

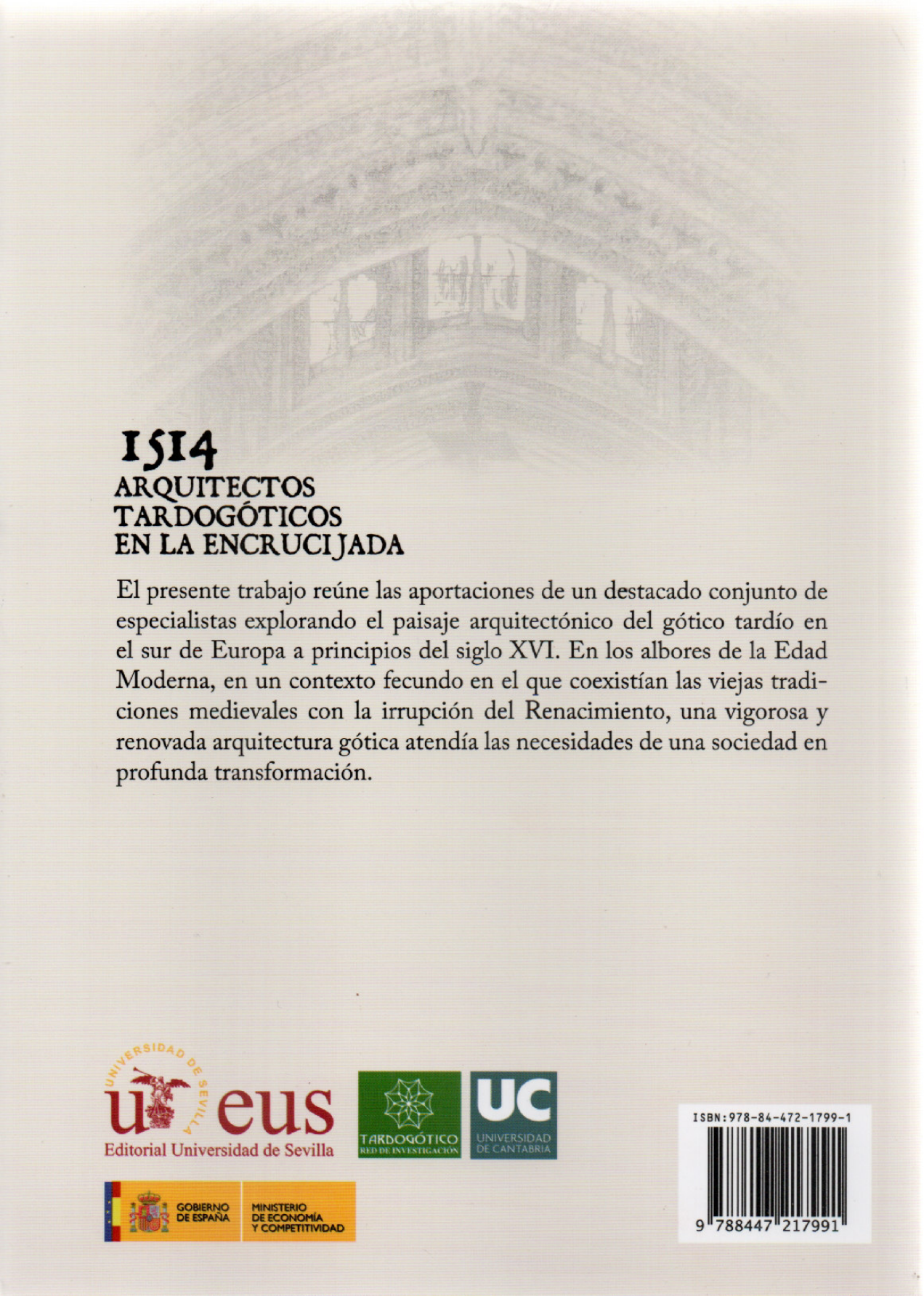


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ARQUITECTOS
TARDOGÓTICOS
EN LA ENCRUCIJADA

Begoña Alonso Ruiz
Juan Clemente Rodríguez Estévez
(coords.)

