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Lettera a Leone X di Raffaello e Baldassarre Castiglione

By Francesco Paolo Di Teodoro. 72 pp. incl. 32 col. ills. (Olschki, Florence, 2020), €23. ISBN 978-88-222-6677-4.

by PETER HICKS

Italians are the leaders in cultural heritage preservation. It is so important for them that it is enshrined in the Italian Constitution (1945), where it is higher up the batting order even than observance of international treaties. Raphael was in the avant-garde of this movement. Together with the humanist and translator Fabio Calvo, and under the benevolent gaze of Leo X, he developed a project that was nothing short of the renewal of architecture via the preservation and imitation of the glory that was ancient Rome. The volume under review presents an edition of the famous letter to Leo X, which the author firmly attributes to Raphael. Baldassare Castiglione is an 'assistant', bringing literary quality and a sensitivity to antique sources to the letter, but the inspiration for it goes back to Raphael 'the technician, the architect'. The book is a precursor of Francesco Paolo Di Teodoro's forthcoming critical edition of Raphael's writings, honouring the 500th anniversary of Raphael's death in 1520.¹

The document known generally as the 'Letter to Leo X' was the dedicatory text to a projected architectural treatise. The treatise was to comprise an ichnographic plan of ancient Rome, a general text and a series of drawings of the most noteworthy buildings in plan, elevation and section (in that order). As Di Teodoro points out in his excellent and detailed introduction, contemporaries had got wind of the project but no one really knew how much had been completed by the time of Raphael's death; most of it – if it was ever produced – would seem to have been lost. The map of Rome appears to have been executed 'regio' by 'regio', following procedures laid out by Leon Battista Alberti a century earlier in the so-called '*Ludi matematici*', in Book IX of the *De re ædificatoria*, and in the *Descriptio urbis Romæ*. As for the lost architectural drawings, Di Teodoro maintains that they emerge as a sort of *éminence grise* behind Palladio's *Quattro Libri*.

The book offers transcriptions of two manuscript versions of the letter: one entirely in the hand of Castiglione (Archivio di Stato, Mantua) and one copied by Angelo Colocci (1474–1549), Apostolic Secretary to Pope

Leo X (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich). A full critical apparatus for all the texts in the tradition is promised in Di Teodoro's forthcoming edition. There are some stern but fair criticisms of two earlier editions of the letter.² In his account of the history of the manuscripts, Di Teodoro springs two significant surprises on the general reader. The first is a new manuscript (in a private archive in Mantua). It predates the printed version of 1733, although it resembles that edition in almost all respects; the discovery was published for the first time in 2015.³ The second is a rejection of the final folio of the Munich manuscript (87 recto and verso) as spurious and not written by Raphael. He bases his argument on two extremely jarring features in the text. First, it suddenly recommends the perspectival visual rendering that had been specifically rejected in the immediately preceding section and, second, it offers 'too' precocious a use of the term '*ordine*' (making it the first known use) instead of the more usual Latin and Italian words for the Classical orders in 1519, namely '*opera*', '*genus*', '*ratio*' or '*mos*'.

Short sections of erudite commentary follow the history of the text. The first of them sets the scene for the writing of the letter through the works of Fabio Biondo, Poggio Bracciolini, Giulio Pomponio Leto, Angelo Colocci and Fra Giocondo. Their emphasis on the sacred ruins and relics of Rome was picked up by Raphael and Castiglione, who maintained that antique Rome should be protected and restored – indeed, Di Teodoro calls the letter a founding document in the history of cultural preservation. The following section details Raphael's selection process in the choice of the exemplary antiquities, eliminating recent and barbarous Gothic constructions. The next two sections discuss the instrument that Raphael used for surveying the city as well as the method he used to draw his ichnographic map of antique Rome and the most significant buildings therein. Di Teodoro quotes Filippo Camerota, whose diagram of a reconstruction of the surveying instrument and its use is usefully reproduced at the end of the book, although not clearly mentioned in the introduction, and adduces a Venetian source for this instrument.⁴ Another short section discusses the crucial dichotomy between the accuracy required for architectural drawings and the unsuitability in this context of beautiful painterly renditions. Raphael proposes the three Vitruvian types of architectural drawing,

the famous *ichnographia*, *orthographia* and *scaenographia* but avoids these grandiloquent terms, preferring the everyday *disegno piano* or 'flat drawing' (i.e. plan), *la parete di fori* or 'exterior wall' (i.e. elevation) and *la parete di dentro* 'interior wall' (i.e. section), a directness glossed over by Di Teodoro.

A final short stand-alone section rehearses the 'fortune' of Raphael's text up to its re-attribution to him in 1799 and subsequent history. The introductory matter finishes with Di Teodoro's hope that Raphael's in many ways 'modern' text will be a sort of champion for the preservation of architectural heritage. The book ends with the two transcriptions of the letter. There follow some very beautiful and readable images of the entire Mantua manuscript. The volume ends with a bibliography of essential reading on Raphael and the letter. Unfortunately, there is no index. This excellent, beautifully produced, scholarly and precise publication is the latest word on this key Renaissance architectural text.

