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## EDITORIAL

### For the deposition of construction and public works firm archives in public conservation institutions (18th—20th century)

*In tribute to Jean-Pierre Sosson, Professor of Medieval History  
Catholic University of Louvain (1936–2019)*

First of all, we would like to pay homage to the modest medievalist Jean-Pierre Sosson who, starting with his master's thesis on *Les travaux publics de la ville de Bruges, XIV<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles. Les matériaux, les hommes*<sup>1</sup>, published in 1977, broadened our understanding of the economic and social history of the towns of the former Low Countries, drawing on examples from the field of construction. Valérie Theis, Philippe Bernardi and I invited him to speak at a seminar on the question of “Economics and Construction” held on 4 April 2011. Newly retired, he had lost neither his vigorous style of delivery nor his faith in his research. For him, the question of “public works” in the context of economic practices and policies of the medieval State had attracted little, or even no, attention from medievalists. Of course, attention has been paid to the significance of the financial measures put in place, as well as the impact of the economic situation and the amount of wealth accumulated as the works progressed, for instance in relation to cathedral construction projects. Equally, in a celebrated article included in the *Annales* of 1952, Robert Sabatino Lopez noted the potential negative effects – due to the increased scarcity of productive investments – of the sums of money swallowed up in urban economies<sup>2</sup>. For the most part,

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1 Bruxelles, Crédit communal de Belgique. Collection *Pro Civitate*, series in-8°, 48.

2 Robert Sabatino Lopez, “Économie et architecture médiévales: Cela aurait-il tué ceci?”, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 1952, no. 4, p. 433-438.

however, the study of “public works” as symptoms or manifestations of rational economic practices and policies remains a field yet to be explored, at least for the Middle Ages. Drawing on several examples, two questions were thus deemed worthy of reflection: What economic policies? And what measures? Sosson’s publications have helped answer these fundamental questions, among other things. His full bibliography is too plentiful to list here.<sup>3</sup> He was one of the first members of our Francophone Association of Construction History, and a member of its Board of Directors. Our field has lost one of its most devoted figures. We will have the opportunity to return to the different aspects and contributions of his work. For now, we are confident he would have approved of the claims set out here concerning the archives of construction firms.

FOR THE DEPOSITION OF CONSTRUCTION AND PUBLIC  
WORKS FIRM ARCHIVES IN PUBLIC CONSERVATION  
INSTITUTIONS (18<sup>th</sup>—20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)

We wish to call here for a more systematic collection of the archives of building and public works firms (18<sup>th</sup>—20<sup>th</sup> century), for the benefit of historians. While, in the field of national defence specifically, historians were recently troubled by an unprecedented restriction of access to contemporary archives, leading the Association of French Archivists to release a column bearing the headline “The decline of archives? Restricted access for citizens and professional constraints for archivists”,<sup>4</sup> we entreat building and public works firms to deposit their archives for the benefit of our community.

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3 We nonetheless refer our readers to the medieval bibliographic database on the site of *Regesta Imperii* [this project by the Academy of Sciences and Literature of Mainz, Germany, seeks to gather together elements of medieval history, in the form of extracts, using legal and literary sources from the Holy Roman Empire between circa 751 and 1519], which comprises sixty entries for Jean-Pierre Sosson ([http://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang\\_en/autoren.php?name=Sosson%2C+Jean-Pierre](http://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang_en/autoren.php?name=Sosson%2C+Jean-Pierre), consulted on 8 March 2020).

4 <https://www.archivistes.org/Le-crepuscule-des-archives-Entre-acces-restreint-pour-les-citoyens-et> (consulted on 8 March 2020).

While architects have successfully deposited their archives in reliable, well-known conservation institutions,<sup>5</sup> company archives, which are instead seen as economic archives harbouring “secrets”, are only safeguarded very rarely, belatedly and – for the most part – only for major private and public firms in the major sectors of the economy.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, beside the big names of the building and public works industry – which often have a dedicated internal service – no building company considers filing its files.

