

**Carla Hendriks: Northern Landscapes on Roman Walls. The Frescoes of Matthijs and Paul Bril** (with essays by Angela Negro and Louisa Wood Ruby; edited by Bert W. Meijer); Florence: Centro Di 2003; 206 S., 331 Ill.; ISBN 8870383830, € 75,00

**Francesca Cappelletti: Paul Bril e la pittura di paesaggio a Roma 1580–1630**; Rome: Ugo Bozzi Editore 2005–2006; 377 S., 359 Ill.; ISBN 8870030407, € 240,00

**Archivi dello sguardo. Origini e momenti nella pittura di paesaggio in Italia.** Atti del Convegno Ferrara, 22–23 Ottobre 2004, (Quaderni degli Annali dell'Università di Ferrara, Sezione Storia 4), Francesca Cappelletti (ed.); Florence: Le Lettere 2006; XXIII + 405 S., Ill.; ISBN 8871669827, € 42,00

In the last decades, the study of Flemish and Dutch painters in *Cinque-* and *Seicento* Rome has gained a new impetus. After the important show of *Fiamminghi a Roma 1508–1608*, held in Brussels and Rome in 1995, and the exhibitions of drawings by 17th century Dutch artists in Italy under the heading *Drawn to Warmth* at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, a number of artists that played a significant role in these shows were singled out for monographic presentations.<sup>1</sup> Recently, Herman van Swanevelt has been the subject of an exhibition in his native Woerden, and paintings by Nicolaes Berchem were shown at Haarlem, Zürich and Schwerin.<sup>2</sup> Although Paul and Matthijs Bril have not yet been the subject of a monographic show, they surely generate a lot of academic publications as they are generally considered important intermediates between the northern and Italian styles in landscape painting around 1600.

After the publications by Louisa Wood Ruby on Bril's drawings, by Andrea Berger on Bril's paintings<sup>3</sup> and by Nicola Courtright on the decoration on the Torre dei Venti,<sup>4</sup> now two more monographic publications have appeared that deal with Matthijs and his brother Paul. Carla Hendriks has published a catalogue of the two brothers' extant frescoes in Rome and the Vatican, and Francesca Cappelletti brings a complete catalogue of Paul Bril's paintings, both in fresco and in oil. Both authors took a different approach to their subject, however. Hendriks sketches a picture of Paul and Matthijs' artistic and stylistic development as exemplified by the frescoes, while Cappelletti regards Paul Bril as a central figure in the general development of the landscape genre in Central Italy. Cappelletti, moreover, organised in 2004 a conference on

1 See HANS DEVISSCHER, DOMINIQUE ALLART, MARTINE CAYMAEX (EDS.): *Fiamminghi a Roma, 1508–1608*: Kunstenars uit de Nederlanden en het Prinsbisdom Luik te Rome tijdens de Renaissance; Gent, Bruxelles 1995. PETER SCHATBORN ET AL.: *Drawn to warmth: 17th-century Dutch artists in Italy*; Zwolle, Amsterdam 2001.

2 See PIETER BIESBOER (ED.): *Nicolaes Berchem: In het licht van Italië*; Haarlem, Gent 2006. FLORENCE DE GRAAF (ED): *Het zuiden tegemoet: de landschappen van Herman van Swanevelt 1603–1655*; Harderwijk, Woerden 2007. For the latter exhibition, see also the review by SUSAN RUSSELL, in: *The Burlington Magazine* CXLIX (2007), p. 507–508.

3 ANDREA BERGER: *Die Tafelgemälde Paul Brils*; Münster, Hamburg 1993.

4 NICOLA COURTRIGHT: *The Papacy and the Art of Reform in Sixteenth-Century Rome. Gregory XIII's Tower of the Winds in the Vatican*; Cambridge 2003.

landscape painting in Italy between 1550 and 1700 – entitled *Archivi dello sguardo* – the acts of which were recently published. These three publications illustrate the present-day spectrum between the monographic and the contextual study of the Bril brothers.

The carefully and opulently illustrated *Northern Landscapes on Roman Walls* takes the well-defined biographical and artistic course of both Matthijs and Paul as its main subject. In her first two essays, Hendriks provides the reader with a general survey of the two brother's lives, and a discussion of the still extant frescoes in Rome. Especially the fact that the brothers worked in teams on most of their commissions, and the recurrent motifs that characterise their work are important issues in the latter. Elongated figures in a sketchy style, craggy rocks, feather-like foliage with dark green in the foreground and yellowish-green tones in the background are recurrent elements in Matthijs' oeuvre; these constitute the starting point for his brother as well. Paul was, however, according to Hendriks, better at painting figures and animals than his brother. He also seems to have been able to manage large workshops of painters in the many commissions he was given in papal projects such as the Scala Santa and the Lateran Palace. This enabled him to work at great speed; and obviously, this satisfied his patrons to such an extent that his work was in great demand. As a result, Bril was increasingly employed by the most important patrons of his day, including popes such as Gregory XIII and cardinals such as Scipione Borghese. Over the course of the years, also a gradual change in style can be observed; around 1600, Paul left behind the nordic tradition that Matthijs had used throughout, and he started to paint more calm and tranquil Italian landscapes. The apex of this rise to fame was the fresco of 1621 in the so-called 'Room of the landscapes' in the Casino Ludovisi. Here, four landscapes were painted by the most famous masters of their day – Domenichino, Guercino and Viola. That Paul Bril was asked to contribute to this ensemble means that by that time, he was considered in Rome to be one of the founding fathers of the landscape style.