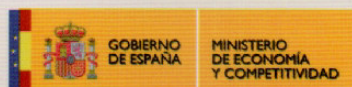
EDITORIAL UNIVERSIDAD DE SEVILLA



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ARQUITECTOS TARDOGÓTICOS EN LA ENCRUCIJADA

El presente trabajo reúne las aportaciones de un destacado conjunto de especialistas explorando el paisaje arquitectónico del gótico tardío en el sur de Europa a principios del siglo XVI. En los albores de la Edad Moderna, en un contexto fecundo en el que coexistían las viejas tradiciones medievales con la irrupción del Renacimiento, una vigorosa y renovada arquitectura gótica atendía las necesidades de una sociedad en profunda transformación.



ISBN: 978-84-472-1799-1



BEGOÑA ALONSO RUIZ
JUAN CLEMENTE RODRÍGUEZ ESTÉVEZ
(coordinadores)

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UNIVERSIDAD DE SEVILLA



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Editorial Universidad de Sevilla

Sevilla 2016

Serie: Arte
Núm.: 42

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Motivo de cubierta: Imagen de la nave mayor de la Catedral de Sevilla, tomada desde la cabecera, con el Cristo del Millón en el centro. Fotografía: Juan Clemente Rodríguez Estévez, por cortesía del Cabildo Catedral de Sevilla.

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C/ Porvenir, 27 - 41013 Sevilla.

Tlfs.: 954 487 447; 954 487 451; Fax: 954 487 443

Correo electrónico: eus4@us.es

Web: <<http://www.editorial.us.es>>

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Impreso en papel ecológico

Impreso en España-Printed in Spain

ISBN 978-84-472-1799-1

Depósito Legal: SE 1138-2016

Diseño de cubierta: Santi García. info@elmaquetador.es

Impresión: Imprenta tecedé, Córdoba. www.imprentatece.com

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Antonio Belguardo: a master of the late Gothic in Western Sicily and some of his contemporaries

SABINA MONTANA / FULVIA SCADUTO
Università degli Studi di Palermo

Historiographic attention for the world of professions associated with the art of building in 16th century Sicily is fairly recent. Pioneer studies by Filippo Meli¹ have shown us a professional universe dominated by contractors and entrepreneurs, often organised in dynastic clans, whose biographic and professional profiles appear to be almost always undetermined. Although there has been substantial historiographic silence for over thirty years, recent research has given us back an image of a professional context that is anything but monolithic, in which personalities with diverse training and competences coexisted and were active during a period of extraordinary vitality in the building sector. The purpose of this contribution is to enrich the biographic and professional profile, drawn up till now, of the master builder Antonio Belguardo, active in the last quarter of the 15th century, and also to critically compare his profile to his contemporaries, Biagio Timpanello and Filippo de Bertolinis who were less well known. Though distant as regards to role, social extraction and aspirations, the peculiarity of the data that has emerged is the indication of a variegated reality of careers, symbolic investments and connections with professional universes that were geographically and culturally distant from Sicily.

¹ MELI, 1958.

