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FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

3

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THE *TEMPIO MALATESTIANO* AS AN AESTHETIC AND IDEOLOGICAL INCUBATOR

PAOLA SPINOZZI

Conceived by Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta in 1447, designed by Leon Battista Alberti, decorated by Agostino di Duccio, painted by Piero della Francesca, and left unfinished, the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini exhibits distinctive marks of multiple intellects which have inspired tales, historical novels, poems, and essays. Writing (about) the Tempio between the second half to the nineteenth century and the present age, Jacob Burckhardt, John Addington Symonds, Charles Yriarte, E.M. Forster, Pasquale Villari, Edward Hutton, Ezra Pound, Aldous Huxley, and Adrian Stokes have generated a network of ekphrases across Europe. Diverse ekphrastic narratives reveal that the architectural building is a conceptual site which generates other conceptual sites, an incubator of aesthetic and ideological interpretations from different historical and cultural contexts.

The verbal renditions of the Tempio show how an architectural and conceptual building can host multiple aesthetic and ideological appropriations which allow us to define its historical role and reveal its characteristics as an intercultural and transnational catalyst.

Keywords: Tempio Malatestiano, ekphrasis, appropriation, aesthetics, British travellers

The Tempio Malatestiano is both an architectural building and a conceptual site which generates other conceptual sites, an incubator of aesthetic and ideological interpretations from different historical and cultural contexts. The monument, conceived by Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, designed by Leon Battista Alberti, decorated by Agostino di Duccio, and painted by Piero della Francesca [Plate 1], exhibits distinctive marks of multiple intellects which have inspired tales, historical novels, poems, and essays. Each of these forms of writing contributes to forming an intertextual mosaic of ekphrastic narratives which represent the architectural complexity of the Tempio, thrive on its symbology, magnify the deeds of its patron, and celebrate the talent of its artists. The ekphrastic network is a fabrication by writers whose verbal renditions have refracted, multiplied, and disseminated the Tempio across Europe.



Plate 1 - The façade of the Tempio Malatestiano.

Source: original by the author

“SIGISMUNDUS PANDULFUS MALATESTA PANDULFI F(ilius) v(oto) FECIT ANNO GRATIAE MCCCCL”, the inscription on the frieze of the façade celebrates the Lord of Rimini and the year 1450, in which the Tempio was erected, although Alberti’s design may date to 1453. This symbolic statement is part of a project featuring a complex iconographic programme, the display of Sigismondo’s coat-of-arms and portrait in medallion along with his cipher and emblems of an elephant and a rose, his manifestation of love to Isotta degli Atti, his tribute to the philosophers and poets who lived at his court and now rest in the tombs built under the marble arches encasing the Tempio. These artistic, cultural, and political components form a multi-faceted expression of the Italian Renaissance [Plate 2].

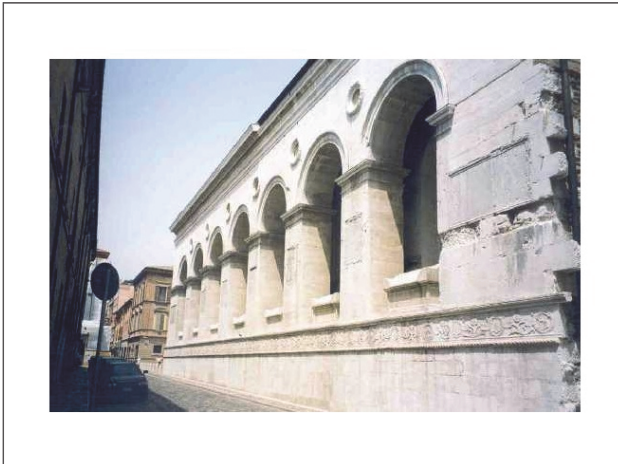


Plate 2 - The right-hand side of the Tempio Malatestiano.

Source: original by the author

In *Kultur und Kunst der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) Jacob Burckhardt offered a groundbreaking contribution to the canonization of the role played by Malatesta. Burckhardt's well-known theory, according to which the Italian Renaissance marks the beginning of modern individualism, attributes a paradigmatic status to Malatesta's frame of mind. He, a condottiere who ruled Rimini from 1432 to 1468, is among "Die Förderer des Humanismus", the proponents of Humanism to whom a fundamental chapter is dedicated: his role as initiator of a cultural shift is based on the intellectual activities that flourished at his court and on his indomitable nature. Burckhardt explains that the project for the reconstruction of the church of San Francesco was propelled by Sigismondo's desire to magnify his ability to rule a town, cultivate human intellect, and celebrate his love for Isotta. Burckhardt's fascination for Italian Renaissance culture and Swiss Calvinism produce a bipolar reading, in which attraction for the grandeur of Sigismondo's plans, exhibited in the Tempio, intertwines with reprobation for his amoral conduct.

Emphasizing his cult of personality, the historian shows a Romantic vision, according to which the intellects of fifteenth-century Italian lords gave rise to modernity. He highlights the intellectual vitality of the court at Rimini, where the non-religious condottiere welcomed refined scholars well versed in disputations and Latin poems praising beautiful Isotta. Burckhardt believes that the church of San Francesco was rebuilt as a funerary monument in her honour: *Divae Isottae Sacrum*.

Und wenn die Philologen sterben, so kommen sie 208 in (oder unter) die Sarkophage zu liegen, womit die Nischen der beiden Außenwände dieser nämlichen Kirche geschmückt sind; eine Inschrift besagt dann, der betreffende sei hier beigesetzt worden zur Zeit, da Sigismondous, Pandulfus' Sohn, herrschte¹.

