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### In the January Issue

POUSSIN

Poussin's Bacchanals for Richelieu

Poussin and Mantegna

A source for Caravaggio's 'Taking of Christ'

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Cover illustration: detail of a crucifix, attributed to Andrea del Verrocchio. Limewood and cork with stucco and polychromy, 87 cm high (whole). (Confraternity of S. Francesco Poverino, Florence).

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and changing fashions of medieval coiffure and dress, evidently as erratic then as they are today.

As a result the entries are rich in fresh insights and information which will significantly alter our perception of some of the most important tapestries in the collection. For example, Cavallo reassesses the date of the *Worthies* fragments, provides new evidence regarding the provenance of the *Annunciation* and *Seven Sacraments* tapestries and challenges previous assumptions about the original structure of the latter and reassesses the symbolism and relationship of the *Hunts of the Unicorn* tapestries. For many of the lesser-known tapestries this is the first scholarly appraisal which they have received. In each case the analysis and broader significance is clear and accessible for the specialist and lay reader alike. Even where further research is required Cavallo's thorough discussion of existing knowledge will provide a crucial foundation for further debate both on these tapestries and on those in other medieval collections throughout the world.

The principal limitations of the catalogue are presumably the result of financial restraints. Although the quality of the colour plates is excellent, they accompany only about one third of the entries and it is to be regretted that more photographs of the backs of tapestries could not have been included. Discussion of some of the heavily rewoven panels would also have benefited from diagrams and the single-volume format is cumbersome. However, compared to the scholarly achievement which this catalogue represents, such issues are secondary.

TOM CAMPBELL

**Donatello.** By John Pope-Hennessy. 376 pp. incl. 147 col. pls. + 157 b. & w. ills. (Abbeville Press and John Murray, New York and London, 1993), £72. ISBN 1-555859-645-3.

**Donatello.** By Artur Rosenauer. 350 pp. incl. 6 col. pls. + numerous b. & w. ills. (Electa, Milan, 1993), £115.

**Donatello and his World.** By Joachim Poeschke. 496 pp. incl. 63 col. pls. + diagrams + numerous b. & w. ills. (Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1993), £75. ISBN 0-8109-3211-3.

'The artist was what he did, he was nothing else'. Despite the numerous anecdotes relating to Donatello, Henry James's sentence is an appropriate one for the biographer to ponder. Despite Donatello's longevity and astonishing profusion of works, there is a striking lack of revealing primary material. Even some of his tax returns were written by associates. The documents relating to him in the *Regesti Donatelliani* compiled by Herzner run to nearly four hundred items but they do not afford material for a real life of the artist. One correspondent describes him as '*molto intricato*' but there is little more, even if we

add Vespasiano da Bisticci's story of how Cosimo de' Medici made efforts to dress him properly.

We are left with 'what he did' and it is to this that these books are addressed. One is an excellent survey of Italian fifteenth-century sculpture with particular emphasis on Donatello's works. Those of Rosenauer and Pope-Hennessy\* are, on the other hand, densely written monographs, filled with factual information and highly personal judgments. All three books are lavishly illustrated in rather different ways. Rosenauer gives us much more comparative material but some of his plates are very disappointing. Many of Pope-Hennessy's are altogether exceptional images. A number of them, such as the orthogonal view of the Cantoria on p.107, are conceived with imaginative audacity. Both books are expensive and both will be needed by the serious student of Donatello. The texts are frequently in conflict over issues which range from authorship, *viz.* the wooden crucifix in S. Croce, to those of meaning and function, *viz.* whether the Judith group was envisaged by the artist as a fountain. Rosenauer, despite the monographic format, is more concerned to keep general issues in view; the same is true of Poeschke, whose introductory essays, particularly that on 'Convention and Artistic Freedom', successfully cover a great deal of ground. Rosenauer's approach is restrained although in certain sections, as in his beautiful analysis of the *Judith and Holofernes*, he provides a kind of accumulative illumination. Pope-Hennessy's style and approach is more descriptive and at the same time dogmatic, at times incautiously so. He provides us with substantially more technical information than Rosenauer and some of this is important. Many statements in both books need careful scrutiny.

A valuable aspect of Rosenauer's account is his attention to the physical settings of the statues, something he explored at length in a very stimulating book of 1975. This serves him well in his assessment of Donatello's works at Or S. Michele and on the Campanile. He is particularly concerned with the increasing autonomy that Donatello achieved for his statues. Yet even here the reader needs to be on guard. He twice affirms (pp.26 and 31) that the Campanile niches are uniform in structure. But this is incorrect. As is clearly observable from the street and, more conveniently, in his plate on p.26, the two inner niches of the relevant register of the Campanile are significantly narrower than the outer ones, not unimportant for our assessment of the statues that went into them. The shift towards the autonomy of renaissance sculpture is undeniable in the period, but it is easy, in following its progress, to forget, say, Maitani's freestanding bronze St Michael at Orvieto.

