

Rezensionen

WOLFGANG WOLTERS, *Der Bilderschmuck des Dogenpalastes: Untersuchungen zur Selbstdarstellung der Republik Venedig im 16. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1983. 339 S., 316 Abb. DM 246,—.

It would be difficult to think of a subject more relevant to the current concerns of historians of Renaissance art than the painted decoration of the Doge's Palace. In addition to the problems of dating and connoisseurship, particularly in connection with the possible intervention of assistants, which many of these paintings present, the iconographic issues which they raise are important for the understanding of other pictorial cycles not only in the Veneto, but throughout Italy. Most of the pictures in the palace were commissioned in a relatively short period following the disastrous fires of 1574 and 1577, replacing earlier canvases which often illustrated the same subjects. The meaning of many individual paintings has still to be fully established. It is also unclear whether they comprise a single coherent scheme, let alone one that was intended to proclaim a consistent ideological message; and it is likewise uncertain to what extent the artists were required to follow precise instructions provided by the patrons. The evidence for the solution of such problems is abundant and varied. It includes earlier Venetian works of art, the panegyric literature of Venetian historians and orators, a programme for the redecoration of part of the palace drawn up after the second fire and the published descriptions of the paintings by Sansovino and others. For anyone interested in the relationship between artists and patrons, in the use of visual imagery in a political context, or simply in painting in Venice in the later Renaissance, the Doge's Palace would therefore seem an obvious point of reference. Numerous studies of individual aspects of the decoration have been published in recent years, including several important contributions by Professor Wolters himself, yet in this century the only scholar before Wolters to have provided an extended discussion of the subject was Staale Sinding-Larsen, in his *Christ in the Council Hall (Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia, V, Rome, 1974)*; and even here, as the title would suggest, the text is largely confined to the religious imagery.

Wolters's book begins with two introductory chapters outlining the building history of the palace and providing a survey of the available evidence about the division of responsibility for the commissioning and planning of the decoration, and of the early textual sources. There follows a discussion of Venetian pageantry, which leads to a series of studies of the principal categories of imagery to be found in the palace, such as the portraits and votive paintings of the Doges, the allegorical representations of the Venetian state, the histories, and finally Tintoretto's *Paradiso*. In each case the author first examines the political ideas that might be relevant to the particular type of imagery, for example discussions about the status

of the Doge, panegyrics on the qualities of the Venetian state, or the historiography of the events depicted in the history cycles, and then tries to establish the extent to which these ideas are reflected in the paintings themselves.

His purpose is two-fold: first, to explain what the various works of art in and around the palace were intended to convey, and second to show how the artists approached their task. And again and again he comes to the conclusion that major features can only be adequately explained as reflections of the decisions of individual painters. Thus when Tintoretto, in his votive painting of Andrea Gritti, showed the same figures as Titian had done in the earlier composition destroyed by fire, but altered their arrangement and so — in a subtle way — their significance, this change in meaning, Wolters argues, must be due to the artist, since the contracts for such pictures never specify in detail the placing or poses of the participants. In the same way he believes that instructions given to the painters cannot account for the different ways in which Veronese on the one hand, and Ponchino and Zelotti on the other represented *Psychomachias* on the ceiling of the *Stanza dei Tre Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci*, or for the divergences from the programme found in the ceiling paintings of the *Maggior Consiglio*. The most extreme example of artistic licence is the final scene in the cycle devoted to the Fourth Crusade, painted by Aliense. This shows Baldwin I crowned by the Doge, whereas in the programme the subject specified was the enthronement of Baldwin by the Doge and his fellow electors. Aliense, whose interpretation of this event cannot be paralleled in Venetian historiography, would seem here simply to have disregarded his instructions in order to create a more stylish composition.

What Wolters's has done, in effect, is to restore to the artists the central role in the design of their paintings that modern scholarship, through the study of iconography, has increasingly tended to attribute to their patrons. His book is both an attempt to demonstrate the complexity of the process by which ideas are translated into visual terms, and an illustration of the problems of interpretation that necessarily result from it. This attitude is directly opposed to the standpoint of Sinding-Larsen, whose monograph is based on the premise that the fires of the 1570s provided the Venetian government with an opportunity to create a coherent scheme of decoration for the palace which can only be understood in terms of a fully articulated ideology. As he has said of Wolters's book in a recent article, "ideologies, especially if they are functionally related to institutions and rites, represent firmer analytical parameters than the biographical and chronological accidentals of planning and execution", and "no documentation exists that allows an assessment of individual or groupwise investment of interest and ideas in a single picture or series of them in this context beyond the level of general ideologies" ("The 'Paradise' Controversy: A Note on Argumentation", *Interpretazioni Veneziane, Studi di Storia dell'Arte in Onore di Michelangelo Muraro*, ed. David Rosand, Venice, 1984, pp. 363—370).