Yet the archives of the world of work in Roubaix, for example, contain around forty archival collections concerning the building and public works industry and agricultural, mechanical and metal construction. Some of these are well-known, such as the ‘Etablissements Eiffel’ and the ‘Société de construction des Batignolles’, already the subject of several remarkable studies.<sup>7</sup> From a consultation of departmental archives, it is

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- 5 Sonia Gaubert and Rosine Couhu, edited by David Peyceré and Gille Ragot, with the support of Christine Nougaret, *Archives d'architectes: États des fonds, XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris, Institut Français d'Architecture, Direction des Archives de France, la Documentation française, 1996; Déborah Pladijs, *Les archives des architectes conservées aux Archives nationales du monde du travail (Roubaix)*, List of collections available as at 8 September 2017, available online [consulted on 13 October 2018: [http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/camt/fr/publications/donnees\\_brochures/Architectes\\_BR.pdf](http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/camt/fr/publications/donnees_brochures/Architectes_BR.pdf)]. – Some regions have set up commissions entrusted with collecting the archives of local architects. On this subject, see the one dedicated to the architecture, town planning and landscape archives of the Midi-Pyrénées region –dedicated site: [http://archives.haute-garonne.fr/que\\_faire/architectes4.html](http://archives.haute-garonne.fr/que_faire/architectes4.html) consulted on 13 October 2018.
- 6 Zuber Henri, “Les archives d’entreprise en France : bilan et perspectives”, *La Gazette des archives*, no. 213, 2009-1, Les archives, patrimoine et richesse de l’entreprise, p. 43-51. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/gazar.2009.4529>. See, also, another reflection on the subject, to which the journal *Entreprises et Histoire* dedicated an issue in 2009/2 (no. 55): “Tendances de l’histoire des entreprises”. On archives, see in particular Roger Nougaret’s article “Les archives d’entreprises en France en 2009” (p. 67-73) and the discussion on “Les archives d’entreprises: ressource potentielle ou nouvelle contrainte?” (p. 111-123). For a comparison with Belgium, see Madeleine Jacquemin, “Les fonds d’archives d’entreprises conservés aux Archives générales du Royaume” in Martine Aubry, Isabelle Chave et Vincent Doom (ed.) *Archives, archivistes, archivistique dans l’Europe du Nord-Ouest du Moyen Âge à nos jours. Entre gouvernance et mémoire*, Villeneuve d’Ascq, Publications de l’Institut de recherches historiques du Septentrion, 2012, p. 81-89. Available online [consulted on 13 October 2018]: <https://books.openedition.org/irhis/148?lang=fr>.
- 7 Rang-Ri Park-Barjot, *La société de construction des Batignolles. Des origines à la Première Guerre mondiale (1846-1914)*, Paris, Presses de l’université de la Sorbonne, 2005; Anne Burnel, “La Société de construction des Batignolles de 1914 à 1939, histoire d’un déclin”, *Histoire, économie et société*, 1995, 14<sup>th</sup> year, no. 2. Entreprises et entrepreneurs du bâtiment et des travaux publics (XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles), edited by Dominique Barjot, p. 301-315. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/hes.1995.1775>.

clear that a number of deposits of this type have been made that could be of interest to us.<sup>8</sup>

In order to assess the collections dedicated to the building and public works industry currently available, an inventory-guidebook would be worth attempting, following the example of the one produced in 1989 for the mechanical and textile industries.<sup>9</sup> The Francophone Association of Construction History<sup>10</sup> could initiate such an endeavour.

Thanks to the implementation of guarantees to safeguard documents in the best possible conditions, to classify documents according to recognised scientific criteria and to respect the *desiderata* of archive owners, firms should no longer have the slightest fear of depositing their archives in public conservation institutions. Nowadays, archiving policy is based on the following principles: risk control; compliance with the regulatory environment; and the economic optimisation of the information stored and of the conservation conditions.

The time is ripe to take this step to collect the archives of construction firms for two reasons: on the one hand, the movement to safeguard sources has been internationalised, with a multifaceted reflection in this sector ensuring that documents are made available to researchers in the best possible manner; and, on the other hand, we have been

