

Dell'Architettura civile di Baldassarre Orsini Parte Seconda
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Vito Cardone - *Preface*

Ten years ago Paolo Belardi and Adriana Soletti, with the publication of *Parte Prima* of the manuscript *Dell'Architettura civile di Baldassarre Orsini*, drew the attention of the world of architecture to a de facto disregarded figure outside the restricted local context. With *Parte Seconda* of the manuscript, Belardi concludes the publication of the complete Treatise by the versatile Perugian painter-philosopher.

The two parts which can stand on their own – in brief one could say – the first part is dedicated to principles of theory, the second to the principles of construction – constitute an organic whole, which focuses on reviewing some hasty evaluations and comments that were made perhaps after an initial reading of just *Parte Prima* of the Treatise. It reveals a harmonious continuity with the Introduction and the Preface of the work, which was difficult to see after reading only *Parte Prima*.

The statement that «l'Architettura sia scienza, siccome quella che ha per sue ministre parecchie altre facoltà e discipline scientifiche – Architecture is science, since it has many other faculties and scientific topics at its service» (*Parte Prima*, Introduzione) remains a mere statement, which instead should have characterised the work, since – as is well known and as the author himself implies – the Treatise is more a text-book for students than a work by an active architect or an art theoretician. Among these subjects, Orsini specifies in his notes, «bisogna annoverare la letteratura; quella parte di filosofia a cui vien dato il nome di etica, o sia di morale; e l'altra, che si dinomina fisica; di quella parte di giurisprudenza, che si appartiene agli edifizj; le matematiche; e finalmente la dottrina e la perizia del disegnare – one should include literature, the part of philosophy that goes by the name of ethics or morality, another known as physics, and that part of law that pertains to buildings, mathematics and at the end the doctrine and expertise of drawing». It is through such “utilitarian” disciplines that architecture «giudica delle opere, le quali dagli artefici sono fatte; e quindi, a conseguire questo suo fine, ora si volge all'investigare delle ragioni, per cui le opere, o sono compiutamente fatte, o sono prive della ricercata perfezione; ed ora si dimora tutta intenta intorno all'esecuzione delle medesime opere. Da che egli è assai chiaro e piano ad intendere, che a colui soltanto è con giustizia dato il nome di Architetto, il quale, è insieme esercitato nell'opera della mano, e nell'investigazione delle sue ragioni. [...] L'Architettura adunque, al pari d'ogni altra arte, contiene la parte teorica e la pratica - judges works, those made by artists, and in order to fulfil its objectives, now turns to examine the reasons for which the works are completed or are devoid of refined perfection, and is now concentrated on the execution of the same works. From which it is very clear and easy to understand that you can rightly call an architect, he who has hands-on experience and has the experience of studies. [...] Architecture, then, as every other art, contains both the theoretical and the practical side» (*Parte Prima*, Introduzione).

Such an approach made one hope for an original attempt at a unitary reconstruction in the training of architects on an artistic and scientific basis, theoretical and practical, an evident countertrend to the long-standing distinction between architects and engineers. A distinction that in the latter period of the Illuminist age, and everywhere in Europe, was to be incorporated in the training with the setting-up of state schools for the specific training of engineers who had to work there as well. According to some it is with the constitution of these schools that the specialisation process for engineers took shape, which also led to the more general and definite separation between technical and Humanist training.

But despite the indications repeated in the frontispiece of *Parte Seconda* that