1 See Patrizia Cavazzini's review of the anniversary exhibition *Raphael 1520-1483* in this Magazine, 162 (2020), pp.983-85.

2 E. Camesasca and G.M. Piazza, eds: *Raffaello: Gli scritti. Lettere, firme, sonetti, saggi tecnici e teorici*, Milan 1994; and J.K.G. Shearman: *Raphael In Early Modern Sources, 1483-1602*, I, New Haven and London 2003.

3 F.P. Di Teodoro: 'La lettera a Leone X di Raffaello e Baldassar Castiglione: un nuovo manoscritto', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Classe di Lettere e Filosofia* S 5, 7 (2015), pp.119-168 and 260-70.

4 See F. Camerota's entry in M. Faletti and M. Lanfranconi, eds: *exh. cat. Raffaello 1520-1483*, Rome (Scuderie del Quirinale) 2020.

Poussin's Women: Sex and Gender in the Artist's Works

By Troy Thomas. 386 pp. incl. 116 col. ills. (Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2020), €119. ISBN 978-94-6372-184-4.

by EMILY A. BEENY

There is a great book to be written on Poussin's women: the goddesses, saints and ordinary mortals who populate an oeuvre marked by drastic metamorphoses of style and subject. Troy Thomas is to be applauded for recognising this fact, as well as for his contributions to scholarship on the artist over a long career. His research on the moralising commentaries appended to early modern translations of Ovid, for example, has expanded our understanding of *The Realm of Flora* (1631; Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden), a masterpiece of

Poussin's early maturity; and his proposal of a print source for the resplendent *Diana and Endymion* (c.1630; Detroit Institute of Arts) has enriched our knowledge of this work's literary context. In *Poussin's Women*, Thomas sets these and several dozen other works against the background of seventeenth-century European gender politics, exploring the ways in which Poussin's approach conformed to or – more occasionally – deviated from the norms of a contested but essentially patriarchal social order.

'The value in viewing Poussin's [...] paintings and drawings from the perspective of women and gender', Thomas suggests, 'is that such approaches open up ways of understanding them that we might not have imagined otherwise' (p.25). The presumptive 'we' here is puzzling, for of course some of us have had little choice but to see these works 'from the perspective of women' all along. Perhaps, as Thomas asserts, Poussin's works 'often fail to create a position for his female audience or to concretize what the "female gaze" might require', but female audiences across the centuries have gazed upon these paintings, carving out their own positions in relation to the women portrayed. The fact that Poussin's work often reveals an attitude to relations between the sexes typical of his time, place and social class can surely come as no surprise to most readers today. Moreover, Thomas's determination to classify Poussin's depictions of women as 'positive' or 'negative' threatens to reduce creations of extraordinary aesthetic richness and emotional complexity to anthropological data points.

The theoretical framework of Thomas's book is unusual for a study of Poussin. Perhaps because his approach was so singular in Baroque Rome, he has attracted relatively little attention from the practitioners of what was once called the social history of art. Instead, for more than fifty years, the field of Poussin studies has been divided into two broad camps: those primarily concerned with matters of chronology and collecting (the leading thread in French and Italian scholarship) and those chiefly concerned with iconography (dominant in English-language scholarship). Each has something to offer and both run the same risk when taken to extremes: chasing Poussin into the archive on the one hand and the library on the other, both the document hunters and the iconographers have sometimes lost sight of the works themselves.

Although Thomas's project is a rare attempt at social art history in the Poussin universe, his methods – and shortcomings – are essentially those of an iconographer. The first section of the book seeks to position Thomas's study in relation to prior iconographic literature and the second offers an overview of various roles played by women in the cultural, economic and political life of seventeenth-century France and Italy. Due mention is made of the *précieuses* and *frondeuses* and of limitations on property rights and inheritance. A brief discussion of the relationship between Poussin's friend and patron Cassiano dal Pozzo and Artemisia Gentileschi will leave many readers wishing for more. The third section, divided into eight thematic chapters, addresses the pictures and drawings themselves, sorted by the characterisations of the women they depict: 'Predators', 'The Lustful', 'Lovers', 'Killers, Transgressors', 'Victims I', 'Victims II' and 'Heroines, Great Ladies'. Here we find an implied sliding scale from 'negative' to 'positive' representations, with the domineering goddesses of Poussin's early mythological paintings at one end and the Virgin Mary at the other.

Thomas maintains, not without reason, that previous iconographers – from Giovanni Pietro Bellori and André Félibien through to Anthony Blunt and his intellectual heirs – have downplayed the presence of 'conflict' in Poussin's work in order to emphasise its erudition and classicism. Thomas takes particular issue with Blunt's reading of Poussin's paintings as lessons in stoic philosophy, finding the bad behaviour so often portrayed – acts of lust, revenge and deception, for example – incompatible with the high-minded ideals ascribed to this artist. Discussing Poussin's two paintings of the *Abduction of the Sabine women* (c.1633-34; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and c.1634-35; Musée du Louvre, Paris), Thomas strikes a note of outrage: 'Some of Poussin's

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