

THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE



PICASSO'S PORTRAITS OF ISABEL RAWSTHORNE

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Books

Il Maestro di Ozieri: Le inquietudini nordiche di un pittore nella Sardegna del Cinquecento. By Maria Vittoria Spissu. 408 pp. incl. 40 col. pls. + 259 b. & w. ills. (Il Poligrafo, Padua, 2014), €30. ISBN 978-88-7115-835-8.

Reviewed by DAVID EKSERDJIAN

AS A RULE, introductions to Italian Renaissance painting are miserably limited in scope and tend to confine their attention to the achievements of Florence, Rome, Venice, Siena and – at a pinch – Parma. Moreover, devotees of seemingly comprehensive overviews, such as Crowe's and Cavalcaselle's nine volumes on the history of painting in Italy and the seven of Berenson's revised 'Lists', will find that even they are nothing of the kind, and are doomed to search in vain for any consideration of the productions of either Sicily or Sardinia, to name but two of the lacunae.

In the case of Sicily, Teresa Pugliatti's three exemplary volumes, published between 1998 and 2012, fill the gap, but the same cannot be said for Sardinia, which may forever be destined to be associated with bandits, the Costa Smeralda and *nuraghe*. Sardinian painting of the cinquecento has not been wholly neglected by scholars, and Renata Serra's *Retabli pittorici in Sardegna nel Quattrocento e nel Cinquecento* (1980) and Giovanni Zanzu's and Gabriele Tola's exhibition catalogue *Pittura del Cinquecento a Cagliari e provincia* (1992) were both important steps in the right direction, but Maria Vittoria Spissu's monograph represents a major contribution to the understanding of this unjustly overlooked school.

As he has come down to us, the Master of Ozieri is the author of at most half a dozen works; the only one of them not in Sardinia, a *Crucifixion* in the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, was attributed to him and published in this Magazine in 1930 by Hermann Voss.¹ Like all the Master's works, it is characterised by a blend of quirkily expressive power and more than a hint of pathos. Precisely because his *œuvre* is so limited, Spissu is able to examine each work in essay-length catalogue entries and to set his achievement within the wider context of cinquecento Sardinian painting, which differs so profoundly from the Spanish-inspired art that flourished on the island in the previous century.

One of the principal merits of the author's approach is her exploration of the material, especially the prints, that served

as visual sources for Sardinian painters in the chapter 'Le incisioni, fonti privilegiati'. It seems that these artists also had access to works that were never engraved, a celebrated case in point being the borrowing of Michelangelo's figure of Haman from the Sistine Chapel ceiling for the Good Thief in the *Crucifixion* panel of the anonymous *Retablo dei Beneficiati* in Cagliari Cathedral (Fig. 52). The Bad Thief in the same panel is also from the Sistine Chapel, one of the sculptural *ignudi* above the *Zorobabel – Abiud – Eliachim* lunette (a figure also adapted by Morazzone for the protagonist of his *Forge of Vulcan* in the Castello Sforzesco, Milan). Raphael was even more frequently plundered, as in Michele Cavaro's *Madonna del cardellino* in the Santuario di Bonaria in Cagliari, an adaptation of Raphael's *Madonna della rosa* in the Museo del Prado, Madrid, while Northern European art was not ignored either.

It would be misleading, however, to conclude this review by giving the impression that the Maestro di Ozieri and his ilk were mere cut-and-paste merchants, because at their best they represent a distinctive voice within the broad picture of Italian Renaissance painting, and Spissu's monograph is a most welcome apology for their genuine qualities.

¹ H. Voss: 'A problem of Sardinian painting', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 56 (1930), pp. 171–73.



52. *Crucifixion* from the *Retablo dei Beneficiati*, by an anonymous artist. c.1528–30. Oil and tempera on panel, dimensions unknown. (Cagliari Cathedral).

St Jacob's, Antwerp: Art and Counter Reformation in Rubens's Parish Church. By Jeffrey Muller. 631 pp. incl. 321 col. + b. & w. ills. (Brill's Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History, 13, Leiden and Boston, 2016), €186. ISBN 978-90-04-31186-2.

Reviewed by HANS VLIEGHE

THE CONTEXTUAL STUDY of seventeenth-century art in Antwerp and in the Southern Netherlands more broadly has been an international research topic for some time. The book reviewed here is one of the latest results of a growing interest in the connection between Flemish Baroque art and its sociological context. It is devoted to the extremely well-preserved interior decoration of Antwerp's Sint-Jacobskerk, the most important church in the city after the cathedral. Its interior is unique among Antwerp churches as an almost unaltered arrangement of works of art re-established in the spirit of the Counter-Reformation after the serious iconoclastic damage done by Calvinists between 1566 and 1585.

It is striking that this magnificent Baroque ensemble exists in a Gothic church begun in the last decade of the fifteenth century and finished only in the second half of the seventeenth. Sint-Jacob's is a very late example of the so-called Brabant High Gothic. Its style was not deemed to be anachronistic, despite the church containing dramatic Baroque sculpted and painted decoration. In Antwerp the survival of a Netherlandish Late Gothic style was not restricted to Sint-Jacob's. Other important examples are Sint-Pauluskerk, the former Dominican church completed in 1639, and Sint-Andriesskerk, completed in the 1660s. Nevertheless, the decline of late medieval architecture was criticised by some, including Rubens himself in the preface to his *Palazzi di Genova* (1622).

Jeffrey Muller's book is the result of several years of painstaking research in Sint-Jacob's well-preserved archival records held in the city's Rijksarchief. He discusses in turn the chapel of the Holy Sacrament, the adjoining Marriage Chapel and Our Lady's Chapel, the canon's choir, the many chapels of confraternities and corporations, the private chapels and the numerous funerary monuments. These monuments are considered in close connection with the main issues of the Counter-Reformation: the defence and promotion of the sacraments, especially eucharist, confession and extreme unction, and the important role of the cult of saints and of the Virgin Mary. This was the spiritual underpinning of an impressive *Gesamtkunstwerk*, built up especially from the mid-seventeenth century onwards and consisting of a coherent programme of painting, sculpture, *Kleinarchitektur* and decorative art. The author also covers work by gold- and