Sigismondo's beliefs were blasphemous, yet he was driven by intellectual vitality. Burckhardt's attempt to validate the cultural impact of the warlord emerges from his reference to Pope Pius II: on the one hand he excommunicated Malatesta and burned his effigy, claiming that the Tempio was built for heathens more than Christians, on the other he acknowledged that the Lord of Rimini was well acquainted with history and philosophy and seemed born to achieve everything he pursued. He is the emblem of the 'complete man', a new human type who was strong enough to endorse a form of historical existence crucial to the development of civilization. His personality introduced the era of modernity: inclined to war and art, to action and contemplation, he chose to adhere to a form of extreme individualism thriving on open-minded realism and magnificent ideals. The violence of proto-individualism marked a transitional phase leading to the necessary and positive formation of modernity. Malatesta thus personifies an immense paradox: he was the man who initiated modernity and the man who represented what later modernity lost and betrayed, a refutation of modernity itself. As Burckhardt's book was translated into

¹ J. Burckhardt, *Kultur und Kunst der Renaissance in Italien*, Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft G.M.B.H., Berlin 1900, *Dritter Abschnitt. Die Wiedererweckung des Altertums, IV. Die Förderer des Humanismus*, pp. 198-209, pp. 208-209.

French and Italian in 1876, into English in 1886, it resonated across Europe and produced further elaborations. At the end of the nineteenth century Malatesta was at the centre of the European debate on the origin and evolution of modernity.

In *Rimini. Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta and Leo Battista Alberti*, published in *Sketches and Studies in Southern Europe* (1880), John Addington Symonds reconstructs the process of metamorphosis which transformed the Gothic Church of Saint Francis into the monument which symbolizes the revitalization of paganism in the fifteenth century. When Symonds visited Rimini, it was a town of about eighteen thousand inhabitants on the Adriatic coast and close to the world-famous Rubicon River. The baths were already famous, but visitors from the North were attracted by two Roman monuments: the bridge spanning the Marecchia River with five gigantic arches of white Istrian limestone, which Emperor Augustus started in 14 AD and Emperor Tiberius completed in 21 AD; the triumphal arch erected in honor of Augustus, serving as city gate and surmounted with mediæval machicolations. The two ancient Roman monuments and the cathedral remodelled by Leon Battista Alberti for Malatesta were clearly the wonders of Rimini:

This strange church, one of the earliest extant buildings in which the Neopaganism of the Renaissance showed itself in full force, brings together before our memory two men [...] typical in their contrasted characters of the transitional age which gave them birth. [...] Nothing but the fact that the church is duly dedicated to S. Francis, and that its outer shell of classic marble encases an old Gothic edifice, remains to remind us that it is a Christian place of worship. It has no sanctity, no spirit of piety. The pride of the tyrant [...] seems so to fill this house of prayer that there is no room left for God. Yet the Cathedral of Rimini remains a monument of first-rate importance for all students who seek to penetrate the revived Paganism of the fifteenth century².

Symonds elucidates the role of the renowned architect who, while fulfilling the expectations of his commissioner, wanted to express his own vision: entering the service of Malatesta, Alberti pursued a bold syncretism. He remodelled the Franciscan Church, transforming a plain Gothic structure with apse and side chapels into a peculiar classical building in which the Middle Ages and the Renaissance would exist simultaneously. Specifically, he altered the whole exterior by erecting Roman arches and Corinthian pilasters, which hid the old design and left the Gothic windows and doors intact. Symonds's perceptivity as a critic and connoisseur emerges from a meticulous study of the neoclassical decorations covering the interior walls: observing the allegorical figures in low relief, he argues that the singing boys [Plate 3] are designed in the manner of Donatello, the delicate style is reminiscent of Botticelli, and the draperies would appeal to Edward Burne-Jones.

² J. Addington Symonds, *Rimini. Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta and Leo Battista Alberti*, in *Sketches and Studies in Southern Europe*, Harpers and Brothers, New York 1880, 2 voll., pp. 92-109, p. 92.



Plate 3 - Tempio Malatestiano, Angels playing and singing.
Source: original by the author

His comparison between the Italian masters of the early Renaissance and the Victorian artist who was still active in 1880, when *Sketches and Studies in Southern Europe* was published, is a perceptive reference to the Italian origins of Pre-Raphaelitism. Incrustation is the term Symonds chooses to define the bizarre effect of density and intensity produced by the angels, the statuettes in niches, the personifications of arts and sciences, the satyrs, and the sea-children, filling all the spaces. His finest intuition is that the reliefs mark a particularly interesting moment in the history of modern art: mid-fifteenth-century Italy was characterised by style, variously expressed by sculptors, the poet Boiardo, and the painter Botticelli.

Symonds captures the transition between mediaeval and classical standards of taste, Pagan and Christian beliefs. Independence of thought and precision, freedom from repetition of figurative patterns, and creative symbolism indicate that this was the period when art reached consciousness while the artist had not yet become self-conscious.

To study the flowing lines of the great angels traced upon the walls of the Chapel of St. Sigismondo in the Cathedral of Rimini, to follow the undulations of their drapery that seems to float, to feel the dignified urbanity of all their gestures, is like listening to one of those clear early Italian compositions for the voice, which surpasses in suavity of tone and grace of movement all that Music in her full-grown vigor has produced. There is, indeed, something infinitely charming in the crepuscular moments of the human mind. Whether it be the rather loveliness of an art still immature, or the beauty of art upon the wane – whether, in fact, the twilight be of morning or of evening, we find in the masterpieces of such periods a placid calm and chastened pathos, as of a spirit self-withdrawn from vulgar cares, which in the full light of meridian splendor is lacking³.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-109.

The Tempio is rendered as a sumptuous piece of aesthetic prose in which critical thinking mingles with creative ideas, conjuring up an appreciation of art imbued with impressionistic speculations. The imaginative use of language is evident in the choice of the adjective crepuscular and the noun twilight to indicate both the latest stage of development and the beginning.

