, the authentic source of inspiration in order to achieve the *bella maniera* that is mainly pursued in his project. On the contrary, as a result of the Barbarian invasions, architects forgot the way of classical antiquity. That being said, Raphael does not categorically reject the *macchina gotica* in its entirety – he admired the naturalist tendency of its arboreal architecture, which he thought it might be connected to the Vitruvian tradition as well.

I. *Haver cura di quello poco che resta di questa anticha madre*

The editor's statement that the *Letter to Leo X* by Raphael and Castiglione lays the foundations of heritage protection represents the main contribution of the book. On many occasions, as the letter develops, Raphael expresses his profound sorrow over the deplorable state of the monuments of Rome and declares being suffering « grandissimo dolore vedendo quasi il cadavero di quella nobil patria, che è stata regina del mondo, così miseramente lacerate » (p. 43). In this sense, Raphael demonstrates big interest in the urgent necessity of eradicating damaging practices in what respect monument preservation, which he ascribes to the harmful effect of the passage of time, the actions of the Barbarians, and most importantly, the adverse consequences derived from the art policy implemented by the Popes.

Raphael expresses his discontent to Leo X and denounces that the Popes have systematically plundered the *sacre ruine* of Rome over the years for the sole purpose of building their magnificent city of Christianity: « Persino I pontefici, che avrebbero dovuto difendere le 'povere reliquie di Roma', hanno invece, hanno invece, 'atteso a ruinare templi antiqui, statue, archi et altri aedifici gloriosi',

lasciando che i marmi fossero impiegati per l'edificazione della nuova Roma » (p. 25). Raphael does not only accuse the Popes of permitting the general destruction of classical monuments, he also insists on their indifference and indolence, which to a certain extent becomes equally destructive. In these circumstances, Raphael explains his project to Leo X with the hope of helping to avoid actions of this sort. Therefore, by means of the *Lettera*, he tries to establish measures to prevent detrimental impacts on Classical art.

In this line, Raphael urges the Pope to put maximum effort to ensure the most appropriate care for monuments. This should be an objective of utmost importance for the Pope, Raphael argues, inasmuch as the protection of artistic heritage might truly manifest the virtue of the *Pastor clementissimo* of all Christians, who safeguards the benefits of such an universal legacy from *maligni et ignoranti*. Hence, Raphael encourages the Pope to preserve ancient works – the *pietre 345nstaure* – as a gesture of divine grace. This way, the Pope would incarnate the model of the Christian prince of peace, who brings prosperity to the people instead of savagery and barbarism. Not casually, this message contained in the *Lettera* appears precisely in a moment of growing awareness of the need to protect Roman monuments. For example, in 1462, Pio II published the bull *Cum alman 345nstaure urbem*, where he said to be committed to defending Rome's former splendour and conserve it for posterity. The same purpose is present in *Roma instaurata* written by Flavio Biondo some decades earlier, dedicated to the Pope Eugenio IV. However, general devastation of classical buildings continued, reaching increasingly alarming levels.

This being so, the editor claims that the *Letter to Leo X* shows Raphael's great awareness of the value of classical heritage and the way in which he tried to solve this matter mainly from the perspective of an architect. In his preliminary study, Di Teodoro highlights Raphael's determinant role in bringing about the basis of heritage protection, taking the letter as a way of promoting specific actions within the framework of the preservation of historical monuments. Despite the editor's enthusiastic stance on this issue, the previous statement may require a nuanced analysis, given that the conceptual dimension of the *Lettera* pales in comparison with other theoretical texts that provide more powerful results. In this regard, surprisingly enough, the editor does not discuss the most relevant document in the field, *De re aedificatoria*, written by Leon Battista Alberti in 1450, which raises significant similarities and might be considered a precedent of the *Lettera*. The book X of Alberti's treatise, for instance, which is focused precisely on the conservation of buildings (*operum instauratio*), draws interesting parallels with Raphael's letter.

As a prolific author and theorist, Alberti's exhaustive knowledge of classical antiquity, his inspiration in nature, as well as his extensive research on written sources like Vitruvius, along with the direct study of ruins and archaeological

remains make him a principal figure on the conceptualisation of Renaissance architecture and urbanism. The wide influence of his texts undoubtedly exceeds the scope of Raphael's *Lettera a Leone X*. Alberti does not only master the visual technique of *disegno prospettico* a century before Raphael, following the path of his admired Brunelleschi, but he also initiated the practice of studying the monuments built by the Romans, which he considered his true teachers. Alberti explained that he acquired precious knowledge about the ancients by observing carefully and making sketches of these buildings and the ruins that remained, still full of wise lessons to be learnt. Similarly, in the book VI of *De re aedificatoria* he manifests his tears of suffering for the beautiful buildings practically reduced to rubble, in a way that seems to be replicated by Raphael in his letter. According to Alberti, ruins are the consequence of time, the active destruction of the Barbarians, and also the passive destruction provoked by indifference and disregard. That is why Alberti states that the architect must intervene in favour of conservation. In this point Raphael clearly echoes Alberti's programme.