PRINCIPALIS FABRICATOR HUIUS FELICIS URBIS PANORMI²

New documents that have come to light in recent years on Antonio Belguardo allow us to draw a more complete biographic profile of one of the most prolific protagonists of Late Gothic Sicilian architecture³. His activity, as far as we know, was mainly carried out in Palermo but also in Trapani and Partinico. The prestige and role of the master appears evident if one considers: the intense activity carried out in a fifty year span, his success with aristocratic clients, his rapid professional and social rise attested by his role as Royal Master Mason and his son Giovanni Antonio's ecclesiastical career. The variety and quantity of work carried out tells a story that bares no resemblance to any in Palermo during that period. Documents show that he took part, often simultaneously, in at least fifteen churches or chapels that were being built or restructured and worked on some of the most important city building sites. News confirms the acknowledgement of his expertise in masonry and a career that had risen to entrepreneurial level. Documents point out he came from Scicli⁴, in the County of Modica, that he was part of a dynastic clan and that, as the name points out, he perhaps originated from Catalonian (region from where the Cabrerias, Counts of Modica came from) or from the south of France (Languedoc-Roussillon), areas where this toponym is common and abundant with quarries (Bellaguarda) from which specialised workforce could arrive. Presumably in his city of origin, where there was a stone carving tradition, the young Belguardo carried out his initial apprenticeship as lapidary or carver. Early documents confirm his presence in Palermo in 1484 as an apprentice under a master builder for two years⁵, a necessary custom to insert oneself in the working world of the capital's master builders (*fabricatores*). Indeed, in 1490, he was already mentioned as "fabricator cives panormi"⁶. His first independent activity was at the end of the century, during a particular moment for the city building sites that coincided with the arrival of Matteo Carnilivari (1487) and the start of the Late Gothic manufacture undertaken and supervised by the architect from Noto, in which Belguardo (coming from a city near Noto) had to finish his training in contact with other important personalities⁷. It is established that he collaborated with Carnilivari on the building site of Cefalù Cathedral (1499)⁸ and later in the completion of the church of the Catena in Palermo as "scultori et capu magistro maragmatis" in 1521⁹ and again in 1534¹⁰. These first experiences represented a test bench to consolidate his knowledge in the stone carving field and in the

² The first paragraph of this contribution titled *Principalis fabricator huius felicis urbis Panormi* has been written by F. Scaduto, whereas the paragraph titled *Social trajectories and parallel professional paths: three case studies* has been written by S. Montana.

³ For initial biographic reconstruction: SCADUTO, 2007. On Belguardo also: VESCO, 2006, pp. 41-50; VESCO, 2007-2008, pp. 47-64.

⁴ MELL, 1958, doc. 87.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ MELL, 1958, doc. 88.

⁷ SCADUTO, 2006, pp. 97-108.

⁸ GAETA, 2009, doc. 8.

⁹ VESCO, 2007-2008, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰ Palermo State Archive, not. G. T. De Leta, v. 3511, c. 301v. Document found by S. Montana during ongoing research that will be published in the near future.

more specific one of stone vaulted ceilings¹¹ (cross vaults and cupolas) for which he developed singular experimentation and that constitute one of his particularities in his later professional work. Based on documents, his first assignments, from the last decade of the 15th century, are linked to prestigious privately commissioned work and had to do with residential constructions in which he also maintained the prerogative of sculpting stone doors and windows. A well known case worth remembering is the obligation (1508) to construct the house of the Notary Laurefice and to also carry out an exposed stone carved façade, with carved doors and windows¹². Contextually Belguardo carried out activities linked to estimates and surveys together with other works showing the unconditioned appreciation of his qualities as a constructor. The first "official" consensus, which is a recognition of the master's professional value, was in 1510 when he was appointed Councillor of the *Fabricatores'* Guild of Palermo, the second appointment in order of importance after that of Consul¹³. It is clear that in that very moment and within the corporate system Belguardo's professional success had started, confirmed by the public offices held that mark the stages of his rise: from 1520 we find him again Consul of the Guild of builders¹⁴, in 1535 he is Royal Master Mason and from 1536 (until 1540) he is in charge of the renovation work of the city walls planned by Antonio Ferramolino¹⁵, reaching his zenith in the 1530s. His professional beginnings were also characterised by his participation in the last two great works of Late Gothic religious architecture in Palermo: the convent of the Observant Franciscans (under construction in 1489) and the Spasimo of the Olivetans (post 1505), in which he had probably been involved since the very beginning and is mentioned on several occasions till a later date¹⁶ (Illustration n° 1). There, he was almost definitely master mason directing the execution of the works and proving to have structured construction abilities (arch of the projecting part of the church's entrance, cross vaults on the naves) and was also involved in the construction of the first stone cupolas. The Basilicò domed chapel on niches (first decade of the century) (Illustration n° 2) is indeed the first of a series of neo-Norman cupolas built in Palermo in the space of a few decades that can without a doubt be attributed to Belguardo: cupola of St Antonino in the Cassaro, the Spinola chapel in the St Oliva church (1530)¹⁷ in St Francesco di Paola and the domed tribune of St Maria della Pietà; all works in which the master is mentioned, as planning supervisor, respectively in 1516¹⁸, in

