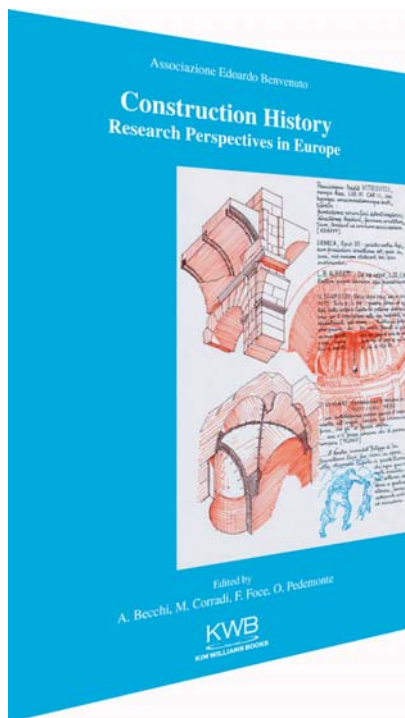


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Federico Foce and Orietta Pedemonte**
“Construction History: The Genoa Meridian”

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Construction History
Research Perspectives in Europe

A. BECCHI, M. CORRADI, F. FOCE AND O. PEDEMONTE, EDS.

This is vol. IV in the book series “Between Architecture and Mathematics”. The Associazione Benvenuto for research in the Science and Art of Building in their historical development assigned to a few international “observers” the task of styling a map of Construction History in their various countries. Obviously, we are not dealing here with an exhaustive map, but rather with a first attempt to identify some of the significant lines of research and to put into contact the individual scholars. A small step towards the constitution of an international scientific community that is interested in architecture as well as mechanics; in construction as well as its history. A community which, up to the present, has not known how to find the essential points of contact and dialogue, and which has avoided the onus of long-term initiatives. The present volume is an aid for establishing solid collaborative research projects, knowing that this can happen only if the studies are so rigorous and detailed that those emphatic recall to arms of interdisciplinarity, sure signs of problems set forth badly, are rendered superfluous.

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PREFACE

CONSTRUCTION HISTORY: THE GENOA MERIDIAN

The recent paper of David Cannadine, provocatively entitled “Engineering History, or the History of Engineering? Re-Writing the Technological Past”¹ nicely highlights the difficulties that even today plague the history of technology as regards its relationship to the histories of economics, of science, and of culture. A sinister and disquieting unease is felt by anyone who takes an interest in the subject and attempts to define the disciplinary boundaries, making use of categories and concepts taken from knowledge of a longer tradition.

This difficulty was apparent as well at the “First International Congress on Construction History” (Madrid, 20-24 January 2003) with regards to the concept of *Construction History*. In general discussions, as well as in those that attempted to delineate the future prospects for this field of research, the divergences turned out to be profound, sometimes without any apparent means of bridging the gaps. Historians of technology, science, architecture, and engineering (among other fields) were and are ready to establish boundaries and drive stakes to distinguish the pure from the contaminated, to advise on partnerships and discourage dangerous alliances. As always happens in such case, the advisers far outnumber the good advice and from the disciplinary barracks, often of a small academic nature, fly volleys of messages that are subtly threatening, as if research feared liberty and should be constrained by written declarations of appurtenance. Contemporaneously on the opposite front are thrown together “insurrectional” proclamations, everyone having to have his say, leaving aside only the seriousness of the research and the rigorousness of the methods of investigation.

It is difficult to imagine what will come out of the latest, recurring, conflict of these opposing ideologies, but one thing is certain from the outset: we are not enrolling in either camp. We can't do it, tied as we are to the memory of Edoardo Benvenuto, both as a human being and as an intellectual. The fact is that Benvenuto's research always moved eccentrically with respect to the two positions outlined above: interdisciplinarity was never a fig leaf to be placed modestly over a knowledge that is fragile, immature, and unconscious with

¹ D. Cannadine, “Engineering History, or the History of Engineering? Re-Writing the Technological Past”. *Transactions of the Newcomen Society* 74, 2 (2004): 163-180. This paper resulted from the “25th Dickinson Memorial Lecture” read at the Science Museum in London on 7 May 2003.

respect to thoughts that are “clear and distinct”; in the same way disciplinarity was never used to achieve comfort where the academic aura hides an abysmal cultural poverty. We have then decided to take off once again from the first international meeting in Saragossa in 1993²—conceived and promoted by Benvenuto together with Patricia Radelet-de Grave—during which the two key words “mechanics” and “architecture” were placed squarely at center stage. The project “Between Mechanics and Architecture” maintained the line set out at Saragossa, and was from its inception rendered concrete by a series of initiatives that were purposely limited in scope;³ after Benvenuto passed away in 1998, there was additional motivation to develop these initiatives through the association that bears his name, founded in Genoa in June 1999.⁴

Since then, the Associazione Edoardo Benvenuto has organized seminars and international conferences.⁵ It has published, through Birkhäuser, two anthologies of essays that are part of the series “Between Mechanics and Architecture”.⁶ It has established the Edoardo Benvenuto Prize.⁷ It has supported the publication of scientific monographs dealing with themes and personages in relationship to the connections between mechanics and architecture.⁸ As a whole, this is a mass of work that delineates a “Genoa meridian” for historical research on the art and

² The symposium “Between Mechanics and Architecture” took place during the XIX International Congress of History of Science, Saragossa, Spain, 22-29 August 1993. The proceedings were published in the volume *Between Mechanics and Architecture* edited by Patricia Radelet-de Grave and Edoardo Benvenuto (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1995).