It will be evident from these comments that Sinding-Larsen considers Wolters's enterprise to be based on false premises; and it would seem that he would reject

any argument about the apparent incompatibility of any particular image with the professed ideology of the patrons as irrelevant, or at best misleading. But while it is certainly true, as he asserts, that we can never be sure what precise instructions, whether verbal or written, the artists might have received from "the authorities", the fact remains that Wolters has produced much powerful evidence for his point of view; and I believe that his approach is historically the more plausible. For Sinding-Larsen himself starts from a series of undocumented and unprovable assumptions that are, at the least, open to question, as Juergen Schulz has already pointed out in an important review (*Kunstchronik*, 32, 1979, pp. 141—156). Thus it is by no means self-evident that the Venetian government sought to produce a coherent ensemble for the entire decorative ensemble installed after the fires of the 1570s, or that it exercised close supervision over the activities of the painters, or that the intention at every point was to provide a precisely defined content, rather than a group of splendid and opulent pictures which would in a general way proclaim the values of the Venetian state, the great deeds of Venetian history and the continuity of Venetian institutions.

Sinding-Larsen's claims would carry more conviction if he had succeeded in interpreting the paintings installed after 1577 in an entirely satisfactory way, and if his general assumptions about the practice of the government authorities could be shown to be consistent with what had happened in comparable decorative projects in Venice and elsewhere. On the first of these counts, it is certainly the case that his interpretations sometimes seem wide of the mark, a case in point being his startling assertion that many of the figures with angel's wings in Tintoretto's *Paradiso* are souls, a point on which much of his subsequent discussion hinges. As for the second issue, his assumption that the Venetian government routinely concerned itself in detail about the imagery of its public buildings is not only unsupported by any clear contemporary testimony, it is also difficult to reconcile with one striking piece of evidence provided by Wolters. In 1591 Girolamo Bardi, one of the scholars who drew up the programme for the redecoration of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, was asked by the Procurators to identify the mythological subjects carved on the portico of the Library, so that appropriate figures could be selected to adorn the parapet above. The Procurators, therefore, did not even know the meaning of the subjects chosen by their predecessors less than fifty years earlier for a major building which came under their direct control. And in the context of Sinding-Larsen's approach, it is perhaps also worth mentioning the case of the decoration of the town hall in Modena, where there is very clear evidence that in one instance an iconographic scheme was devised in a strikingly sloppy way, and that in another the supervision of the artists was minimal (Erika Langmuir, "The *Triumvirate of Brutus and Cassius*: Nicolò dell'Abbate's Appian Cycle in the Palazzo Comunale, Modena", *Art Bulletin*, 69, 1977, pp. 188—196; Dwight Miller, "Bartolomeo Schedoni in Modena, 1602—07; the earlier phase of his work", *Burlington Magazine*, CXXI, 1979, pp. 76—92). We certainly cannot be sure that things were very different in Venice.

Wolters's own arguments are all the more persuasive in that he has provided a much richer and more comprehensive treatment both of Venetian ideology and of the paintings themselves than Sinding-Larsen. His book draws on a very extensive group of sources, both textual and visual; and it represents by far the most useful survey of Venetian official imagery that has so far appeared. Its value therefore goes far beyond the immediate topic of the Doge's Palace, not only because it is so full of information but also because it should direct the attention of other scholars to classes of imagery, and especially paintings, that tend to be overlooked in most discussions of Venetian art, for example to the numerous canvases in other government buildings which appeal less to modern taste than altarpieces and *poesie*.