Pope-Hennessy's involvement with his subject informs his entire text, and some of his discussion, especially of the relief sculpture, can be revelatory. But his passionate empathy with the artist can lead him to abandon critical caution. In this book, we are told that the London *Ascension* relief 'was made for the Carmine' (p.121), but if

we turn back to his exemplary catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum sculpture of 1964, we find, alongside the suggestion that it was destined for the Brancacci chapel, the comment that 'there is no certainty as to the purpose for which it was carved' (I, p.72). No new evidence has turned up to convert conjecture into fact. Rosenauer, on issues of context and purpose, is almost invariably more discreet. This does not, however, imply a readiness to welcome all his attributions. This reviewer finds his ascription of the so-called Niccolò da Uzzano to Desiderio da Settignano baffling.

Another very welcome feature of Pope-Hennessy's book is an attempt to give us the texts of at least some of the documents concerning the works. Whilst we all now turn to Herzner's *Regesti*, already referred to, we need to remember that few of the entries there give us whole texts rather than paraphrases or excerpts. But some of the citations in this new book can be highly problematical in their economy over quite essential details. One of the most troubling of all Donatello documents is the payment of September 1457 (Herzner 355) for bronze for a '*mezza figura di Gioletta*'. Pope-Hennessy vigorously rejects the possibility that the Judith group was initially a commission for Siena. But it seems unjust to the nature of the whole problem to exclude the information that this payment was made by the Opera del Duomo of Siena, just like a successive payment for toll duty levied on Donatello's bronze Baptist (or rather half of it, '*d'una mezza figura di Santo Giovanni*') still in the Siena Cathedral. The mystery that surrounds the Judith – made in so literal a fashion and yet so abstracted in its interpretation of death – still remains, it seems to me, notwithstanding the arguments of Herzner and others.

None of the authors casts much light on the circumstances of Donatello's seemingly rather unpremeditated move to Padua. Rosenauer suggests that, at least as part explanation, he may have been drawn there by the fame and skills of the city's bronze casters. Pope-Hennessy writes that 'orthodox Florentine aesthetic thinking was no longer a spur but a constraint', a statement difficult to elucidate at best and the more puzzling in view of his preferred dating of the bronze *David* to within the period preceding the move. It may be useful to add that, very recently, Pietro Donato, Bishop of Padua from 1428, has been indicated by Andrea Calore as the man most likely to have been the agent responsible.<sup>1</sup> Calore points out that the two men could have met when both were in Siena as early as 1423, that Donato was continuously in Florence from 1440 to 1443 – the very eve of Donatello's departure – and that he is even given a biographical sketch by no less a person than Vespasiano da Bisticci. Despite all the labours of the last hundred years, perhaps more could still be teased out to amplify the picture of the circles in which Donatello moved.

Where evidence relating to the sculpture does exist, be it documentary or physical, an unwelcome number of Donatello scholars have treated it with a startling lack of



respect. The identities of Donatello's two later prophets for the Florentine Campanile is a case in point. The documents inform us that the last to be carved was of Habakuk. The statue has been traditionally identified as the 'Zuccone', the bald-headed prophet. Pope-Hennessy, in agreement with the ever to be lamented Lányi, insists on this identification, surely rightly, for the other late prophet carries on his scroll the inscription 'Gemia', i.e. Jeremiah. Janson challenged the evidence of the inscription and reversed the sequence of the statues; he is now followed by both Poeschke and Rosenauer. But even if the inscription was, as Janson argued, added in 1464, when the prophets were moved from one face of the Campanile to another, are we, in the late twentieth century, better placed to know the truth than fifteenth-century Florentines who could have consulted Donatello himself?

A further example (and here a final one) of potential confusion concerns the much debated Bargello marble *David*, traditionally regarded as Donatello's very earliest surviving marble carving. While Rosenauer and Poeschke accept this view, that it is the *David* ordered by the Opera del Duomo in 1408 for one of the Cathedral buttresses and never put in place, Pope-Hennessy has abandoned this conclusion (he has been preceded by others), and here proposes that Donatello's earliest statue is a dispiriting figure in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo which bears no securely identifiable features as a *David*. For him, as for others, the Bargello *David* is a work of some years later, ordered not by the Opera but by the Signoria and for this reason it was delivered to them (as documents show) in 1416. Behind this reasoning there seems to lie some fundamental mistake, evident in the extraordinary statement (p.323) that we can happily conflate payments made by the Cathedral Opera with payments made by the Signoria. The Opera had paid for its *David*. And the wording of the documents relating to its delivery of the Bargello *David* to the Signoria (familiar and in the Opera archive) very strongly implies that the statue was never in origin, a Signoria commission. One of them refers to '... *quandam figuram marmoream David existentem in dicto opera*'. Another speaks of the *David* '... *che si mandò in palagio per comandamento de Signori*.' Another refers to '... *la figura di David ch'e Signori voglono in palagio*.' Distinctions in funding of the kind we encounter here had been sanctioned by centuries of Florentine practice long before we meet with another case of a *David* surrendered to the Signoria by the Opera, Michelangelo's *gigante*, a work, it scarcely needs saying, ordered by the Opera in 1501 and yielded up in 1504. Here too, the statue had been paid for by the Opera del Duomo in full.