In the subsequent essays, first Louisa Wood Ruby discusses the attribution of the extant drawings to either Matthijs or Paul Bril, and their function as model for these fresco-projects. She relates the change in style around 1600 to a shift in Paul's working method. Concurrently, these drawings also document the ever more elevated position of his patrons, and these sheets might have had the function of presentation drawings as well. A factor not mentioned by Ruby that might have contributed to this development, is Paul's ability and indeed necessity to run a workshop, as mentioned by Hendriks. Angela Negro, finally, deals in this book with the ceiling-fresco in the Casino of the Patriarch Biondo, part of the present-day palazzo Rospigliosi-Pallavicini on Monte Cavallo, and a crucial stage in Bril's development from northern to Italian style landscapes. In this project, Bril cooperated with Guido Reni for the most demanding patron of his day, Scipione Borghese. Negro primarily discusses the technical and stylistic details of this project, of which Bril was obviously in charge as payments were only made to him – he ran the workshop that included Guido Reni and probably also Pietro Paolo Bonzi. This is another sign of his prestige around 1610. Negro also pays attention to his working techniques, which consisted of transferring the preparatory

drawings directly onto the plaster, in brown outlines. He did not use, as many other artists of his day did, cartoons. But most importantly, it is a project in which various elements were combined to create a spectacular ensemble of landscapes, a pergola with plants and birds, and struggling *putti*; this, and its location are a clear sign that Bril's art was considered something remarkable by his contemporaries.

Francesca Cappelletti's *Paul Bril e la pittura del paesaggio* takes a much more general approach to Paul Bril as a painter. Her book consists of two parts; it offers a discussion of Bril's relations with his contemporaries, followed by a *catalogue raisonné*. In the latter, Cappelletti adds a number of new attributions to Bril's oeuvre. When compared with for example Mayer and Faggin, Cappelletti's catalogue includes more paintings; but when compared with Berger's (who listed only the easel-paintings), she comes to an oeuvre of comparable size. But most of all, each painting is discussed in detail, and Cappelletti offers a useful summary of the recent publications with new discoveries, including her own contributions in this field, whereas all prior publications merely listed the paintings, even without proper illustrations of most works.<sup>5</sup> But when, as in the case of the painting in oil on stone, the painting itself is unpublished and its location is unknown, and the attribution is founded upon the repetition of a motive found in a celebrated fresco in the Scala Santa in Rome, it becomes difficult for the reader to follow this particular attribution. In a reasoned catalogue as this aims to be, a more critical editing (and a complete set of illustrations) might be expected. Moreover, the lack of an approximate chronology, admittedly a fairly difficult task in the case of Bril with his repetition of elements and compositions throughout his life, renders the question of attributions on stylistic grounds even more complex. The choice for archival sources as a basis for quite a few new attributions, although in itself not without its own particular problems, is an elegant way to circumvent this issue. In general, though, the discussion in the catalogue is more helpful than Hendriks and certainly provides a basis for further discussion on autograph paintings.

But Cappelletti's approach to Bril as a painter is mainly characterised by her interest in the wider effects of Bril's presence in early *Seicento* Rome, and it is here that the combined use of archival sources and stylistic analysis renders some interesting insights. This moreover shows how much the research on Bril has superseded the theories of the beginning of the twentieth century, when the issue of stylistic influences of Roman landscape painting was first addressed. In 1930, Baer summarised that Mayer was of the opinion that Elsheimer was the main example for Bril – and he therefore had not been influenced by Italian painters – while Weizsäcker reversed this hypothesis; Gerstenberg only saw influence from Annibale Carracci and Domenichino on Bril's development, excluding Elsheimer. Baer himself proposed that all

5 ANTON MAYER: *Das Leben der Brüder Matthaeus und Paul Brill. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Landschaftsmalerei um die Wende des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts*; Leipzig 1910. GIORGIO T. FAGGIN: Per Paolo Bril, in: *Paragone* 16 (1965), p. 21–35.

three painters had influenced Paul's work, in three different, but neatly divided stages.<sup>6</sup>

Cappelletti has, even more determinedly than Hendriks, done away with this concept of unilateral or bilateral influences, and proposes a complex set of artistic interactions. For example, the cooperation between Bril and Ambrogio Bonvicino, with whom he worked in Palazzo Mattei around 1599, posits the northern painter firmly in the Roman scene, as does the information on Bril's function as head of the Accademia di San Luca. Obviously, the various styles of landscape painting gradually merged into one. The last chapter, where northern and Italian theories on art are confronted, regards this process finally on a more abstract level. The confrontation of Van Mander's *naer het leven* (true to life) with the term of *diligenza* that was applied by Italians in Bril's time to describe northern landscapes, is for that reason an indication how not only the painters slowly but surely approximated the genre. Around 1600, they took up the subject as well – and for that reason tried to capture the essence of the northern style with their own terminology and painterly approach. The result was the classic style of seventeenth-century Italian landscape. Although this last chapter is not primarily concerned with Bril and for that reason seems slightly out of place in a book that in its title announces attempt to deal with his oeuvre, it indeed points at the importance of a broader approach to the genre that transcends the boundaries between the northern and southern schools that have for too long obstructed a clear discussion of the development.