³ These meetings were: “Culmann and Graphostatics” (Genoa 1996); “Between Mechanics and Architecture in Encyclopaedias” (Liège 1997); “Entre Mécanique et Architecture IV: Hommage à Barré de Saint-Venant” (Louvain-La-Neuve 1997); and “The Role of Descriptive and Projective Geometry in Architecture and Mathematics” (Pescara 1998).

⁴ The “Associazione Edoardo Benvenuto per la ricerca sulla Scienza e l’Arte del Costruire nel loro sviluppo storico” (Association Edoardo Benvenuto for research in the historical development of the Science and Art of Construction) was founded 8 June 1999 by Danila Aita, Giovanna Aita, Antonio Becchi, Giovanni Benvenuto, Massimo Corradi, Federico Foce, Orietta Pedemonte, and Paolo Torsello.

⁵ See the website of the Associazione Benvenuto: <http://www.associazionebenvenuto.org>.

⁶ A. Becchi, M. Corradi, F. Foce, and O. Pedemonte, eds., *Towards a History of Construction* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2002); *Essays on the History of Mechanics* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2003). The contribution of Sandro Caparrini to this volume, entitled “Early Theories of Vectors,” was awarded the 2003 Slade Prize of the British Society for the History of Science, which is presented biennially to the writer of an essay that makes a critical contribution to the history of science.

⁷ The winners of the prize to date are: 2002, Pierre Smars (Belgium); 2003, Tullia Iori (Italy) and John Ochsendorf (USA); 2004, Joaquín Antuña Bernardo (Spain) and Chiara Calderini (Italy).

⁸ A. Becchi and F. Foce, *Degli archi e delle volte. Arte del costruire tra meccanica e stereotomia* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2003); A. Becchi, *Q.XVI. Leonardo, Galileo e il caso Baldi: Magonza, 26 Marzo 1621*. (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2004).

science of construction which is closely related to Benvenuto's work⁹ and, at the same time, a reliable point of reference for new fields of investigation regarding *Construction History*.

The heterogeneity of the fields of specialization of the authors invited to participate at the Saragossa symposium¹⁰ was a clear demonstration of the difficulties encountered during the selection process. At that time there was no international network that permitted the certain identification of lines of research and institutions that worked in directions analogous to that of the project "Between Mechanics and Architecture". But that heterogeneity was also an explicit signal of openness, knowing that often the most interesting ideas are developed far from hue and cry of the beaten path. It is with the same intent that, ten years from the Saragossa symposium, we decided to assign to a few international "observers" the task of styling a map of *Construction History* in their various countries. Ours was the responsibility for selecting the authors (three of whom were present in Saragossa in 1993), but the responsibility—and the merit—for the picture presented here goes to the authors.

Obviously, we are not dealing here with an exhaustive map, but rather with a first attempt to identify some of the significant lines of research and to put the individual scholars into contact with one another. This is a small step towards the constitution of an international scientific community that is interested in architecture as well as mechanics; in construction as well as its history; a community which, up to the present, has not known how to find the essential points of contact and dialogue, and which has avoided the onus of long-term initiatives. It is our hope that the present volume will be helpful in establishing solid collaborative research projects, knowing that this can happen only if the studies are so rigorous and detailed that those emphatic recalls to arms of interdisciplinarity, sure signs of problems set forth badly, are rendered superfluous.

At the same time, the Associazione will continue its work supporting young researchers through the Edoardo Benvenuto Prize. Twenty years from the establishment of the doctoral program in "Storia delle scienze e delle tecniche

⁹ In particular we refer to the volumes *La Scienza delle Costruzioni e il suo sviluppo storico* (Florence: Sansoni, 1991) and *An Introduction to the History of Structural Mechanics* (New York: Springer, 1991).

¹⁰ Authors of essays included in the Proceedings are: Antonio Becchi, Edoardo Benvenuto, Anne-Chatrine Bernès, Massimo Corradi, Anne Coste, Jean Dhombres, Salvatore Di Pasquale, Federico Foce, Paolo Freguglia, Giorgio Gullini, Robert Halleux, Karl-Eugen Kurrer, Franco Laner, Diarmuid Ó Mathúna, Pier Daniele Napolitani, Cristiana Pesciullesi, Antoine Picon, Patricia Radelet-de Grave, Marta Rapallini, Joël Sakarovitch, Angiola Maria Sassi Perino, and Rossana Tazzioli.

costruttive” (History of the sciences and techniques of construction), conceived by Benvenuto together with Nino Giuffrè and Salvatore Di Pasquale (who prematurely passed away as this Preface was being written and to whom this volume is dedicated), the Prize is intended as a concrete means of encouragement for those involved with the history of the art and science of construction. In order to underline the international character of this initiative, next year’s prize will be awarded in Madrid, during the meeting “Historical Perspectives on Structural Analysis”, to take place 2-3 December 2005. At that meeting will be presented an anthology of essays written in honor of Jacques Heyman, Honorary President of our Associazione. It will be an important occasion for reaffirming a faithful continuity: from the great lessons of the Masters to the new frontiers of research, in the name of that knowledge “between mechanics and architecture” which, as is written in a manuscript from the Renaissance, distrusts the *turba degli Architetti pratici* as well as the *Mecanici semplicemente pratici, anchorchè per semplice pratica abbiano fatto merauiglie*.

The Editors
Genoa, 4 November 2004