¹¹ The introduction of the technique and use of pumice-stone in the construction of vaults in Palermo from the 1530s can be attributed to the master. GAROFALO, c.d.s.

¹² SCADUTO, 2007, pp. 183-184; GAETA, 2005, doc. 13.

¹³ GAROFALO, 2010, pp. 53-54.

¹⁴ Palermo State Archive, not. G. F. La Panittera, v. 2712, c.n.n. Document found by G. Mendola that will be published in the near future. VESCO, 2007-2008, p. 55.

¹⁵ VESCO, 2006, p. 45; VESCO, 2007-2008, p. 52.

¹⁶ See: SCADUTO, 2006, pp. 183-189. In the Gancia his presence is certified in 1507 (cappella La Voglia) and in 1536 (lateral portal); in the Spasimo between 1514 and 1535: VESCO, 2006, pp. 43-44; VESCO, 2007-2008, pp. 47-48.

¹⁷ NOBILE, 2013, p. 19. The chapel had to be built based on the Basilicò's chapel in the Spasimo.

¹⁸ Palermo State Archive, not. A. Lo Verde, v. 2266, c. 581. Document found by G. Mendola during ongoing research. It is a quincunx church reconstructed, as can be read on the deed of obligation, "cum lamijis dammissis et testitudinibus seu cubulis", based on the model of the old church of St Teodoro, which is described by Fazello (1558) "a cupola e sostenuta da colonne", FAZELLO, 1990, p. 385. As for hypothesis on Belguardo's role in St Antonino: SCADUTO, 2007, p. 189; VESCO, 2007-2008, p. 54.



Illustration n° 1.
Church of the Spasimo,
inside (Palermo).

1519¹⁹ and in 1535-36²⁰. Also in the case of the cupola on the chapel of the Madonna of the Annunziata in Trapani (beginning of the 1530s) there are good reasons to assign its authorship to the master.²¹ This typological solution was also found in the Norman church of the Maddalena (Palermo) in which Belguardo worked on the renovation building site in 1520²², moreover in 1519 he was master mason in the restoration of the Basilian church of St Salvatore²³. Experience based on direct observation of Norman roofing can justify loans from the Romanesque world (Sicilian medieval tradition) re-proposed and re-elaborated by the master. It is however only after the first quarter of the century that Belguardo started to emerge in documents as the most successful active master in the city, indeed the following period shows he was an established professional. The years of the

¹⁹ SCADUTO, 2007, p. 189. Belguardo's presence on the building site is again documented in 1536.

²⁰ MELI, 1958, pp. 108, 109 e docc. 143, 144, 145; SCADUTO, 2007, p. 190; VESCO, 2007-2008, pp. 52-53 e docc. 3, 4.

²¹ NOBILE, 2013, pp. 20-21.

²² SCADUTO, 2007, pp. 188, 190.

²³ Palermo State Archive, not. N. Bruno, v. 559, c. 398. Document pointed out by S. Montana by courtesy of A. Mannino.



Illustration n° 2. Basilicò Chapel in the Church of the Spasimo, domed on niches (Palermo).

