

SUPSI

In the mirror of the past: rediscovering identity and form in antiquity

The graphic corpus of Tito Vespasiano Paravicini between Renaissance and Neo-Renaissance

The object of the research is to study an unpublished corpus of drawings, dating from the last decades of the 19th century, which depicts Renaissance buildings in Lombardy and Canton Ticino. This analytical study is embedded within a more complex set of issues and opens up broader prospects, concerning a crucial stage of European history and culture, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the Renaissance became a model to follow and imitate, creating new architectural languages as well as a means of defining modern identities. In this historical context, it was important to study and survey buildings from the 15th and 16th century, which were often subject to demolition or radical reworking. The result of the 19th-century graphic production on these issues was twofold: on the one hand it recorded the appearance of Renaissance buildings that were then about to disappear and on the other it was functional to the development of catalogues of models and decorative elements useful for the practice of modern architects.

This study intends to deal with both values in parallel, adopting an innovative perspective, to enrich both our knowledge of the Renaissance and of the 19th-century vision of the past. The subject and occasion of the research is the rediscovery of this corpus of unpublished drawings by the architect Tito Vespasiano Paravicini (1830-1899), kept in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, with a thousand items comprising sketches, building surveys and architectural elevations, dating from between 1870 and 1890. The drawings are of the highest quality and the building surveys were conducted with a rigorous scientific method that makes this production highly distinctive. They have not yet been studied and, in addition to revealing a still submerged world, they reveal a further, strongly political dialectic.



Tito Vespasiano Paravicini, Die Renaissance-Architektur der Lombardei, Dresden: Gilbers, 1878, tav. 19, "Kirche zu S. Lorenzo zu Lugano. Haupttür"; tav. 20, "Kirche zu S. Lorenzo zu Lugano. Details der Haupttür".

The research will not be limited to the analysis and publication of this set of drawings, which is in itself a challenging task, since some of the buildings are still unidentified. Studying Paravicini's work, in a region with very strong and homogeneous geographical coordinates (Lombardy and Ticino), will offer an extremely significant sample of a broader phenomenon, that of the European neo-Renaissance and the systematic practice of building the present through the authoritativeness of the past.

Goals of the project are: to explore the historical-cultural context in which the Lombard and Ticino neo-Renaissance was formed and developed by focusing on an important figure and his work; to define the various levels of relations between the study of the past and the formation of new architectural languages; to use Paravicini's work to increase our knowledge of the Renaissance buildings that were the model of his research.

The research will: use unpublished archival documents to identify, study and catalogue 19th-century graphic surveys of Renaissance monuments, many of which are now lost; create a cataloguing system for the architectural material to enable comparison of ancient and Renaissance models, as well as their study or reuse in the 19th century.

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Financed by

FNS – Swiss National Science Foundation

Duration

01.06.2019 - 31.05.2022

Link

<http://p3.snf.ch/project-185344#>