Reinforcing Symonds' emphasis on paganism, the French journalist and art historian Charles Yriarte noticed that Christian religion is conspicuous by its absence in the Tempio. His ponderous *Un Condottiere au XV^e siècle. Rimini. Études sur les Lettres et les Arts à la Cour des Malatesta d'après les Papiers d'État des Archives d'Italie* (1882) includes Chapter VIII. *Isotta de Rimini (1417-1470)*, in which he claimed to have discovered a love poem composed by Sigismondo in honour of Isotta. Yriarte's attribution has not been corroborated by philological evidence, and yet his emphasis on sentimental aspects has strengthened the influence of the fictional biography on the reception of the Malatesta Tempio in Europe. The transformation of the church of Saint Francis into a mausoleum is the focus of Chapter X. *Le Temple des Malatesta*. In the section *L'Intérieur du Temple* the author develops a meticulous iconological investigation leading to the conclusion that Paganism originates from an ideological programme in which the reinterpretation of classical mythology legitimizes and ennobles the deeds of Sigismondo.

Yriarte enumerates the cherubs and genies playing ancient instruments, Strength, Prudence, Science, Music, Astronomy, Philosophy, the Arts, the Seven Planets, and the Signs of the Zodiac, five hundred shields or mottos, a hundred bas-reliefs, three tombs, twenty statues, noticing how their variegated nature and rich floral ornamentation on the upper parts of the walls form a perfect unity. While sacred images and divine symbols are absent, as are all signs of a quest for redemption, the allegories and symbols celebrating the Lord of Rimini are inspired by the myths, beliefs, and philosophy of the ancient Greeks.

Yriarte explains that the laurel-crowned head standing out against a gold background at the base of the pillars is the image of Malatesta, portrayed by Matteo de' Pasti and Pisanello on many medals.

Sigismond, vainqueur du roi d'Aragon, couronné par les Florentins, le *Poliorcetes et semper Invictus* des légendes de Pisano, n'est plus un homme au moment où il élève ce temple: dans les bas-reliefs du tombeau de ses aïeux, porté sur un char triomphal traîné par des captifs, il figure au milieu des dieux de l'Olympe; et plus loin, aux plis de la robe d'une des figures allégoriques qui représentent les Vertus dont il est orné, on lit cette légende païenne: *Jupiter, Apollo, Arimineus*. L'encens de ses thuriféraires a troublé le cerveau du condottiere vainqueur; il sent qu'il devient un dieu, et le seul Immortel est absent de ce temple au fronton duquel Malatesta a cependant écrit son nom. Ce n'est pas Dieu qu'on adore ici, c'est Isotta; c'est pour elle que brûlent l'encens et la myrrhe⁴.

⁴ Ch. Yriarte, *Un condottiere au XV^e siècle. Rimini. Études sur les Lettres et les Arts à la Cour des Malatesta d'après les Papiers d'État des Archives d'Italie*, J. Rothschild, Paris 1882, pp. 178-252, p. 198.

Yriarte's decadent style thrives on the power of synaesthesia that brings together visual and olfactory stimuli: the iconography in the chapel of the ancestors blends with the scent of incense, exalting Malatesta's belief in his divine role as a warlord. It is a vivid example of French fin-de-siècle writing transforming the description of a monument into a source of sensory delight. Yriarte's interpretation of Sigismondo's cult of personality and Isotta's importance, fuelled by his penchant for Romantic sensationalism, acquired a popularity that lasted for several decades, until about 1920.

In March 1904 Edward Morgan Forster wrote *The Tomb of Pletone*, a short story which was never published but appeared posthumous in *Arctic Summer and Other Fiction* (1980). In October 1905 he published the essay *Gemistus Pletho* in the "Independent Review" and in 1936 republished it in *Abinger Harvest*, a collection which includes other essays, reviews, poems, and a play. The story and the essay offer a peculiar perspective on Forster's ability to draw upon historical events to explore cultural encounters and clashes in colonial and imperialistic contexts and the difficulties of reconciling multiple religious confessions in different ethnic groups.

Of *The Tomb of Pletone* only the unfinished manuscript written in pencil, perhaps in preparation for typing, is extant. The philosopher George Gemistus Pletho was born in Constantinople in 1355-1360 and died in Mistra, near Sparta, in 1452, or in 1454, the difference between the two dates being significant as to whether Pletho still lived during the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. He played a pivotal role in advocating and spreading Renaissance humanism through Neoplatonism. In 1466 Sigismondo Malatesta stole Pletho's remains, brought them from Mistra to Rimini, and interred them in a tomb on the right-hand side wall of the Tempio. Malatesta's extraordinary deed offers an insight into the history of fifteenth-century Italy, troubled by cultural conflicts between the West and the East and dealing internally with different social groups and lifestyles.

The relationship between Pletho, Greece and the East on the one hand and Malatesta, Italy and the West on the other is the conceptual and narrative core around which Forster developed his plot, fuelled by his tour of Greece in the spring of 1903. *Idea of a story about Pletone, starting at Mistra* appears in his journal as a note dating to the 8th of December 1903. While appreciating Forster's careful reading of Italian history and the elegance and restraint of the story, Elizabeth Heine notices that "*The Tomb of Pletone* preserves [Forster's] unsatisfactory efforts to fuse the history with imagined scenes of nightmarish violence, as well as with his characteristic themes of brotherly friendship and sacrifice"⁵. The geography of Greece and Italy is exact and historical facts are accurate, except for his choice to compress the years between the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and Sigismondo Malatesta's military excursion to the Morea for the Venetians in 1464-65. Heine explains that a pressed Star of Bethlehem marks the page describing Mistra in Forster's copy of the Baedeker's *Greece* edition published in 1894, while in a letter to his mother he wrote that he first saw Rimini and the tomb in 1907, a few years after drafting the story. The fact that

⁵ E. Heine, *Editor's Introduction*, in E.M. Forster, *Arctic Summer and Other Fiction*, Holmes and Meier Publishers, New York 1981, pp. 93-117, p. 95.

he composed it before visiting Rimini may explain why there is no description of the Tempio, or it may have been lost with the last page of the story⁶.