Viceroy Ettore Pignatelli (1517-35) coincide with the climax of his “luck” in the public sector. During this phase Belguardo appears to be linked to technicians that revolved around the Viceroy’s Court and took advantage of a series of professional opportunities linked to Royal patronage. As master mason, he worked on the reconstruction of the St Francesco di Paola Convent (St Oliva) (1519) and the church of Sette Angeli (1527-28) directly commissioned by the Viceroy²⁴. Besides religious architecture he also worked in the public sphere on the city fortifications, which confirms his technical expertise in this specific sector. He appears in the citadel of Castellamare, viceregal seat since 1517: in 1518 for carving works “ad opus dila maragma”²⁵ and in 1524 as superintendent for the transformation work based on the drawings of the Royal engineer Antonio Tomasello²⁶; the complexity of the construction site (grand vaulted structures and imposing circular towers) and the large number of teams and workers involved suggest that the work required efficient organisational skills and management capabilities that constituted the prerequisite of the appointment he took on in 1536 (new town ramparts of engineer Ferramolino). Moreover, we know that in 1522 he had joined Viceroy Pignatelli in Trapani for a consultancy on the City walls²⁷. Among official commissions we must mention the work on the *Regio Hospitio* (Steri) (1530) as master mason-contractor, in which he took

²⁴ Vesco, 2006, p. 44; Vesco, 2007-2008, pp. 49-50 and doc. 1.

²⁵ Vesco, 2014 a, docs. 1, 2.

²⁶ Vesco, 2006, pp. 44-45; Vesco, 2007-2008, p. 49; Vesco, 2014a, pp. 7-30.

²⁷ Vesco, 2007-2008, p. 49; Vesco, 2014a, p. 17.



Illustration n° 3.
Church of the Catena,
vaults (Palermo).

on the execution of a three flights “grand stone staircase”²⁸ on geometrically complex flying buttresses. This is a field of application –that of natural stone staircases– he had tackled in private stately homes²⁹. A direct relationship with the Viceroy and governmental institutions introduced him to the entourage of the aristocracy linked to the Royal Court and also to important private commissions. In 1531 the Royal Councillor De Andrea entrusted him the construction of his residence, never completed, with characteristics of an imposing Late Gothic building with exposed stone surfaces³⁰. News that has emerged seems to suggest that from the end of the 1520s and in the 1530s his work increased thanks to a structured entrepreneurial organization: construction rationality and efficiency, quality, reliability, execution rapidity (he used stone extracted from his quarries and reused centering) and the

²⁸ Vesco, 2007-2008, pp. 51-52 and doc. 2; Vesco, 2013, pp. 55-56.

²⁹ In 1518 he realised a grand staircase, “scala magna...con suo parapetto...intagliato”, in the palace of Domenico Bracco: Palermo State Archive, not. A. Lo Vecchio, v. 2388, c. dated 8th nov. 1518. Document found by S. Montana.

³⁰ Vesco, 2006, pp. 41-47; Scaduto, 2007, pp. 192-193.

ability to simultaneously manage various commissions guaranteed him success among the active construction companies in the city. Undoubtedly Belguardo could count on a tested system of professional alliances and fellowships (with masters from Genoa such as Antonio De Baudo and Antonio Scaluni, Francesco de Basilicata or Persio from Basilicata and the *faber lignarius* Vincenzo de Francisci), on a series of helpers-apprentices and on a significant family network such as master masons Lorenzo and Vincenzo Belguardo. During this phase, as we have partly seen, Belguardo undertook the most challenging construction enterprises; almost contextual is the construction of the cross vaults in religious buildings started earlier and on the way to completion: Catena (Illustration n° 3), Spasimo (1535, remained incomplete), St. Oliva (1536) and from 1534 (until 1543) the difficult commission of the cross rib vaults in St. Francesco d'Assisi³¹. In 1537 his presence is documented in the Partinico area³², on the building site of the towers of the Sanchezes and of the Timpanellos but at the beginning of the 1540s traces of his work become sporadic and his career seems to be already drawing to close. As a matter of fact he died in 1546 when (within the space of another generation) the Gothic Trayectory in Palermo was practically over, but up until the 1540s, Belguardo's activity and success confirm the vitality of Late Gothic architecture; despite the presence of Renaissance masters, Belguardo held centre stage in the construction field and traditional building techniques.