The *Archivi dello sguardo*, finally, extends the chronological boundaries to encompass the entire sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and Rome is left for a wide variety of other Italian locations such as Ferrara, Milan, Naples, and even France. It also offers a wide range of approaches to the genre that incidentally sums up the broadness that the research into the subject has reached. From a psychological view, and for that reason essentially a-historical consideration of Lionello Puppi, to the literary context discussed by Gianni Venturi and the aspects of patronage taken up in various forms by Lucy C. Cutler, Clare Robertson and Susan Russell; style has been surpassed as the exclusive approach to the genre. Although this leads to many variously interesting insights on a detailed level, for example the religious and humanistic aspects of Jan Brueghel's landscapes for Federico Borromeo, the fragmentation of the issue of landscape is also one of its results. As a whole, the acts of the Ferrara conference lead to new questions, but the accumulated results make one long for a coherent view on the topic instead of ever more diverging opinions.

But it can also be concluded that the fact that these new approaches are finally being introduced into monographic studies such as those on Paul Bril, indicates that the genre of landscape painting is being freed of assumed 'naturalness'. The concept that the new style came about as a result of northern influences is likewise questioned, be it more thoroughly by Cappelletti. Her argumentation is, however, almost over-

6 RUDOLF BAER: Paul Bril: Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Landschaftsmalerei um 1600; München 1930, p. 79.

loaded as a result of its rather extensive referring to contemporary artists. The book edited by Hendriks is much more lucid thanks to its more compact theme, and it throws more light on the technical aspects of the Brill working procedure. It is thus depending on the reader's familiarity with the subject which of the two publications is the better choice. But for both books, with their particular approaches, it can be said that they tackle the arthistorical conventions of the genre. No longer is landscape painting a purely Renaissance invention that introduced a strictly secular outlook on the visual world. And no longer is it strictly an invention of famous individuals, but a development in which patrons commissioned large workshops of painters to collaborate in producing large-scale decorative cycles, thus increasing the popularity of landscape painting during the lifetime of Paul and Matthijs Brill.

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**Christiane Rambach: Vermeer und die Schärfung der Sinne;** Weimar: VDG Weimar; 324 S., 9 farbige u. 90 SW-Abb.; ISBN 978-3-89739-570-1, € 35,00

Sicherlich hat der inzwischen leider verstorbene Jörg Träger als Betreuer der Dissertation einen entscheidenden Anteil an dem Umstand, dass sich eine Doktorandin an ein solches, in rein empirischer Hinsicht monumentales Thema wie Jan Vermeer heranwagte, da doch ohne professionelle Hilfe leicht droht, dass der Anmerkungsapparat den Text auffrisst. Dieser Gefahr konnte Christiane Rambach entgehen, auch weil sie trotz des Faktengebirges, das der kunsthistorische Forschungsfleiß vor den Vermeerschen Werken entstehen ließ, dennoch Neues gefunden und hier mitgeteilt hat.

Die Bilder des Delfter Künstlers zeichnen erstens eine hohe kunsthandwerkliche und inszenatorische Qualität aus, manche behaupten, dass noch keinem davor und danach Besseres gelungen ist, und zweitens eine bemerkenswerte Rätselhaftigkeit, die eine Unzahl von Deutungsversuchen provozierte. Deshalb bietet die Vermeer-Forschung einen guten Blick über die Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte, mit dem die Autorin ihre Untersuchung einleitet. Einen Schwerpunkt bildet dabei die ikonologische Sinn- und Bedeutungsdechiffrierung in der Tradition Panofskys, die ab 1970 auch die Auseinandersetzung mit Vermeer bestimmte und ständig neue Nahrung erhielt aus den Röntgen- und Infrarotuntersuchungen, die in der Folgezeit eine ganze Reihe übermalter Motive in den Werken Vermeers zutage förderten. Es entstand eine kleine Geschichte der unsichtbaren Kunst, die jedoch die Anzahl der Vermeerschen Geheimnisse eher erhöhte statt verringerte.

Man kann der Autorin zu ihrem Mut gratulieren, ihre ersten professionellen Schritte als Kunsthistorikerin auf einem solch dünnen Eis unternommen zu haben, und zu dem Erfolg eines neuen und klugen Beitrags zur Vermeer-Forschung. Sie wählte dazu vier Bildbeispiele: „Die junge Dame mit dem Perlenhalsband“, „Die Stadtansicht von Delft“, „Das schlafende Mädchen“ und „Das Mädchen mit dem Perlenohrgehänge“ und untersuchte diese mit den Instrumenten einer sehr hand-