Its strength resides in Forster's reception and representation of Malatesta's belief that Pletho's legacy would initiate a much-needed cultural change. The mentality of the Lord of Rimini, called Sismondo, takes shape through his dialogue with two fictional characters: Astorro, a clerk who works in the Rome branch of the Medici bank and decides to travel to Rimini and join Sismondo in his mission to Mistra, and Jacobo Vernagallo, a fine Neoplatonic scholar, follower of Pletho and new governor of Mistra, whom Astorro hopes to be able to rescue. Sismondo boldly declares to Astorre that Greece will rise from the dead and flourish in Italy.

"We go to awake the dead!" [Sismondo] cried. "We will bring Greece to Italy, you and I. The tombs open, the gods start up from sleep to accompany your friend and mine. And when the sacred ship returns, in Italy too, in Italy too will begin the reign of beauty, wisdom and strength. I dedicate my soul to this, even as you have dedicated yours"⁷.

Sismondo explains that worldly pleasures such as art and literature, fine clothes and food, war and love are nothing, compared to the uplifting presence of a strong intellectual. Malatesta recalls the first time he heard Pletho speak at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439): though unprepared to respond, he was struck by the eloquence with which Pletho, a Greek and not even Christian, defended the Latin Church⁸.

Pletho's historical role at the Council has been widely investigated. Concerned more with the advancement of Neoplatonic philosophy than with religious questions, in Florence he delivered *De differentiis Aristotelis et Platonis* [*On the Difference between Aristotle and Plato*, 1439]. This treatise sparked a new interest in Plato, who had been overshadowed by Aristotle in the West during the Middle Ages, and inspired Cosimo de Medici's project of founding the Platonic Academy of Florence. Stanford Patrick Rosenbaum is right in observing that "Italian humanist values of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are the focus of Forster's interest in Jerome Cardan and Gemistus Pletho"⁹. Forster's understanding of the role of Greece and Italy in the fifteenth century has been examined by David Ernest Roessel, who captures Forster's ambivalent attitude in *The Tomb of Pletone*. Roessel believes that, while Forster strongly advocated the regeneration of Greece, he did not believe it could take place on Greek soil, because "the entire plot of the story concerns an attempt to make 'Greece' awake in Italy"¹⁰. Indeed, Astorre, whose job as a clerk makes him more inclined to practical activities than contemplation, declares that Greece is a dead

⁶ E. Heine, *Notes*, in E.M. Forster, *Arctic Summer and Other Fiction*, p. 326.

⁷ E.M. Forster, *The Tomb of Pletone*, in *Arctic Summer and Other Fiction*, pp. 93-117, 98.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁹ S.P. Rosenbaum, *E.M. Forster's Earlier Short Writings*, in Id., *Edwardian Bloomsbury: The Early Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group*, Macmillan, London 1994, 2 voll., pp. 30-60, 38.

¹⁰ D.E. Roessel, *In Byron's Shadow: Modern Greece in the English & American Imagination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, Chapter II. *The Magic Force of Legends*, Part 6. *Politicized Pans*, p. 320 (Notes to pages

country, where “the hills are dead, the islands are dead, the towns, the fields, the trees”¹¹. This is the main argument he uses to persuade his friend Jacobo to leave Greece for Italy, where Neoplatonism could flourish.

Sismondo’s explanation of how the body of Pletho will exert a benignant influence on Italian soil and, more importantly, will stimulate the propagation of a new culture is as detailed as it is uncanny, evoking metempsychosis.

“His body has made this plant and his spirit has filled it. His eloquence has passed into its tendrils, his wisdom into its leaves, and the blue flowers are his soul which has contemplated heaven. For he has awoken the gods, and year by year they will renew him and increase him, till the flower which is his covers the whole earth. I will take it to Italy, this flower, and there he shall grow, as a sign that Greece has risen from the dead.” [...] “I shall take all to Italy— the tomb, the bones, the flowers, for it is all Pletone. Not a grain of earth shall be altered”¹².

“He shall lie outside the Cathedral of Rimini,” said Sismondo. “Outside, because of the flowers. There is a palace opposite, which I will give to Jacobo”¹³.

The story stops with the description of the ceremony during which the bones of Pletho were translated to their new sarcophagus of porphyry, at the presence of a Cardinal representing the Pope, the Archbishop, the clergy, along with Piero della Francesca, Leon Battista Alberti and Jacobo Vernagallo. It is clear that *The Tomb of Pletone* revolves around the three Italian protagonists, who refer to the Byzantine philosopher as Giorgio Gemisto Pletone, and their idiosyncratic personalities, exhibiting a peculiar blend of ideological beliefs and mystical drives, temperament, sentimentalism, and intellectualism.

Forster’s attempt at framing Renaissance culture within a Gothic tale could not be more distant from the historical approach he adopts in “Gemistus Pletho” (1905). It was in 1903 that he began lecturing on Italian history at Cambridge University. The whole essay is a thorough account of the historical events, geopolitical issues, philosophical disquisitions and doctrinal antinomies culminating in the Council of Ferrara-Florence, in which for the last time the Latin and Greek churches tried to reach agreement. The last paragraph of the essay is dedicated to Malatesta’s deed and the symbolic role played by the Tempio, a Renaissance building evoking Roman antiquity and erected on a Gothic church:

In 1465, Sismondo Malatesta of Rimini captured Mistrà from the Turks, and, out of the great love he had for Gemistus, exhumed his body and translated it to Italy. At Mistrà the mediaeval world surveys the empty site of Sparta; in the church of San Francesco at Rimini the Gothic brickwork has disappeared behind the marble arcades of Alberti. Gemistus lived in the one, and is buried in the other. The Renais-

172-174). See also P. Jeffreys, *Eastern Questions: Hellenism and Orientalism in the Writings of E.M. Forster and C.P. Cavafy*, ELT Press, Greensboro 2005, Chapter 1. *A Mutual Hellenism*, p. 10.

