

DIALOGUES CARVED IN STONE: PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN ARCHITECT-SCULPTORS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE DIFFUSION OF ARCHITECTURAL "VARIETAS" IN LATE 15TH-CENTURY ROME

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Studies on the decorative aspects of early Renaissance architecture have been so far analyzed mostly as purely formal phenomenon without taking into account their social implications. The purpose of this research is to overturn this traditional approach, considering «*varietas*» – that is the differential component of ornamental elements of the same kind in a building or in a work of art – as a social parameter, to interpretate the organizational structure of workshops.

The theoretical core of this study consists in trying to assess how the spread of the antique-like architectural language, characterized by a search for modular and aesthetic unitarity and coherence, was dealt with in an age in which the work organization of building sites was based on a choral contribution to the formal layout of a building. Since the figure of the architect as the sole author was then more an exception than a rule, the role of these masters and their workshops takes on a much higher value in relation to design choices, particularly to decorative ones.

Through the analysis of concrete examples of *varietas*, it is possible to determine that, in parallel to the vertical hierarchy of their working relationships, existed a horizontal hierarchy with respect to the making of the architectural details. A clear expression of this can be found in the existence of partnerships in which two or more masters lead together a workshop, clearly for an economic advantage, but also on account of the custom of conceiving the project definition as a shared responsibility.

The outcome of this can still be recognized in the stone works of many 15th-century buildings and architectural sculptures, such as tombs, tabernacle, ciboria. The focus of this research has been posed on the Roman context but considered in the light of a comparative approach with other important centers of the Renaissance period.