

Appointment of Raphael as Inspector of Antiquities in Rome

1518

On August 1, 1514, Raphael was appointed chief architect of Saint Peter's. The papal brief which made the appointment specified that Bramante had named his successor to the office before dying. Raphael certainly considered this his most onerous duty. The other letter of nomination which we translate here is intended to facilitate Raphael's work on Saint Peter's by providing stone from the Roman ruins. Using ancient materials for building was current practice through the 16th century (Sixtus V had the Septizonium, one of Rome's most famous ancient ruins, destroyed for this purpose). Yet, the terms of Raphael's appointment showed an advance over previous practice in that it made an effort to avoid outrageous destructions. In this context one will notice the humanist attitude which gave precedence to inscriptions rather than reliefs.

TO RAPHAEL OF URBINO¹

It is of the utmost importance for the work on the Roman temple of the Prince of the Apostles [St. Peter's], that the stones and marble, of which a great quantity are needed, be easily obtained in the neighborhood rather than imported from afar. And since we know that the Roman ruins provide them abundantly, and that all sorts of stones are found by almost anybody who starts to build in or around Rome, or digs up the ground for some other reason, we create you, because we have entrusted you with the direction of the work, inspector in chief of all the marble and all the stone which will be excavated from now on within Rome or within ten miles around it, so that you can purchase them if they are modest, and low origin and rank, that they should first of all inform you, in your position as head supervisor, of all the marble and stones of all kinds discovered in the above-mentioned precincts. Whoever will not have complied within three days will be punishable by a 100 to 300 gold ducats fine, as you should decide. Since we have been informed that masons unheedingly cut and use ancient pieces of marble and stone that bear inscriptions or other remains which often contain things memorable, and which deserve to be preserved for the progress of classical studies and the elegance of the Latin tongue, but that get lost in this fashion, we order all stone quarries of Rome not to break or saw stones bearing inscriptions without your order and permission, liable to the same fine if they disobey our orders.

1. Rome, August 27, in the 3rd year of our Pontificate [1518].

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