¹¹ E.M. Forster, *The Tomb of Pletone*, p. 109.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

sance can point to many a career which is greater, but to none which is so strangely symbolical¹⁴.

Pletho bore witness to the complex dynamics that led to the transition from the medieval to the early modern age. This transition is the essence of the Tempio, which has deep roots in the Middle Ages and regenerates in the Renaissance.

Throughout the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century the romantic view, popularized by Charles Yriarte, that the Tempio had been built as a tribute to Isotta circulated in encyclopedias, tour guides, novels, plays, and critical monographs. The eminent historian and politician Pasquale Villari, author of the entry on Rimini for the 1886 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, dedicated great attention to the description of the Tempio, emphasising the absence of sacred emblems and dedication to either Saint Francis or the Christian God. It was inspired by the woman who was yet to become Sigismondo's wife: "The bas-reliefs of one of the chapels represent Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mars and Diana, together with the signs of the zodiac. And these subjects are derived, it appears, from a poem in which Sigismondo had invoked the gods and the signs of the zodiac to soften Isotta's heart and win her to his arms"¹⁵. Clearly this romantic interpretation, reinforced by the authoritative Villari and published in subsequent editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, did have an impact on the reception of the Tempio in Europe.

As an Italophile and writer of books on Italian regions and towns, Edward Hutton was highly prolific from the beginning of the twentieth century through to the Sixties. During the Second World War he contributed to the preservation of Italy's cultural heritage by producing extensive lists of the monuments and sites that should be protected by the Allied Intelligence Corps. Attracted to the history of art and culture, he devoted two of his works to Sigismondo Malatesta, whose larger-than-life personality aroused the critic's sympathy and admiration. *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini. A Study of a XV Century Italian Despot* (1906) is a fictional biography pervaded by a romantic vision of the warlord, whose life is observed by a narrator called Sanseverino:

Then in the spring Sigismondo returned, and certain details which awaited his decision were settled; and at last, on a showery day in March, our Lord passed in state from the Rocca to S. Francesco to attend Mass there for the last time. Later there was to be a "discorso" in the great Hall of the Rocca, in which Messer Leon Battista was to explain the plans he had made for that new Temple vowed in battle to Almighty God. For the old Gothic church of S. Francesco [...] was [...] to be altogether changed into something rich and curious the mere brick and stone of the old building remaining to be covered by the dreams of Sigismondo, the art of Leon Alberti¹⁶.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁵ P. Villari, *Rimini*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Adam & Charles Black, Edinburgh 1886, vol. 20, pp. 557-560, p. 558.

¹⁶ E. Hutton, *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini. A Study of a XV Century Italian Despot*, J.M. Dent & Co./E.P. Dutton & Co., London/New York 1906, p. 169.

Hutton recounts how Alberti proposed to carry out Sigismondo's ideas by turning a medieval church into a modern building, so that the façade would feature a great central door reminiscent of the arch of Augustus, flanked by two similar smaller arches demarcated by pillars, on which would rise a pediment and over all a great dome. The narrative focus is on the metamorphosis from an old mysterious church into a temperate building which preserves the old one: the windows would be filled with glass decorated with fantastic figures, the harsh brick would be covered by precious ornamented marbles, twilight and darkness would be replaced by light, spaciousness, and proportion.

Hutton develops a smooth narrative and makes a plea for syncretism: the spirit of Alberti combined with the genius of Sigismondo brought to life a monument in which Greek mythology, Christianity and Neoplatonism coexist, summoned by Malatesta to celebrate his own existence:

It was a Temple built to the Ever-living God, who hides Himself in the beauty of the world, whom men called Zeus, whom we call the Father, who is to be found in the Philosophy of Plato as well as in the Gospel of Jesus, but whom it is, as Pico has lately told, easier to love than to utter in words. [...] This Temple raised to the Ever-living God was also to be the monument and symbol of his life¹⁷.

Hutton's élan gains momentum when he explains the aims of his book and defines it as an experiment, prompted by his willingness to write fact as fiction. He chose to explore the first part of the fifteenth century drawing upon historical events and simultaneously writing the life of a fearless warlord. He acknowledges that scholars like the Canadian historian Donald Creighton, the German diplomat Alfred von Reumont, or Jakob Burckhardt would certainly write a more authoritative monograph on Sigismondo. He also clarifies that Charles Yriarte achieved this task in *Un Condottiere au XVIème Siecle*, to which he is indebted. Instead of writing a novel or a romance, Hutton decided to write the life of Sigismondo, utilizing both facts and history, including plenty of details, pursuing the integrity of the historian and yet wanting to create a work of art:

That the facts should live, so that they might become more than facts, and take on something of the vitality of fictitious things. I invented Sanseverino: all his life is a tale – *tutta è una frasca* – he is the fiction which speaks my truth, and from his mouth you may know clearly the fact from the lie [such as] those incidents [...] which he tells only from hearsay, and such-like inventions¹⁸.

Sanseverino is thus Hutton's alter ego, through whom he expresses his dual predisposition towards critical and creative writing.

Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini invites a comparison with the chapter *Rimini* in *The Cities of Romagna and the Marches* (1913), in which he adopts a more objective and matter-of-fact approach:

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296.

On either side is carved his shield bearing his monogram or cipher. This monogram has been generally supposed to represent “the entwined names of Sigismondo and Isotta,” but this is very doubtful. It would seem to be merely the first two letters of Sigismondo’s name, and as a monogram to be in keeping with the traditions and practice of his family. The rose, which is everywhere scattered through the church, may perhaps be Isotta’s emblem, but is more likely to refer to the gift of the golden rose which Sigismondo received from Nicholas V¹⁹.

While the fictional biography of Malatesta incorporates a romantic tribute to the deeds of the warlord, the chapter dedicated to Rimini adopts an objective approach that undermines romance. Different hermeneutical approaches by the same author show that the Tempio has become an incubator of multiple intertextual narratives.