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- 8 See, for example, Archives départementales du Rhône, Entreprise Pommerol, Bâtiment et travaux publics, 1882-1982, 118 J 1-209, *Répertoire méthodique*, prepared by Olivier Ferré, director of heritage, 2009, 10 pages ([http://archives.rhone.fr/accounts/mne-sys\\_cg69/datas/medias/IR\\_pour\\_internet/118%20J.pdf](http://archives.rhone.fr/accounts/mne-sys_cg69/datas/medias/IR_pour_internet/118%20J.pdf), consulted on 8 March 2020), or Archives départementales de la Côte d'Or, Entreprise Detouillon, Travaux publics de la commune de Talant (21240), 1948-1982, 27j 1-73, retroconverted by Antoine Lachot, trainee, edited by Edouard Bouyé, Dijon, 2015 (consulted on 8 March 2020: [https://archinoe.fr/console/ir\\_ead\\_visu.php?PHPSID=c44d8ba569d2afe20bf2632b5922984e&cir=23516#.XmUlgPRCfIU](https://archinoe.fr/console/ir_ead_visu.php?PHPSID=c44d8ba569d2afe20bf2632b5922984e&cir=23516#.XmUlgPRCfIU)). [Here, we learn that, following multiple transactions, the firm's documents were abandoned on vacant land, protected from the elements by a tarpaulin. They were recovered in September 1984, following a report by Maître Curé, a managing agent in Dijon. Most of the documents were in such a state that it was impossible to identify them. Only around a tenth of the collection could be handed over to the departmental archives]. We could also cite the archives of the firm Silviéro, a builder of residential complexes in the department, 1959-1978, Departmental Archives of Yvelines, 88 J 1-148.
- 9 Bibliothèque Nationale de France (National Library of France), Printed Books Section, Department of Foreign Entries, *Archives d'entreprises du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle. Industrie mécanique, industrie textile*, with an introduction by Claire Moisset, Alain Cottereau, Jean-Pierre Daviet, and Laurent Thévenot, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1989 (Collection Études Guides et Inventaires n° 13).
- 10 <http://www.histoireconstruction.fr/> (Consulted on 8 March 2020)

witnessing a dramatic European revival of construction history since the 2000s.<sup>11</sup>

The collection of company archives is justified by various factors:

- Their rarity and resulting high value (neither the archives of building contractors nor those of engineers are preserved);
- The evidence they provide of appointments and of the company’s fulfilment of its obligations vis-à-vis its clients, staff and partners beyond the operating times;
- It is problematic to rely solely on the architectural archives and administrative files of the public authorities when working on construction history;
- They serve as a reference for new actions undertaken with the help of memorisation;
- They help us understand the company’s strategic position with regard to its choices concerning building technology, and its cooperation – or lack thereof – with other contractors or architects;
- They highlight the identity and image of the firm, that is, its culture.

Such an initiative would undoubtedly provide excellent results, as well as allowing for the discovery of unpublished collections:

- It would reveal the true identity of artisans-contractors in all sectors of the economy, particularly the building trade, which could only prove beneficial to them.
- It could generate an unprecedented wave of research in the still obscure world of the building industry.

Let us consider three recent examples of the use of “new” building firm archives:

The uncovering of the Blaton archives by our Belgian colleagues is the subject of the first history of this firm, a work richly illustrated with the photographic and written documentation revealed.<sup>12</sup> In July

11 Antonio Becchi, Robert Carvais and Joël Sakarovitch (dir.), *L’Histoire de la construction/ Construction History. Relevé d’une chantier européen/Survey of a European Building Site*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2 vol., 2018.

12 See Yaron Pesztat (ed.), with Maurice Culot, Rika Devos, Bernard Espion, Armande Hellebois, Yaron Pesztat, Michel Provost et Jens Van de Maele, *Blaton. Une dynastie de*

2013, semi-trailers loaded with the archives of the Brussels-based construction firm Blaton, established in 1865 and still operational to this day, arrived at the doors of the Modern Architecture Archives in Brussels. They contained a large quantity of plans, drawings, and blueprints alongside design calculations, estimates and correspondence, all illustrated with photographs: concrete cathedrals, monumental bridge arches, majestic factory vaults, hangar corollas, garage beams with unsurpassed spans... not to mention countless views of building sites. In these tens of thousands of documents, the names of eminent architects and engineers, among others, are revealed: Victor Horta, Henry van de Velde, Victor Bourgeois, Jean-Jules Eggerickx, Gustave Magnel, Alfred Hardy... An immense collection of archives (255 linear metres, that is, over 70 m<sup>3</sup> of paper) opens up new perspectives on over a century of building innovations and architectural creations, making it possible to trace the history of what remains a family company to this day. This exceptional collection is nonetheless still incomplete – there are gaps relating to certain periods, projects, and activities, and the documents, preserved by dossier, are of varying degrees of interest, and not properly classified or inventoried. By studying the collection, we can nonetheless complete – or even take a fresh look at – the history of Belgian and colonial construction, perhaps even the history of civil engineering and its engineers, both in relation to emblematic constructions and to entirely anonymous ones and projects that were never completed, revealing a new history of construction.

The second example concerns the development and content of a digital platform on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century construction know-how in Portugal: a sort of cartography of the country's construction history.<sup>13</sup> This project,

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*constructeurs. Een dynastie van bouwers*, Bruxelles, Editions AAM, 2017.

