

The work of Giovanni Battista Scapitta

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This thesis about the work of Giovanni Battista Scapitta, has a documentary character with the intent to make clear and deepen the knowledge about the figure and the work of this monferrino architect and surveyor.

Giovanni Battista Scapitta was born in Moncalvo on 17th January 1653; without any academic schooling, he grew up as a student of the military engineer Antonio Leni and soon entered the service of Monferrato's ducal administration covering the duties of Land Agent (from 1676) and later of Prefect and Surveyor of Ducal Buildings (from 1681).

With this last post, during a period of thirty years, he visited the whole territory of the state, engaged in establishing boundaries, feudal possessions and estate measuring, water course survey and road routing.

During the present study a lot of *tipi* have been found, such as maps, charts and location plans, that witness his activity; we have used them to try and define the figure of the Surveyor-Cartographer in the Duchy of Mantua, which owned Monferrato from 1708, comparing this figure with the others from the neighbouring states of Milano and Savoia Piedmont.



Picture left: ASTo, Corte, M.to. Provincie, m. 18. Map of Monte Ursale
Picture right: ASTo, Corte, M.to.Provincie, m.18. Map of Monte Minale

This conspicuous activity often diverted Scapitta from his private activity as an architect, in which he reveals an exceptional talent, placing him among the most interesting artistic personalities of the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century.

The present work has re-examined the whole of Scapitta's work, including some engravings of *apparati* designed for celebrations (1705 wedding of Duke Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga and Susanna Enrichetta of Elbeuf) or mournful occasions (1685 funeral in picture of Archduchess Isabella Clara).

Particular interest has been paid to his projects such as the Acqui Thermal Bath (1680), heavily modified in the following century, the "Cavallerizza" of Casale Monferrato (beginning of XVIII century), the Tonco castle (1698-1705) and the drawing, still unpublished, about the design proposal for the new shape of the existing Thea-Porta castle at Castelletto Molina, in the Acqui area.

These works, related to the mature period of Scapitta, testify to the pleasure of innovation, the precise study of plans and elevations, the magisterial composition and the flowing plastic scansion that well characterise one of the two best work of Scapitta: Gozzani di Treville palace (design of 1711) that Scapitta was never able to see finished.



Casale M.to. Gozzani di Treville palace. Great staircase- Hall

This palace is a residential structure, magnificent and articulated, rich in scenographical effects in the entrance hall lay-out and in the yard conclusion. It is derived from the theatre tradition of the Bibienas, with whom Scapitta came into contact both during his trips to Piacenza and Mantua and when the Bibienas made an intervention on the Duchy theatre of Casale, substituted later by the present structure, which was started during the late seventeenth century.

As regards the religious architecture interventions of Scapitta, they have been divided into 4 areas: the first one is related to the rebuilding and consolidation actions, including the intervention in S. Filippo Neri at Casale M.to, Pozzo S. Evasio and Madonna delle Vigne near Trino Vercellese.

The second area is related to the churches that have been attributed to him on a basis of historical and chronological considerations or under styling analogies with other buildings, known to be designed by him: among these the church of Torrione, as yet unpublished.

The third area includes the churches of S. Michele at Balzola (1689), an oratory with a centralized nucleus, brightened up by a fancy facade; the parish church in the Pobietto *Grangia* (1711) is another example in which it is possible to find the special balance of the traditional single nave pattern. This long experienced composition ability emerges in the convent church of S.Caterina of Casale (1711) that represents with Gozzani Palace, the two most famous and discussed works of Giovanni Battista Scapitta.



Casale M.to. Convent Church of S.Caterina. Cupola

The building composition is solved by an elegant elliptical structure of the cupola and by the stunning elevation of the overlapped orders with returned structure. The fourth and last area, studied the religious works, the furnishing and redesign intervention assigned to Terranova (wooden altar) and to the Casale Cathedral (furniture for the new sacristy, the Relic Chapel and the new main altar design). Since Scapitta died (15th November 1715) before the main design was completed (Gozzani palace and S.Caterina church) it has also been examined who could be the architect that inherited the interrupted sites. On Scapitta's death, his nephew Vincenzo (Casale 1680-1750) inherited the survey office, with all professional tools and draft *tipi*, but surely not the two open sites, because, in terms of sensitivity and taste, he seems distanced from all architectural activity. The two sites were carried on, according to the most recent studies, by the master builder and architect Giacomo Zanetti (Lugano 1696-Casale M.to 1735).

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