SOCIAL TRACKS AND PARALLEL PROFESSIONAL PATHS: THREE CASE STUDIES

In the space of a few years, Belguardo managed to have a corner on the building sector. Apart from being involved in numerous building sites of civil and religious architecture, he signed at least six apprenticeship contracts of which half in favour of apprentices from Ficarra (Messina), known for its tradition in stone carving. He surely worked outside of Sicily, as a document dated 1529 suggests, in which an apprentice pledged to work by his side in Palermo, in and outside the Kingdom³³. Belguardo owned a quarry -from which he extracted stone for construction work he was involved in and if necessary he also entrusted its temporary management to other craftsmen³⁴- and only one house in the centre of the Palermitan district of the Cassero³⁵. The assets he left in inheritance did not comprise books nor luxurious objects³⁶. Of the two sons born from his first marriage, the younger, Giovanni Francesco, was directed towards a career as a notary; the older, Giovanni Antonio, known with the onomastics variant of Beroaldo (or Beroaldi), was a scholar in civil law a canon and a prelate³⁷. In 1538 he was called by Pope Paul III to join the Roman Curia for his talent as a humanist and expert in the Law. He was nominated Bishop of Telesse (Campania) in 1548 and took active part in the Council of Trento. The biographic profiles

³¹ ROTOLO, 1952, pp. 115-118; ROTOLO, 1985, pp. 91-101; ROTOLO, 2010, pp. 247-248; MELI, 1958, docc. 155-158.

³² VESCO, 2014b, p. 93. Also see following paragraph by S. Montana.

³³ Palermo State Archive, not. G. Spanò, v. 3382, c. dated 18/01/1529.

³⁴ Palermo State Archive, not. M. La Cara, v. 2327, c. 170r.

³⁵ VESCO, 2006, p. 49.

³⁶ Palermo State Archive, not. A. Lo Vecchio, v. 2413, Antonio Belguardo's last will and testament published on 6th April 1546.

³⁷ Ivi. On Bishop Giovanni Antonio Beroaldo: MENCHI, 1967.

Lucca to purchase Carrara marble necessary for the completion of the work⁵². The building sites in which Timpanello appears to be involved in are two: the new slaughter house in Palermo (1539)⁵³ and the lateral portico of Monreale Cathedral (Illustration n° 5) (1547-1562 ca.)⁵⁴. In both cases Timpanello carried out the project drawings. His name is often associated to a master from Brindisi (Puglia) which, in 1537, with Antonio Belguardo entrusted the construction of his tower in Partinico⁵⁵. This further confirms that Timpanello's engagement in the construction sector, being an expert in drawing and music, was only limited to the ideative phase. In the light of the data emerged up to now, his appearance in deeds related to the construction of the tribune of Palermo allows us to speculate that he was jointly involved in its realization, perhaps due to a direct professional and personal connection with the workshop of the Gagini sculptors, as two clues suggest: his signature placed as witness in sculptor Antonello's last will and testament⁵⁶ and Giovanni and Vincenzo Gagini's involvement in the execution of the lateral portico of Monreale, the drawing of which is attributed to Timpanello based on reliable sources, although not supported by documents. As the slaughter house has vanished leaving no iconographic memory, the portico remains his best known work. The work funded by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese is perfectly integrated with local architectural practice and indifferent to the flattery of the classicist lure. What has been said up to this point only allows us to outline the professional profile of Timpanello, whose distance from his master Belguardo and de Bertolinis, verifiable in the diversities of origin, training and professional roles, seems to reduce itself to the sharing of the same cultural matrix linked to Late Gothic tradition.

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⁵² DI MARZO, 1883, pp. 155-156.

⁵³ Palermo State Archive, not. A. Lo Vecchio, v. 2449, c. 1192.

⁵⁴ SCHIRÒ, 1990, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Palermo State Archive, not. P. Ricca, v. 493, c. 132v.

⁵⁶ DI MARZO, 1883, p. 188.

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