- 13 The site can be consulted in English and Portuguese at: <https://portugalbuilds.org/> (consulted on 9 March 2020). This project is led by João Mascarenhas Mateus (FAUL-CIAUD), president of the Portuguese sister association *Sociedade Portuguesa de Estudos de História da Construção* and the team working on it is made up of researchers from various disciplinary fields (architecture, engineering, social and economic history, the digital humanities, and cultural heritage at the University of Lisbon and the New University of Lisbon (Nova): co-IR Sandra M.G. Pinto (CHAM-NOVA FCSH), José Aguiar (FAUL-CIAUD ARCHC\_3D), Ivo Veiga (FAUL-CIAUD), Ana Paula Pires (IHC, NOVA FCSH), Daniel Alves (IHC, NOVA FCSH), Manuel Caiado (FAUL-CIAUD), and Julia Lyra (IHC, NOVA FCSH). For more information about the project, see João Mascarenhas Mateus y Ivo Veiga "Portugal Builds: una plataforma digital para la historia de la construcción

entitled “Portugal Builds 19-20”, gathers together an impressive amount of data in all forms (texts, graphics, images, sounds, films, maps,<sup>14</sup> etc.). It thus combines numerous pertinent indications that provide a better understanding of the country’s construction history: demographics; law; statistics on industry and commerce; the use of quarries; infrastructure; the transformation of landscapes; cement or metal production plants; teaching; work; and travel, etc. This information comes from different sources published by scholarly history societies and professional building and public works associations,<sup>15</sup> with no particular reliance on unpublished firms’ archives. When examining it, however, one notes not only the abundance of the different sources presented, but also how much company archives would contribute, especially as one of the objectives of the project is to increase contacts and exchanges between universities and decision-makers in the building and spatial planning sector. We can only hope that access to company archives will open up on this occasion. The site offers three different modes of access. Firstly, virtual exhibitions: the first such exhibition focuses on contractors from Portugal in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the second (forthcoming) is dedicated to the 1100 public works produced by the fourteen largest firms in Portugal; and the third is expected to examine railways and ports in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Another method for navigating the site is to explore the collections around four different axes: collective actors (institutions, associations, public administrations, etc.); individual actors (contractors, architects, engineers); concrete objects (buildings, public works, materials and machinery); and abstract objects (laws, patents, publications, etc.). The third and final method is centred on the *item*, as a unit of information.

For the third example, we would like to draw upon a personal experience. At the departmental archives of Ile-et-Vilaine, we uncovered and studied the papers of Pierre-Théodore-Marie Louise (1782–1841), a public works contractor from Rennes engaged in building activities

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en Portugal en los siglos XIX y XX”, *Estudos Históricos. Rio de Janeiro*, vol. 33, p. 88-110, Janeiro-Abril 2020, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S2178-14942020000100006>.

14 Each firm headquarters and location of the constructions should be geo-localised.

15 All the sources are referenced. They mainly come from periodicals specialising in construction, architecture, civil engineering, industry, etc., but also from public archives such as those of the National Archives of Torre do Tombo, the National Digital Library, blogs by former building firm workers, and the sites of the firms themselves.



from the 1820s onward. The composition of this collection (65 J 1-35) is somewhat surprising as it was first bought, in large part, in 1991 (twenty-five lots), and then purchased during two successive auctions: three lots in 2003 and seven in 2004. During the latter sale, we purchased a set of miscellaneous papers belonging to the firm, lest they should disappear into the hands of individuals; we were unaware at the time that the rest had been purchased by a public conservation institution.<sup>16</sup> The works concerned are extremely varied in nature: public works, such as the construction of the Canal d'Ille-et-Rance; works for the town of Rennes, such as the erection of the town theatre or the clearing of Rue Victor Hugo; and private works, such as residential buildings, individual houses, and workshops. Some of the dossiers also centre on repairs or the fitting of architectural elements (porticos, a tower, shop or office gables). The historic value of the collection is immense, since, in terms both of their nature and of their content, the documents provide multiple, precise and sometimes entirely new responses to a series of complex questions that researchers have asked themselves about the sequence of building projects over time. It is essential that we pay heed to the caution and precautions required when dealing with these incomplete, often disordered archives (use of critical thinking, situating them in their internal and external context, accepting black holes, etc.). In the archives of the firm Louise, we identified five innovative research axes for the history of the construction site: 1/- dissecting the building through the multifaceted study and analysis of plans and sketches (presentation engravings, working drawings both of the structure and of the architectural details; technical mechanical drawings for the machinery; masonry bond drawings; carpentry assembly drawings, etc.); 2/- the attitudes of the site workers through the examination of correspondence, for which drafts of the requests are often preserved, together with the related responses: these reveal the relationships of trust or of distrust with partners, colleagues, competitors, the reporting structure in work relationships, considerations on the local and foreign labour workforce, and attitudes towards administrative and judicial hurdles or non-payers; 3/- the organisation of work from a social, economic and even accounting perspective: the archives provide more information