II. *The Modern Concept of Heritage Protection*

Notwithstanding the attempts to preserve monuments from destruction, the event known as *Sacco di Roma* took place only seven years after Raphael's death. In the context of such a terrible situation, it is worth mentioning that a copy of the *Letter to Leo X* was sent for publication by Castiglione's son in the attempt to vindicate the figure of his father in the eyes of Pope Clement VII and thus dispel the shadow of suspicion about Castiglione's alleged negligence during the *Sacco*. Although the purpose of Castiglione's son was not fulfilled because the *Lettera* finally remained unpublished, the intention of using it as a proof in his benefit makes clear the signification conferred to the document: the deep sense of commitment and responsibility towards monument protection contained in the letter was evident from the very beginning. As Di Teodoro says in the introduction, this aspect of the *Lettera* is certainly a factor of importance which has lasted until today. More specifically, he points out that in the text by Raphael and Castiglione are to be found the seeds for the modern concept of heritage protection which lays at the heart of current legal proceedings like Article 9 of the Italian *Carta Costituzionale*.

Di Teodoro maintains that the *Lettera a Leon X* serves as a powerful stimulus for developing theoretical and practical reflection upon monument conservation in countries with rich heritage as is the case of Italy. He also recognised his aspiration to give this book as a dynamic tool for students at the university so as to motivate them to find solutions to the challenging task of art preservation. Be that as it may, the previous observation made by the editor in relation to the modern concept of heritage protection, although interesting, is not sufficiently argued. He does not provide explanatory details of how this notion is actually sustained on Raphael's

guidelines. In this sense, the reader of this book will miss a thorough analysis of concrete measures of current legislation in the realm of heritage law. For example, the editor does not compare the *Lettera* with specific cases taken from legal sources. This would have been really helpful in order to get a broader sense of the practical influence of the *Lettera* nowadays.

In this state of things, it might be useful to consider a productive dialogue with the *Carta del Restauro* of Cesare Brandi, promulgated by the Italian Ministry of Public Instruction in 1972. This document became a key reference in the field of monument preservation and also an operational guideline for concrete actions required to safeguard artistic heritage. Particularly, it is well-known for introducing the notion of 'preventive restoration', which has been renamed as 'conservation'. Precisely, it can be inferred from the *Letter to Leo X* that Raphael, in his approach to the ancient buildings of Rome, is mainly referring to conservation, so this significant parallel may entail relevant implications. Likewise, Raphael was ahead of his time inasmuch as he almost foresees the modern term of cultural heritage, in the sense that monuments are not ultimately important by themselves but because of the values that they represent for the identity of a community or their contribution to the history of civilisation in general. From this point of view, the *Lettera* precedes the classic definition of heritage given by Henri Rivière. In this important task of laying the foundations for the modern notion of heritage, Italy has played a fundamental role in recent decades.

See, for instance, the *Carta del Restauro* which was passed into law in 1932 after being adapted from the Athens Charter of 1931, with the objective of protecting antique monuments after the Second World War. Another event of this kind was the Hague Convention celebrated in 1945 under the initiative of the Italian Commission of the UNESCO to protect cultural heritage in case of armed conflict. It would have been especially interesting to look for the trace of Raphael's letter in the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites of the year 1964, as a result of the II International Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings, which became the origin of the ICOMOS. Likewise, in the mid 1960s, the Franceschini Commission for the improvement of monument preservation of the Italian Government tried to solve major problems concerning the legal normative of art protection and raise social awareness about it. As can be seen, the active participation of Italy in the modern constitution of heritage protection surely presents rich and varied influences, so that it would not be surprising if the *Letter to Leo X* were one of its most singular precedents. As far as the *Lettera* is concerned, it is relevant to note above all the personal and professional commitment of Raphael, supported by the appropriate writing style of Baldassarre Castiglione, to maintain classical heritage and ensure that the work of art is in its full right to survive, which is really a breath of fresh air.