When Hutton examines the chapels of Saint Jerome and Saint Michael, he explains that the iconographic work encapsulates syncretic beliefs prone to overinterpretation and misunderstandings. The bas-reliefs in the Cappella di Girolamo are not representations of gods but signs of the zodiac, planets, and constellations which in the past used to be attached to divinities [Plate 4].



Plate 4 - Segni dello Zodiaco, Tempio Malatestiano.

He claims that these iconic subjects and the ones in the Cappella di San Michele derive from a poem by Sigismondo’s poems and evoke the signs of heaven rather than pagan

¹⁹ E. Hutton, *Rimini*, in *The Cities of Romagna and the Marches*, Methuen & Co., London 1913, pp. 105-119, p. 115.

gods. The Chapel of Saint Gaudenzio, the richest in the whole Tempio, where Agostino di Duccio carved eighteen bas-reliefs of the arts and sciences, is a physical and a metaphorical space that prompts Hutton to single out the various aims pursued by Sigismondo. He wanted to raise a temple to honour God, himself and his mistress Isotta, and Catholic religion was never his target, but Pope Pius II rejected syncretism as blasphemy.

Lawrence S. Rainey clarifies that the very ambivalence of Sigismondo's frame of mind has generated multiple interpretations of the temple: according to liberal historiographers, he should be situated within a progressive account of modernity, while others have emphasized the subversive traits highlighted by Burckhardt. Friedrich Nietzsche accentuated these traits and their potentialities, regretting that they had been only partially expressed, "to the point of turning the entire Renaissance into the promise of a modernity that had been subsequently thwarted, a modernity not yet realized"²⁰.

Ezra Pound, Aldous Huxley, and Adrian Stokes brought the intertextual network of ekphrases to its highest level of complexity in the Twenties and Thirties. In *The Cantos*, published between 1917 and 1968, Pound established an ideal dialogue with the 15th-century condottiere, Lord of Rimini and patron of the arts. Drawing on his biography and quoting extensively from primary sources, including Malatesta's letters, he composed the *Malatesta Cantos*, which appeared in July 1923 in the first volume of "The Criterion"²¹, founded by T.S. Eliot in 1922 and published till 1939.

As he sought patrons for himself and tried to publish in little magazines and small publishing houses, the role of the patron was crucial for Pound, and Malatesta is the first among the rulers who were also patrons to appear in *The Cantos*. Pound read the works inspired by Sigismondo. He annotated his copy of Symonds' *Rimini. Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta and Leo Battista Alberti* and bought a copy of the Baedeker guide. In April 1921 he moved from London into an apartment in Paris. In May 1922 he was in Rimini and saw the Tempio for the first time with his wife Dorothy²². In Rimini he bought a copy of *L'uomo nuovo. Benito Mussolini [The New Man, 1923]* by Antonio Beltramelli and used it extensively when he composed the first drafts of the *Malatesta Cantos*²³. Back in Paris he bought Yriarte's *Un Condottiere au XV^e siècle* and filled it with notes. He also bought *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini* by Hutton and *Pio II e la politica italiana nella lotta contro i Malatesti (1457-1463) [Pius II and Italian Politics in the Fight against the Malatesti, 1911]* by historian Giovanni Soranzo. He spent a period of intensive work at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, where he consulted rare books, and in January 1923 he left Paris to visit historical archives and libraries holding documents related to Malat-

²⁰ L.S. Rainey, *From the Patron to il Duce: Ezra Pound's Odyssey*, in Id., *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1998, pp. 107-145. See also, by the same author, *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture: Text, History, and the Malatesta Cantos*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1991.

²¹ E. Pound, *Malatesta Cantos*, Cantos VIII, IX, X, XI, "The Criterion", 1, 1923, 4, pp. 363-384.

²² For Pound's attachment to the Italian region of Romagna and the town of Rimini see L. Paganelli, *Ezra Pound in Rimini*, "Linguistics and Literature Studies", 1, 2013, 1, pp. 43-45.

²³ See T. Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991.

esta. He returned to Rimini on the 23rd of March 1923. In nine weeks he took more than 700 pages of notes and wrote 65 drafts and fragments of drafts²⁴.

Pound's fascination for the Tempio originated from the parallelism he drew between the work of architecture and his own work of art. For him the signature building in Rimini was a poem in stone dedicated to self-will as opposed to social constructions and the drudgery of daily life. The syncretism between the severe architectural lines designed by Alberti and the opulent sculptural decorations carved by Agostino di Duccio reveals a polyphonic eclecticism which Pound fully perceived and aimed to reproduce in *The Cantos*. Rainey highlights a connection between Pound's genuine sympathy for Provençal culture and Malatesta's appreciation of Provençal poetry and its influence on Italian poetry. His devotion to Isotta could thus be regarded as a continuation of the courtly love tradition that flourished in Provence. He also supported the house of Anjou from that region, which could have led Pius II to suppress any possible resurgence of heretical and neopagan beliefs such as the ones expressed by Catharism in 11th-century Provence²⁵.

In the *Malatesta Cantos* the Tempio stands out as the work of Sigismondo, portrayed while making progress with its construction:

He, Sigismundo, *templum aedificavit*
 In Romagna, teeming with cattle thieves²⁶,

 And he began building the TEMPPIO²⁷

 And Sigismundo got up a few arches,
 And stole that marble in Classe, "stole", that is²⁸,

As Whittier-Ferguson acutely observed, Malatesta is one of Pound's personae and Malatesta's tempio is like Pound's *Cantos*: "beautiful, heterogeneous, incomplete"²⁹. Pound exalts the process of identification between two creative minds, Malatesta's and his own, and between two extraordinary creations, Malatesta's Tempio and *The Cantos*.