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16 We commit to donating the dossiers purchased to the departmental archives of Ille-et-Vilaine.

on work directives, working times dedicated to the labour, and life on the construction site, bringing to light the “voiceless” members at the bottom of the social scale through pay slips, disputes concerning them, the chart of accounts for monitoring operations carried out in line with quotations, outside of quotations, or even cancelled, as well as modifications to the project underway; 4/- the amount, quality and form of the materials, machines, tools and accessories used: the archives allow us to trace these objects from their production or extraction to their use, and reveal the choice of products thanks to the sampling or testing processes applied, variations in measurement methods, the examination of the manufacturing processes for the vaults, stairs, floors, frameworks, etc; 5/- the legal relationships between the parties involved in the act of building, based on contracts and estimates, specifications, invitations to tender, supply contracts, official reports on the acceptance of the works, with reservations where applicable, fire protection regulations, delivery and liability waivers, appraisal reports, as well as preparatory judiciary records setting out the arguments of the different parties.<sup>17</sup>

Building firms’ archives are essential for making new discoveries, building on our understanding of construction history and opening up new perspectives. In this adventure, it is crucial that we include trade unions in the building industry at the French, or even international, level in our approach. The results could only be beneficial to them, even if, as researchers, our objectives are by definition complementary to those of the firms themselves. We therefore call upon employers’ federations in the building industry, as well as labour unions, to encourage firms to deposit their archives in public conservation sites. Their safeguarding and enhancement are guaranteed thanks to the ethical code of such establishments.

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17 Thanks to these archives, we were able to publish “Le renouveau des recherches sur les populations du bâtiment. Une histoire de sources et d’échelles” (with Valérie Theis) in Arnaldo Sousa Melo and Maria do Carmo Ribeiro (eds.), *História da Construção: Os construtores, Colóquio História da Construção: A população dos construtores, 29-30 octobre 2010*, Universidade do Minho, CITCEM, Braga (Portugal), 2011, p. 11-31; “La construction de la salle de spectacles de Rennes (1831-1839) ou L’incroyable expérience d’une maître d’œuvre d’exécution, seul responsable à ses dépens”, in Robert Carvais and Cédric Glineur (eds.), *L’État en scènes. Théâtre, opéras, salles de spectacles du XVII<sup>e</sup> au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Aspects historiques, politiques et juridiques*, Amiens, Cepsisca/Lextenso, 2018, p. 33-55. There is still much to be written about with these archives.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

Since the creation of *Ædificare*, the sixth issue of the journal is the second to take the form of a *varia*, with no unifying theme, based on the contributions freely proposed for publication. While it underscores how central the question of materials is for construction history, with five out of seven of the articles focusing on this topic (in order: iron and lead, stoneware, steel and wood, raw earth, and wood), the authors often adopt different approaches. On the one hand, different sources are often used to trace the history of the use of materials: factory accounts (Charles Viaut); an archaeological and material analysis (Maxime L'Héritier); technical literature (Valentin Gilet); or even trade regulations (Camille Fabre). On the other hand, the material concerned often constitutes a pretext for posing – and attempting to respond to – a key cross-cutting question. Which authority had the power to standardise a material (Carles Sánchez), for example? How did prefabricated, light and dismountable construction systems made of steel and wood, invented in a colonial context, later contribute to developing the prefabrication of the light facades and internal partitions associated with reinforced concrete structures in an entirely different political context (Laura Greco)? And how should we interpret the real significance of the renewed use of raw earth bricks in North Africa: as the revival of a vernacular method or the implementation of a more recent colonial past (Nadya Rouizem Labied)?

– On this recurrent question of materials, in this issue Maxime L'Héritier presents an interdisciplinary assessment of the works carried out over the past twenty years on the uses of metal (iron and lead) in major medieval monuments, mainly of a religious nature. In his analysis, he draws upon archival accounting sources, archaeological data (positioning of the metal in the building, quantification) and the results of an archaeometric analysis (metallographic nature, mechanical behaviour, identification of the production process and of its provenance, dating). The latter offer an entirely new take on earlier knowledge about medieval metal (its heterogenous nature, the complexity of its origins, and the importance of recycling).

