

António Rodrigues, a Portuguese Architect with a Scientific Inclination

JOÃO PEDRO XAVIER*

Introduction

Mestre António Rodrigues (c.1520-1590) has been only recently acknowledged as an important personality of Portuguese architecture, in spite of his promotion to the post of First Architect of the Realm by D. Sebastião, in 1565, after Miguel de Arruda, and to Master of Fortifications, in 1575, after the death of Afonso Álvares. He performed both tasks for fifteen years, which constitutes a unique event in our country.¹

We owe to Rafael Moreira this re-evaluation; he calls Rodrigues “a Portuguese architect with a scientific inclination”.² Moreira attributed to Rodrigues the authorship of a *Treatise of Architecture*,³ which was the textbook for the course in military architecture (Lição de Arquitectura Militar) for which Rodrigues was responsible in the School of Moços Fidalgos do Paço da Ribeira, as well as the architectural design of the church of Santa Maria da Graça in Setúbal (presently the Cathedral), for which Moreira found documentary evidence. On the basis of stylistic evidence, he also attributed to Rodrigues the Onze Mil Virgens Chapel at Alcácer do Sal, an addition to the church of the convent of Santo António built as a mausoleum for Dom Pedro de Mascaranhas.⁴

In fact, these attributions confirm:

- A solid theoretical formation, classically based, built on treatises, mainly those written by Vitruvius, Serlio and Pietro Cataneo, and most probably nurtured by direct contact with the Renaissance homeland. King João III used to encourage learning in Italy; besides it is hard to believe that the architect of the Onze Mil Virgens Chapel did not have firsthand knowledge of his sources.
- A pedagogical viewpoint in conformance with a teaching model in which, according to Vitruvius, an architect’s formation could not be conceived without a strong scientific basis of mathematics, especially geometry, but where astronomy, music and the disciplines of the *trivium* were also taught.

This was indeed the method of teaching that took place at Paço da Ribeira’s School founded by Pedro Nunes, who was the director of the courses of mathematics and cosmography (the humanist philosopher João Pedro Lavanha was also part of its teaching staff). It was later closed by Filipe II, the first king of the Spanish dynasty in Portugal, and transferred to Madrid where it gave rise to the Academia de Matematicas y Arquitectura directed by Juan de Herrera.

* Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto (FAUP), Rua do Gólgota 215, 4150-755 Porto, PORTUGAL, jpx@arq.up.pt