Rimini and Alberti is one of the travelogues from the collection *Along the Road: Notes and Essays of a Tourist* published by Aldous Huxley in 1925. When he visited the town, the relic of Saint Francis Xavier's thaumaturgical arm was being displayed within the Tempio, an event he describes adopting a highbrow attitude towards a multitude of fervent Catholics from the lower classes. His intellectual fruition is disrupted by the mass phenomenon

²⁴ See C. Ricciardi, *Eikones. Ezra Pound e il Rinascimento*, Liguori, Napoli 1991; C. Ricciardi, *Archives*, in *Ezra Pound in Context*, I.B. Nadel ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, pp. 148-157; E. Pound, *Carte italiane 1930-1944: letteratura e arte*, L. Cesari ed., Archinto, Milano 2005.

²⁵ L.S. Rainey, *All I Want You to Do Is to Follow the Orders: History, Faith, and Fascism in the Early Cantos*, in *A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in The Cantos*, L.S. Rainey ed., The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1997, pp. 63-116, 75.

²⁶ E. Pound, *Canto VIII*, in *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, New Directions Publishing, New York 1996, p. 32.

²⁷ E. Pound, *Canto IX*, in *ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁸ E. Pound, *Canto IX*, in *ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁹ J. Whittier-Ferguson, *Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and the Modern Epic*, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, Catherine Bates ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, pp. 211-233, 224-225.

which appears to be orchestrated by the priests who perform the ritual and the Fascists who enhance pomp and circumstance. Sharing the view popularized by previous authors, Huxley explains that Malatesta chose the Christian church, rebuilt it in pagan form and dedicated it to himself, his mistress, and the humanities. He is struck by the heterogeneous mixture of the interior, in which the original arches of the Gothic church clash both with Matteo de Pasti's pagan decorations and Malatesta's blasphemous cult of personality and celebration of Isotta.

Huxley believes that Alberti pursued his own architectural project in the façade, erecting a triumphal arch which looks like a nobler version of the Arch of Augustus, built where the ancient Via Flaminia connects Rimini to Rome. The deep arched niches containing the sarcophagi of scholars and philosophers appear to Huxley as plain and severe as the character of an early Roman described by Plutarch. The Tempio is thus Alberti's tribute to the human intellect:

The whole building is a hymn to intellectual beauty, an exaltation of reason as the only source of human greatness. Its form is Roman; for Rome was the retrospective Utopia in which such men as Alberti, from the time of the Renaissance down to a much later date, saw the fulfilment of their ideals. The Roman myth dies hard, the Greek harder still; there are certain victims of a classical education who still regard the Republic as the home of all virtues and see in Periclean Athens the unique repository of human intelligence³⁰.

Huxley's claim that Alberti would praise Malatesta's intelligence and criticize his lust and excesses is a subtle way of casting a moral judgement. The antithesis between the severe and stoic vision of the architect and the cunning and murderous deeds of the warlord encapsulates a cultural evaluation of two specific mentalities in relation to their historical context: Alberti's restraint made him hesitate before responding to Malatesta's penchant for theatrical grandiosity, which could have been easily achieved if he had lived in the Baroque Age.

[Sigismondo] deserved Borromini, the Cavaliere Arpino and a tenth-rate imitator of Bernini. What he actually got [...] was Matteo de' Pasti, Piero della Francesca, and Leon Battista Alberti. Alberti's share in the monument [is] a paean in praise of civilization, couched in the language of Rome – but freely and not pedantically employed, as the philosophers and the poets of the age employed the Latin idiom³¹.

The ekphrastic illumination of the Tempio culminates in *Stones of Rimini*, where Adrian Stokes develops his approach as an art critic by establishing a dialectical dialogue with *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853) by John Ruskin.

³⁰ A. Huxley, *Rimini and Alberti*, in *Along the Road: Notes and Essays of a Tourist*, George H. Doran, New York 1925, p. 165.

³¹ A. Huxley, *Rimini and Alberti*, p. 167.

So we shall now attack the vital though confused aesthetic distinction between carving and modelling. There must be a profound aesthetic distinction between them. As everyone knows, carving is a cutting away, while modelling or moulding is a building up. Agostino's virtue will shed new light upon the high imaginative constructions³².

No other sculptor can teach so much about carving. His achievement inspires the search for its origins³³.

The stones of the Tempio metamorphose into a finely carved aesthetic prose oscillating between objective data and symbolical transfiguration. Stokes' style thrives on the legacy of Aestheticism and Walter Pater.

Mars' scythed chariot descends a precipice (Pl. 23). But it is in no great danger. A hurricane blows it back, blows back his ovular shield, pins it to the block, hurls back his cloak and the tree on which his eagle has perched. Mars himself gleams; and the wolf whose hide seems mail-clad-hard, is unruffled by the wind.

Capricorn (Pl. 5), of the full ovoid udders, reaches up a peak to nibble the mountain oak. She balances upon the naked stone. See how it is cut to fundamental stone shapes, to gradual curves and smooth ripples; not gouged, not furrowed³⁴.

Stokes' use of description defies its rules of referentiality and clarity: he 'writes down', as the etymology of 'describere' indicates, to write above. The reader obviously recognizes the planet, the zodiacal sign or every single part described page by page but is also exposed to Stokes' narrative extravagance. Describing becomes overwriting and, ultimately, overinterpretation.

Nothing draws you: it is silent, without rhythm. It is steadfast like a blind face. The fact that it is unfinished starts not one single speculation. Do you wonder what expression the blind man had when he used to see? No: his face is complete as it is. This is no shrine, no temple, but a church; Gothic San Francesco upon which Alberti has built a classical encasement. You can see the brick of the old San Francesco above where the stone encasement is unfinished. That is the only modulation³⁵.

The façade never goes up, nor down, nor across. It stands white and strong³⁶.

The architectural volumes and proportions of the Tempio are defined through bizarre similes ("It is steadfast like a blind face") and synaesthesia ("It stands white and strong").