Valentin Gillet, for his part, examines the history of the manufacturing of porcelain stoneware tiles in France, which were used as a covering for reinforced concrete frames at the time of their introduction into Parisian architecture at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gillet's contribution centres on the analysis of the technical literature between 1840 and 1920. The author reveals the complex process involved in manufacturing this material, comprising multiple handlings and the use of powerful machines (devices used for grinding pastes, hydraulic presses to shape the tiles, and reverse flame furnaces). His analysis should make it possible to identify and interpret the marks left on the surface of the tiles, which evolve throughout their production.

Laura Greco explores the prefabricated construction systems developed by Italian firms in the 1930s. Intended for its colonies (hospitals, military barracks, residential accommodation, and administrative offices), these were inexpensive, flexible solutions characterised by their fast assembly and reversibility. In some, sandwiched panel partition walls promote thermal and sound insulation and the cover was made with steel sheets and fibre cement panels, while in others, the system was organised around trussed beams fitted with metal pillars with a metal truss cover on the pillars. As well as the construction methods they proposed, the author examines how these firms managed – in spite of the Second World War – to transform their manufacturing for the internal building market by developing a new trial using prefabricated interior partition walls and light facades.

Nadya Rouizem Labied seeks to understand why and how a local, traditional, or even vernacular construction process – namely, the use of raw earth – was resumed in a neo-colonial context. Indeed, the French engineer Alain Masson proposed the construction of 2750 social housing units made of raw earth bricks in the Daoudiate neighbourhood of Marrakech in Morocco. Using a functionalist structure to divide the space, and despite preserving the introversion of the dwelling and of a patio, is the builder not distorting the cultural values of this country of the Maghreb? While rationalising its production through the use of mechanical presses, fixing it with cement and developing a quasi-prefabrication, did this use of a traditional material encourage the State to accept the modernisation of local construction? Could such a trial serve as a point of reference in the context of the current environmental crisis?

– Three other essential questions in construction history are tackled in this issue. One is a promising emerging theme – that of the repair and maintenance of constructions, while the other two are classic questions revisited here – conditions of work and financing on the construction site, and the organisation of building trades. While construction and demolition are initial and terminal actions of the act of building – or even vice versa, since demolition frequently precedes construction –, repair, maintenance, extension, redevelopment, and even improvement works regularly occur during the lifespan of a building. The degeneration of a property due to natural wear and tear, that is, as a result of its dilapidation or the negligence of its owners or occupants, in short, a lack of maintenance, inevitably poses a fundamental question that has attracted little attention from historians: that of the potential lifespan of a construction.<sup>18</sup> As far as the law is concerned, we associate this issue of the trial period as a guarantee with the liability of the prime contractor (Roman origin of the biennial and decennial). This concerns the modes of liability relating to misconduct by the prime contractor (in the case of tortious liability) or the non-fulfilment of a clause of a contract (in the case of contractual liability), damages caused and “reparations” for the harm suffered, in legal terms. Yet what about the natural dilapidation of a building and the means with which to remedy it? This is the essential question of maintenance and repairs.<sup>19</sup> As far as construction

18 See H el ene Dessales, “De *Architectura*, construire pour durer: Vitruve face   l’obsolescence   in Julien Zurbach (ed.), *Pass es crois es, pass es compos es. Perspectives   partir des « classiques »*, international conference ICSCC Fudan – Labex Transfers, 25-26 January 2019 (forthcoming: Presses, ENS). In Vitruvius, the author finally discovers the traces of the potential duration of some masonries, which does not exceed 80 years. Thanks to some intrinsic features of the materials, the potential durability of the buildings can be determined. While some buildings are destined to defy obsolescence, the building needs to have been erected without any construction defects (*vitia*) or weather effects (*vetustas*), which makes the achievement of eternal buildings seem unlikely! For now, see Marc M equignon, “Dur e de vie et d veloppement durable”, *Les cahiers de la recherche architecturale et urbaine*, 2012, 26/27, p. 225–232.