When one reflects on the complexity of the documentation relating to Donatello's works which survives, abundant yet incomplete, often informative but as often ambiguous or elusive, one is driven to conclude that it would be helpful to have, not further lavish and expensive monographs, however revelatory their illustrations may be, but a

critical study of the source material, which, even if not resolving all problems of attribution, could illuminate his working career in the context of his time.

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See A. CALORE in *Il Santo*, XXX, 3, [1993], esp. pp. 250ff. There is a full account in the same article of Donatello's bronze caster, Andrea Conti 'da le Caldriere'.

\*[Sir John Pope-Hennessy died on 31st October 1994 while this review was in proof. An obituary notice will appear in a future issue. Ed.]

**Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait. Stories of an Icon.** By Linda Seidel. 308 pp. incl. 96 b. & w. ills. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993), \$60. ISBN 0-521-43125-5.

This is a very self-conscious book, very much a product of its time and place. The author leaves us in no doubt that it is partly informed by her own experience, that she is sceptical of 'detached' scholarship, and that she is eager to question received assumptions about the *Arnolfini* double portrait in the National Gallery, London. While refreshing, this approach has certain drawbacks. Linda Seidel aims to 'reintegrate' the panel 'into the European visual culture of the fifteenth century and the milieu of mercantile exchange, social bonding and legitimating practices in which its protagonists (and its painter) were bound up'. We are thus given a good deal of information about later medieval marriage laws and customs, notarial practices and mercantile activity. For the author (despite some apparent second thoughts in the final chapter 'Poetic Fictions') the panel is essentially a document or record – in fact, a 'surrogate document' authenticating an agreement which took place between Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami at Bruges in 1434. What that agreement actually was, and why it should have been recorded in this way is never (and may well never be) satisfactorily explained. Seidel at least has the candour to admit that we 'cannot say, with absolute authority, why, in 1434, Jan [van Eyck] painted the *Arnolfini* portrait'.

But she writes interestingly (if not always entirely accurately) about the context in which Jan worked and Arnolfini traded, drawing upon a wide range of recent, and less recent, studies. Sometimes the contextual associations seem overstrained – for example, it would be difficult to see any very clear connexion between the panel and Burgundian monetary policy in 1434; fifteenth-century notarial signs of authentication did not look much like Jan's famous example of decorated calligraphy ('*Johannes de Eyck fuit hic. 1434*') on the rear wall within the picture space; nor can any very clear statement about the relationship between commerce, exchange, marriage and women be derived from the painting.

The book was (we are told) inspired by Erwin Panofsky's study of the picture, published in *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* for 1934. It is perhaps a little surprising that despite the claims to novelty made by both author and publishers, Seidel's approach and method hardly differs in any major respect from Panofsky's. In fact, it could be said to take his notions of symbolic meanings much further. Contingent information, some of it of dubious relevance, now presses upon the painting to an almost unbearable degree; in the process, Jan van Eyck's art and artistry tends to disappear from view. The reader is left wondering which pieces of socio-historical, legal, economic or (rather conspicuous by their relative absence) theological and devotional evidence are really of relevance to this work of art.

Despite some assertive rhetoric to the contrary, this is in fact a surprisingly conventional interpretation. The assumption (made, perhaps erroneously, by some commentators from the mid-sixteenth century onwards) that we are witnessing a marriage ceremony, or associated ritual, goes large unchallenged; and few doubts are cast either on the identity of the two subjects or on the reliability of later references in inventories which purport to describe the *Arnolfini* painting. In the painting itself, the puzzling presence of a single lighted candle in the chandelier is explained by a dubious argument from contemporary legal practice linked to what seems a fanciful and mistaken interpretation of Jan van Eyck's decorated signature. But if symbolic meanings are to be pursued, and given what we know about the couple's apparent childlessness could not the painting be more concerned with conception, fertility, childbirth and the begetting of heirs (preferably male) than with the authentication and documentation of a marriage? The appearance of Margaret, patroness of women in childbirth, carved on the chair beside the bed might lend some credence to this view of the strange panel depicting a *Lady at her let*, found in Willem van Haecht's picture gallery, Cornelius van der Geest's picture gallery (Antwerp, Rubenshuis), bears any relationship to the *Arnolfini* panel, and is not sixteenth-century or later derivation, then procreation and safe delivery might be as good an idea as any other to pursue. We shall never know what lay behind the panels, if they were ever associated, but it would be reasonable to assume that they possessed a private, possibly talismanic meaning. Professor Seidel's book has certainly opened up many interpretative possibilities, and is to be welcomed, by both art historians and historians, for that reason.

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