³² A. Stokes, Part Two, *Stone and Clay*, Chapter Four, *Carving, Modelling and Agostino*, in *Stones of Rimini*, Faber & Faber, London 1934, p. 108. See also Id., *The Quattro Cento: A Different Conception of the Italian Renaissance*, Faber & Faber, London 1932.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

³⁵ A. Stokes, Part Three, *Stone, Water and Stars*, Chapter Five, *The Tempio: First Visit*, in *Stones of Rimini*, p. 177.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Ekphrasis as a mode of writing a work of architecture is transformed into a form of expression used to verbalize the surreal projections of the author's imagery.

Of what kind the metaphysical, or, rather, cosmological, meaning that is so mixed up with the reappearance of Diana and the others from the stone at Rimini, that they needs must reappear as planets, amid the attendant signs of the Zodiac³⁷?

Stokes makes statements that sound assertive and raises questions that sound whimsical. *The Stones of Rimini* are the result of a complex iconological investigation in which the method of the art historian is redefined by the introduction of cerebral and psychoanalytical components.

Historians, philologists, and philosophers published extensively about the Tempio in the period immediately preceding and following World War II. In his seminal *La Survivance des Dieux Antiques* (1940) Jean Seznec identified some significant literary sources for the Tempio, provided by the Neoplatonic philosophers Porphyry of Tyre and Macrobius³⁸. In *The Effect of the War on Renaissance and Baroque Art in Italy* (1945) Rensselaer W. Lee commented on the conspicuous damage at Rimini, which the Germans chose as a strategic point of defense situated at the Adriatic end of the Gothic line. The town suffered from heavy bombing by the Allies and the Tempio was damaged: the apse end and the sacristy were almost destroyed, the nave roof collapsed, exposing the interior; the walls were cracked.

But the chapels containing Agostino da Duccio's Tomb of Isotta and his wonderful reliefs of the Arts and Sciences are still standing, and the sculptures partly protected by brick walls, have suffered almost no hurt. Piero della Francesca's fresco of Sigismondo Malatesta had been detached and removed from the chapel wall before the Allied troops entered Rimini³⁹.

Lee expressed deep anxiety about about the state of the Tempio, internationally regarded as the architectural symbol of the Italian Renaissance. After the War, it became quintessentially attached to research on Neoplatonism in the Italian Renaissance, exemplified by Charles Mitchell in *The Imagery of the Tempio Malatestiano* (1951)⁴⁰, Charles Hope in *The*

³⁷ A. Stokes, Part Three, *Stone, Water and Stars*, Chapter Six, *Chapel of the Planets*, in *Stones of Rimini*, p. 209.

³⁸ J. Seznec, *La survivance des dieux antiques. Essai sur le rôle de la tradition mythologique dans l'humanisme et dans l'art de la Renaissance*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, 11, The Warburg Institute, London 1940; II ed. Flammarion, Paris 1980, English translation: *The Survival of the Pagan Gods. The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, trans. by B.F. Sessions, Pantheon Books, New York 1953. See also M. Bertozzi, *Segni, simboli, visioni. Il Tempio Malatestiano e i suoi enigmi*, in Id., *Il detective melanconico e altri saggi filosofici*, Feltrinelli, Bologna 2008, p. 159.

³⁹ R.W. Lee, *The Effect of the War on Renaissance and Baroque Art in Italy*, "College Art Journal", 4, 1945, 2, pp. 81-91, p. 87.

⁴⁰ C. Mitchell, *The Imagery of the Tempio Malatestiano*, in "Studi Romagnoli", 2, 1951, pp. 77-90. See also, by the same author, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*, in *Studi Malatestiani*, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, Roma 1978, pp. 71-103.

Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano (1992)⁴¹, and Stanko Kokole in *Cognito formarum and Agostino di Duccio's Reliefs for the Chapel of the Planets in the Tempio Malatestiano* (1996)⁴².

As Eugenio Garin finely observed, Sigismondo Malatesta, who returned from Greece with the body of Gemistus to give him burial in the Tempio, defied the implacable George of Trebizond, who promised him a sure death if he had not immediately thrown away the bones of the impious philosopher⁴³. Marco Bertozzi notices that the remains of Giorgio Gemisto Pletone are a real “act of defiance”, not only because they signify stubborn opposition to papal politics, but also because Malatesta had been able to grasp in the paganism of Pletone, whom Bessarione had called “the glory of the whole Greece and pride of the times to come”, the myth of an epochal rebirth⁴⁴.

When it was included in the Grand Tour, a trip to Rimini would suggest a historical and artistic interest in some vestiges of ancient Rome and outstanding examples of its ideal continuation in the Quattrocento. The intercultural and transnational forms of writing (about) the Tempio show how an architectural and conceptual building incubates multiple aesthetic and ideological appropriations. The Tempio ekphrastically rendered allows us to define its historical role and to reveal its characteristics as a cultural catalyst.

⁴¹ C. Hope, *The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano*, in “Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes”, 55, 1992, pp. 51-154.

⁴² S. Kokole, *Cognito formarum and Agostino di Duccio's Reliefs for the Chapel of the Planets in the Tempio Malatestiano*, in *Quattrocento Adriatico: Fifteenth-Century Art of the Adriatic Rim*, ed. with an Introduction by Charles Dempsey, Nuova Alfa Editoriale, Bologna 1996, pp. 177-206.

⁴³ E. Garin, *Umanisti artisti scienziati*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1989, p. 109.

⁴⁴ M. Bertozzi, *Il convito di Ferrara. Giorgio Gemisto Pletone e il mito del paganesimo antico ai tempi del Concilio*, in *Ferrara e il Concilio 1438-1439*. Atti del convegno di studi nel 550° anniversario del concilio dell'unione delle due Chiese d'Oriente e d'Occidente – Università degli Studi di Ferrara, 23-24 novembre 1989, pp. 133-141.



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