19 Charles Davoine, Ambre d’Harcourt and Maxime L’H eritier (eds.), *Sarta Tecta. De l’entretien   la conservation des  difices. Antiquit , Moyen  ge, d but de la p riode moderne*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2019 (Biblioth que d’Arch ologie M diterran enne et Africaine, 25). Beyond construction, the question was also raised by Liliane Hilaire-P rez in *La pi ce et le geste. Artisans, marchands et savoir technique   Londres au XVIII e si cle*, Paris, Albin Michel, Coll. L’ volution de l’Humanit , 2013. See also the international colloquium on “Les r parations de la pr histoire   nos jours: cultures techniques et savoir-faire” (Repairs, from prehistoric times to the present day: technical

is concerned, we have showed that, in theory, the question is dealt with extensively and in detail in 18<sup>th</sup>-century law, or even earlier.<sup>20</sup> In the collective research we are currently undertaking on building appraisals,<sup>21</sup> we can already affirm that, either primarily or secondarily, around 30 percent of official reports concern repair works, which demonstrates their importance in practice. What then, we might ask, is the significance of this reparative protection of a building? Does it derive from a desire for profit or an awareness of the value of heritage?<sup>22</sup>

In this issue, Charles Viaut proposes a careful analysis of the accounts of the Castellan of Talmont (Vendée), from the 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> century, dedicated to the maintenance and repair of the buildings of this rural seignury. Through an in-depth archival study, the author draws useful comparisons with archaeological data, providing a better understanding both of the organisation of construction sites in terms of the actors involved (if the lord is the commissioner, his officers oversee the work of skilled workers, who are most numerous in carrying out the work and are grouped according to trades where the family tradition remains decisive) and of the construction economy (what type of market existed for which materials?).

Concerning the two classic questions revisited here – that of the construction site in terms of its payment and financial methods and that of the breakdown of trades – it is worth recalling the report prepared by

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cultures and know-how”, Paris, 26–28 June 2019, organised by Gianenrico Bernasconi (University of Neuchâtel), Guillaume Carnino (UTC-COS-TECH), Liliane Hilaire-Pérez (University of Paris-ICT/EHESS-Alexandre Koyré Centre), and Olivier Raveux (CNRS/TELEMMe) (forthcoming).

20 See our contribution “Entretien des bâtiments. Une préoccupation juridique essentielle chez les architectes sous l’Ancien Régime” in Charles Davoine, Ambre d’Harcourt and Maxime L’Héritier (eds.), *Sarta Tecta*, *op. cit.*, p. 23-35.

21 We are engaged in a multidisciplinary project supported by the ANR (2018-22) on “Pratiques des savoirs entre jugement et innovation. Experts, expertises du bâtiment, Paris 1690-1790” (“Knowledge practices, between judgement and innovation. Experts and building appraisals, Paris 1690-1799”), which involves the following partners: Michela Barbot (economic historian, CNRS, IDHES Cachan, UMR 8533), Emmanuel Château-Dutier (art historian and digital humanist, Faculty of Arts and Science – University of Montreal) and Valérie Nègre (historian of technology, University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne – IHMC) and the following collaborators: Juliette Hernu-Bélaud, Léonore Losserand and Josselin Morvan.

22 These hypothetical responses are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps other explanations exist? Only a close case-by-case analysis of our collection would allow us to distinguish the multiple bases of the repairs.

the Datini International Institute of Economic History during its 36<sup>th</sup> meetings dedicated to construction before the Industrial Revolution<sup>23</sup>, the many national and international construction history conferences that often dedicate entire axes to the construction site from a historical perspective<sup>24</sup>, and the first synthesis related to the remuneration for work across the vast European territory and during the long Middle Ages, or even beyond, from a social history perspective.<sup>25</sup> The question of trade regulations, the subject of frequent analyses from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the Second World War, has often been called into question and criticised on account of its appropriation by jurists and distortion by Vichy ideals. Since 2017, this has been the subject of four symposiums on the question of “forms of trade regulations in medieval and modern Europe: creations and renewals”, successively dedicated to the types of acts concerned, the actors involved, the contents and methods concerned, as well as their spatial inscriptions.<sup>26</sup>

In this issue, through the study of new and voluminous legal archives (contracts, agreements, profits), Carles Sánchez demonstrates the significant protection granted to prime contractors (“architects” and tradespeople) by the Church and King in medieval Spain. This could take the form of tax exemptions, for instance, the option of choosing new payment methods that were more convenient than the ordinary ones (salary paid by the day, month, or task), as well as an annual salary or the allocation of prebends, generally reserved for the clergy, and specific privileges.

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23 Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *L'Edilizia prima della Rivoluzione industriale sec. XIII-XVIII, Atti della « Trentaseiesima Settimana di Studi »*, Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica « F. Datini », Prato (Italy), Le Monnier, 2005.

