

*Il marchesato di Saluzzo tra Gotico e Rinascimento: Architettura, città, committenti.* Silvia Beltramo.

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To the south of the duchy of Savoy, bordered by Provence on the west and the coastal cities of Nice, Ventimiglia, and Monaco to the south, sat the *marchesato* of Saluzzo. As Silvia Beltramo documents, Saluzzo was buffeted by cultural and political forces from all directions. The architecture and urban form of the *marchesato*'s major cities—Saluzzo, Revello, Carmagnola, and Verzuolo—as well as several smaller ones, testify to the intrusions that transformed their character over the course of the fifteenth century.

Notably far off the traditional Rome-Florence-Venice axis, this study patiently reconstructs the phases of development at the micro level of the single house, palace, alley, convent, church, city wall, or public building. Beltramo's aims are multiple, but she directs special attention both to documenting the changes in the public character and appearance of structures, and to revealing the participation of artisans and master builders from both sides of the Alps over the course of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as they shaped Saluzzo. The study addresses the period when the *marchesato*

absorbed influences both of Northern European Gothic and the new Renaissance trends emanating from the Italian Peninsula, particularly Lombardy. Only painstaking, scrupulous, and long-term archival research, coupled with on-site inspections of the buildings, made it possible to accomplish this considerable achievement. In this respect, Beltramo's study falls into the category of the local history. Italy has a long tradition of passionate local historians, many of whose fine-grained studies end up being fundamental to the work of professionals exploring broader topics. The differences between the two types of histories are clear: local histories aim to document, while professional histories address larger questions for which, in turn, local histories are often essential.

Beltramo's study bridges both, largely successfully. She offers house-by-house documentation of property transactions, architectural transformations, and even information about functions, in the two centuries before owners began to assign new representational functions. It was a surprise to discover how many notarial transactions took place in the porticoes of private houses facing the public street, something elsewhere found generally in the porticoes of public buildings. Beltramo even includes details about infrastructure, from paving to sewer systems, and she explores the connections between them and the changing urban patterns of the four cities, as well as some of the smaller towns in the *marchesato*. Although the early chapters focus on urban plans and aristocratic housing, Beltramo also devotes chapters to the dwellings of the prosperous mercantile class, and to churches and monasteries. Luck was with her, for she was fortunate enough to find a remarkable amount of archival documentation for several houses, which she paired with detailed and patient analyses of the structures themselves, bringing to light not only the phases of construction, but also a rich array of frescoes not unlike those of the palaces in Saluzzo and Mantua.

In the final chapter, the study shifts to the materials, their origins and use in the different parts of the *marchesato*, and to the artisans engaged for individual buildings. To this end the author also documents the locations of the primary brick production facilities, the quarries for the stone and marble employed in churches, convents, and noble tombs. Identifying individual artisans allows her to trace the influences from Southern France, especially Provence, from the northern Alps, and from Lombardy and Northern Italy, and how they changed over time. Perhaps the most intriguing feature of this section is the careful documentation of craftsmanship and traditions in constructions of stone, brick, wood, and tile as expressed in the individual buildings. Along with the focus on a region long considered marginal, if considered at all, this may be the study's most important contribution.

Like the best local historians, Beltramo's love of detail leads her to offer multiple instances of similar phenomena, at times interrupting the flow of the analysis. Fortunately, following in the path of historians Carlo Tosco and Guido Montanari, Beltramo cautiously links these details to larger questions. Off the Rome-Florence-Venice axis, Saluzzo in the fifteenth century constitutes an intriguing example of the diffusion of new Renaissance approaches to architecture and urban planning. For

specialists of subalpine architecture in Piemonte and Provence, it is a treasure trove of new material and a model for future studies.

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