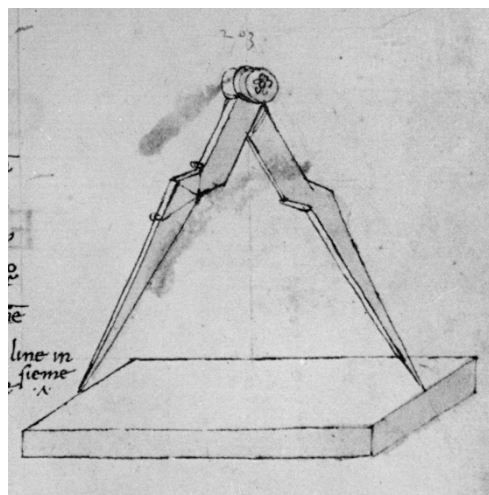


The didactics of *disegno* in Filarete's *Trattato di Architettura*

By the time Vasari founded the *Accademia del Disegno* in 1563, the rubric of *disegno* as a unifying knowledge among the various arts and architecture was secured. What Vasari and others achieved by elevating the status of *disegno*, however, conceals the multivalence of the term in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, particularly in connection with the education and promotion of *capomaestri* at Florentine building sites. In notable contrast to other Italian cities, building sites in Florence maintained a consistent pattern of entrusting the leadership of building projects to those trained in *disegno*, and not those who emerged from the building trades, e.g. Giotto, Andrea Pisano, Francesco Talenti, Brunelleschi. Knowledge of *disegno*, principally through training in the workshop of a painter or sculptor, was thus a prerequisite for one's qualification to lead building projects. Interestingly enough, however, scant evidence exists as to how *disegno* was actually acquired by young apprentices.

In Filarete's *Trattato di Architettura*, a remarkable chronicle of *disegno* represents one of the most complete accounts of architectural teaching in fifteenth century Florence. Narrated around the construction of the imaginary city of Sforzinda, the Duke of Sforzinda invites Filarete to offer his young son drawing lessons in preparation to becoming an architect. The lessons center around the design and construction of the city's central church, from which Filarete introduces specific didactic exercises assigned to his new pupil. He unfolds the project over the course of eleven days of intense meetings between himself and the young lord, consuming fourteen folios of nearly 650 lines of tightly scripted manuscript accompanied by nine illustrations. It is an illuminating episode, from which knowledge of *disegno* is not only prescribed as the fundamental knowledge for an architect, but it is also deliberately represented as a pedagogical concern. Among other exercises with the drawing board, Filarete has his pupil gesso and prepare the tablet and to copy life figures, but he most concentrated effort occurs while learning the ways of the compasses. Under these exercises the pupil enters a striking demonstration between his body and the understanding of scaled drawings. From this, he learns the proportions of a building plan, column orders, and principle building elements and ornaments. Through *disegno* Filarete even teaches structural and material principles, the importance of selecting the appropriate *istoria*, and the critical connection needed between the act of drawing and the pleasure of the architect.

Although ostensibly presented as drawing lessons with his imagined lord, Filarete perhaps has in mind to teach his readers about his specific notion of *disegno*. Nevertheless, the unpacking of this episode offers an overlooked glimpse into the nature of architectural education in the mid-fifteenth century.



Filarete, *Trattato di Architettura*, fol. 178r
Cod. Magliabechianus, BCNF