24 There is not enough space to cite all the publications here. Let us simply mention the proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Francophone Conference (Nantes, 21-23 June 2017), which have just been released, and which are very informative in this regard: Gilles Bienvenu, Martial Monteil and Hélène Rousteau-Chambon (dir.), *Construire! Entre Antiquité et époque contemporaine*, Paris, Picard, 2019, 1314 p.

25 Patrice Beck, Philippe Bernardi and Lauren Feller (eds.), *Rémunérer le travail au Moyen Âge. Pour une histoire sociale du travail*, Paris Picard, 2014.

26 Formed at the initiative of Philippe Bernardi (CNRS) and Arnaldo Sousa Melo (University of Minho, Braga, Portugal), the research group is made up of Caroline Bourlet (IRHT), Catherine Kikuchi (University of Versailles Saint-Quentin), Maxime L'Héritier (University Paris 8), Corinne Maitte (University of Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée), Mathieu Marraud (EHES-CRH), Judicaël Petrowiste (Université Paris-Diderot), François Rivière (EHES), Jean-Louis Roch (Université de Rouen – GRHis), and myself (CNRS).

In the second part of the journal, which is made up of articles of a different nature and form from standard scientific articles, Camille Fabre proposes a critical edition and translation into French of the preamble (in Latin) and main text (in Occitan) of the statute laid down in 1422 by the Capitouls of Toulouse, regulating the trade of the town's 'fustiers' (lumber traders). It is always an immense pleasure to discover a striking new, unpublished source concerning the history of building trades, first through reading, and to then analyse an emblematic text in greater depth through its contextualisation. Contrary to what we might have expected, we learn first that the copy of the edited statute belonged to the archives of a notary who combined his activities for the town with his own private practice, and that this copy bears as much authority as the versions of the statute written for the Capitouls and for the bailiffs of the 'fustiers'. As the editor recalls, the text constitutes a "chain of statutes", to use Florent Garnier's expression, that is to say, it reuses and integrates all the earlier versions of the text from 1273 to 1422 (sequencing respected, identical articles), while at the same time distinguishing itself (expansion of the field concerned: appearance of "rasal"<sup>27</sup> and firewood trading, use of Occitan in the place of Latin). While the 1273 statute falls under royal authority, the statute edited here appears at first to affirm and consolidate consular power (management of lumber supplies in times of shortage, enforcement of measures and prices in the face of monetary difficulties). Yet, if one examines the situation more closely, the text also – and indeed primarily – serves as an affirmation of the professionals in the sector. Responding to a complaint made by the bailiffs and the "probi homines" of the trade, and following a survey conducted by the same individuals, the text appears to have been drafted by the fustiers themselves and put forward for approval by the Capitouls. This rupture is heightened by the outcome of a movement to unify the different organisations involved in the trade at the geographical level (the association of fustiers of Tounis and that of Saint-Cyprien). Yet it likely also marks a moment of clarification in the management of the trade informally guaranteed by the "probi homines" and the systematic nomination of the bailiffs. Lastly, the editor's analysis of the confraternal characters in the 1422 statute

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27 On the Canal du Midi: a piece of wood measuring 12 to 14 metres in length.



suggests that this statute appears to confirm a structural reinforcement of the timber trade around Toulouse.

The new decade has been marked by social movements to which our journal can remain neither insensitive nor indifferent. The editorial committee has decided to support the movement of journals contesting the planned pension reforms and the multiannual research programming law (LPPR). As it has been announced, the LPPR is very far from responding to the major difficulties faced by researchers, lecturers, engineers and technicians. These guidelines threaten statutory scientific employment, the *modus operandi* of laboratories, and working conditions, and risk further aggravating the decline in research potential in universities, major educational institutions, and the CNRS.

We call upon parliamentarians to listen to the community of researchers and lecturers, who are unanimous in rejecting this bill, and invite them to engage in real dialogue to increase the potential of research units, notably in the field of the human and social sciences, where investigations are carried out in the long, and even very long, term, and which are fundamentally incompatible with the systematic use of precarious contracts, notably “project-based” ones. We encourage them to reflect on the following sentence by Albert Camus...

History is only the desperate effort of men to give substance to the most clairvoyant of their dreams.

Albert Camus, *Combat*, 1948  
in *Actuelles*, I, *Chroniques (1944-1948)*,  
Paris, Gallimard, 1950, p. 169.

Happy reading!

Robert CARVAIS