

«Per commodità e aiuto degli studenti». Domenico Fontana e il Collegio Montalto di Bologna

Abstract

During the papacy of Sixtus V (1585–1590), Bologna, the second city of the Papal States, received two important commissions: the vaults of the basilica of San Petronio and the Montalto college. Where the former was just another part of the long history of the city's civic temple – destined ultimately to fail – the latter was, by contrast, intended as a clear sign of Sistine presence in Bologna, no less in one of its fields of excellence: education. Studies on the college have largely focused on the local context of the commission; they have firmly established the details of its construction, but have tended to neglect its wider context of artistic reference. The question of attribution, in particular, has not been addressed, and the possible involvement of Domenico Fontana, the general architect of Sixtus V, has never been investigated. Starting from the reorganisation and verification of known sources and the discovery of unpublished documents, this paper details the primary aspects of the Sistine foundation: its protagonists and the key dates and places. These give a sense of its priority in the papal programme. In addition to uncovering the unpublished intervention of the painter-decorator Giovan Battista Cremonini, analysis of building site documents has allowed the author to identify the craftsmen involved. That some of these craftsmen were members of the main families of the Bolognese building scene in those years is testament to the importance of the Sistine commission. The paper also challenges the conventional attribution to Pietro Fiorini, arguing that his role was instead in the planning of the college, which paved the way for Fontana's intervention. In support of this claim the author references a hitherto unnoticed drawing of the original façade of the Sistine college, which is remarkable for its closeness to Fontana's works.