

Frank Zöllner: Michelangelos Fresken in der Sixtinischen Kapelle. Gesehen von Giorgio Vasari und Ascanio Condivi (*Rombach Wissenschaften – Reihe Quellen zur Kunst*, 17); Freiburg i. Br.: Rombach 2002; 132 S., 3 Farbtaf. und 14 SW-Abb.; ISBN 3-7930-9281-X; € 15,30

The combination of the most famous artist, Michelangelo, and the most famous artwork in the western world, the Sistine chapel, constitutes the recipe for an impossible scholarly project, it seems. Arrived at that point, the only way out is to go back to the sources. But while even the amount of these is almost too great to tackle in one publication, this modest but informative booklet presents only two of the most well-known contemporary views on the artist and his work. Giorgio Vasari's discussion of the Sistine project from his *Lives* of 1568 is contrasted with Ascanio Condivi's biographical account, followed by an appendix containing two letters exchanged between Michelangelo, Piero Rosselli and Giovan Francesco Fantucci; Paolo Giovio's *Michaelis Angeli Vita*; and concluded by an essay on these particular sources. In this last part, Frank Zöllner has tried to place the commission in relation to the image of Michelangelo as suffering artist. The aim of this book is thus to provide a case-study on the painters' status as artistic genius as constructed by the artist himself and his contemporaries¹.

Zöllner derived his argument from the textual relations between the Condivi and Vasari-versions of Michelangelo's troubles in acquiring the commission for the Sistine ceiling. While the 1550 edition of Vasari's *Vite* only referred to the close cooperation between Raphael and Bramante which complicated Michelangelo's obtaining of this commission, Condivi's slightly later text presented this as an outright intrigue by the two against their Florentine competitor. Vasari then used this new material in the 1568 edition, which heralded it as a *topos* in the later literature. But this story was not pure literary invention, it seems. Condivi's text was an adaptation of an autobiographical account by Michelangelo himself, which dated from the 1540's or early 1550's when the artist started to complain about the failure of Julius' tomb-project². In two letters exchanged between the artist and Rosselli and Fantucci in 1506 and 1523 no suspicions of intrigue were yet articulated. Later frustrations on the tomb's failure must then have coloured his memory of the complications of the Sistine ceiling's project into a fierce confrontation with Raphael and Bramante. At the end of his life, the artist tried to withdraw his accusations, but by then it had entered the literature through Vasari, which had made it irreversible³.

- 1 An excellent and still interesting study on this phenomenon is RUDOLF AND MARGOT WITTKOWER: *Born under Saturn. The Character and Conduct of Artists*, New York 1963; for Michelangelo see p. 40–41 and 72f.
- 2 Ascanio Condivi was Michelangelo's pupil, working with him around the 1550's; see *Dictionary of Art* vol. 7, p. 701–702, *DBI* vol.27, p. 753–756, and *Saur Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon* vol.20, p. 500.
- 3 Contemporary annotations to an edition of Condivi's *Vita* have been interpreted as corrections to this text; see UGO PROCACCI: *Postille contemporanee in un esemplare della vita di Michelangelo di Condivi*, in: *Atti del Convegno di Studi Michelangioleschi*, Rom 1966, p. 279–294, and CAROLINE ELAM: „Che ultima mano!“ Tiberio Calcagni's Marginal Annotations to Condivi's Life of Michelangelo, in: *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, 1998, p. 475–497.

The antagonism between the three artists also had another implication, for it presented the project of the Sistine ceiling as the painter's martyrdom⁴. Creating a work of art could be a tale of woe, as his sonnet on this work told its reader in a burlesque and mythological style. The themes of this poem drew on the thematic of the Aenean voyage and the Herculean siege of the Harpies, transforming physical labour into a struggle for artistic virtue. Heroic self-stylisation might have been one of the causes, but surely was the main effect of the fictive antagonism. Personal difficulties were sublimated in the *difficoltà* of the work; which turned the latter into a mirror of the artist's personality⁵.

The expression „Ogni pittore dipinge sé“ (every painter paints himself) which carried negative connotations before 1550 were here turned into a positive argument with the help of artistic and religious tropes. The fact that the Sistine ceiling carried precisely this kind of biblical subject matter only helped to reinforce this image of its creator as martyr. As a result, Zöllner illustrated how the work and the artist glorified each other from the start, and that later historiography only added to this imagery of suffering genius. In that respect the title of this informative book seems somewhat ill-fitted: it illustrates not how Vasari and Condivi regarded the ceiling, but how they perceived the artist.

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- 4 An aspect that has not been treated by Zöllner is that of Calumny, a theme that surfaced in the arts around that time, and which might have influenced Michelangelo's conception of the strife as well as Condivi's representation of it; see for that theme DAVID CAST: *The Calumny of Apelles*; New Haven – London 1981; for Michelangelo positioning himself above that, see MARTIN WARNKE: *Hofkünstler. Zur Vorgeschichte des modernen Künstlers*; Köln 1996 p. 120.
- 5 On this relation, see DAVID SUMMERS: *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*; Princeton 1981, p. 177–185, esp. 184–185.

Hans Holbein: Paintings, Prints, and Reception; Hrsg. Mark Roskill & John Oliver Hand (*Studies in The History of Art*, 60. *Center for Advanced Study in The Visual Arts. Symposium Papers*, 37); Washington: National Gallery of Art 2001; Distributed by Yale University Press New Haven & London; 262 S., zahlr. Abb.; ISBN 0-300-09044-7; £ 40,-

Knapp vier Jahre nach der internationalen Fachtagung am Center for Advanced Study der Washingtoner National Gallery, die vom 21. bis 22. November 1997 anlässlich des 500. Geburtstages von Hans Holbein d.J. stattfand, präsentieren sich nun deren Ergebnisse in Form eines Sammelbandes, der 14 der dort von amerikanischen und europäischen Wissenschaftlern gehaltenen Referate versammelt¹. Die fachliche Bin-

1 Der Beitrag von Tilman Falk konnte – ebenso wie ein ungenannter weiterer – nicht mehr abgedruckt werden (S. 7).