The effect of Wolters's book, in fact, is rather to open questions than to resolve them, especially as he is wary about drawing general conclusions from his analyses of individual works of art. And even in the case of the Doge's Palace itself he has by no means provided a complete study of the major problems. The typological approach that he has adopted, for example, sometimes makes it hard for the reader to consider how far the decoration of individual rooms can be regarded as forming coherent schemes, or for that matter how far the treatment of individual works of art might have been affected by proximity to other works. It is unfortunate that no plan is provided of the palace, and that most of the rooms themselves are not illustrated. What is needed most urgently at the moment is a comprehensive catalogue of the entire palace, on the lines of the indispensable monograph on the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence by Ettore Allegri and Alessandro Cecchi (*Palazzo Vecchio e i Medici*, Florence, 1980). Scarcely less desirable would be a publication of reproductions of all the decorations, including for example the painted frieze in the Sala del Collegio. This is virtually invisible to visitors, but it may well provide a key to the identification of the allegorical female figures by Veronese on the ceiling; for a passage in Sansovino's guidebook of 1581, in which some of the subjects in the frieze are identified (even though he is unreliable about the location of individual subjects) suggests to me that each of the *exempla* from ancient history which the frieze contains — such as the Industry of Archimedes — corresponds in theme to the adjacent personification on the ceiling.

These figures are by no means the only Venetian allegories of the second half of the sixteenth century whose meaning has still to be fully explained. Indeed, this class of Venetian imagery is in general exceptionally difficult to decipher. One need only mention, for example, the ceilings by Veronese, Zelotti und Ponchino in the rooms of the Council of Ten, whose precise significance remains obscure. Wolters himself provides some helpful clues; but his own discussion of one important text has led him, I believe, to take an unduly pessimistic standpoint about the possibility of understanding some types of secular decoration. The text in question is in Francesco Sansovino's guidebook of 1581, and concerns the bronze figures on the Loggetta. Sansovino attributes his very extravagant interpretation of these figures to his father Jacopo, so at first sight it would seem to be entirely authoritative. It

is certainly the case that we could hardly hope to deduce all the meanings which he provides for these figures if we did not know this text, for example that Apollo is there partly to allude to the Venetians' love of music. It is important to remember, however, not only that Francesco specifically stated that the exegesis of the figures was provided by Jacopo, but also that Jacopo himself was presumably not responsible for the choice of subjects. What Sansovino provides, I believe, is an *ex post facto* reading of these figures, which he recorded as an example of his father's *ingegno*. As such, it is just like the flattering allusions to the Medici which Vasari includes in his description of the mythological frescoes of the Palazzo Vecchio in the *Ragionamenti*, which provide no insight into the rationale for the original choice of themes. In the case of the Loggetta, the decision to adorn it with Apollo the god of the arts, Minerva the goddess of wisdom, Mercury the god of trade, and Peace hardly needs explanation: these figures simply express, in the most straightforward possible way, values which the Venetian government was expected to uphold.

A more fundamental problem in Wolters's analysis concerns his treatment of votive images showing a kneeling Doge or government official in the company of the Virgin or Christ and saints. Wolters (and likewise Sinding-Larsen) discusses these pictures in terms that imply that the earthly figures exist in the same plane of reality as the heavenly ones, as if the latter "appear" to the mortals. Philipp Fehl, in a study of Titian's *Madonna of the Pesaro Family*, has provided a more persuasive account of a particularly famous image of this type, and one whose relevance is surely more general ("Saints, Donors and Columns in Titian's *Pesaro Madonna*", *Renaissance Papers* 1974, Durham/North Carolina, 1975, pp. 75—85). According to Fehl, the mortals are seen by the saints, but do not see them. Exactly the same must be true of the votive pictures in the Doge's Palace. In almost every case the Doge is firmly located in Venice, and it is most unlikely that anyone in the sixteenth century would have supposed that the Saviour or St. Mark had actually appeared to him, or might be expected to do so. These paintings do not show apparitions, but proclaim that the heavenly figures watch over the Doge and the city. As a series they demonstrate the particular care of the saints for Venice during the reigns of the various Doges depicted. And this is why the Doges never seem to make eye contact with the saints or with Christ, indeed give no indication of being aware of their presence — even though St. Mark, for example, sometimes places a hand on the Doge's shoulder. In this context, it is surely no accident that the only figures which are clearly seen by the Doges are personifications such as Venice or Faith. These are abstractions, metaphors; the saints, however, are real. A recognition of the mechanism of such pictures would, I believe, have led Wolters to change the emphasis of his text at several points, as for example when he calls the Doge an intermediary or spokesman for Venice before the Virgin and saints. In such images, the Doge, or any other donor, is by definition passive, and no claim is made for his privileged access to the heavenly beings. At most the spectator is

reminded of the donor's devotion to particular saints, and invited to remember him in his prayers to them, as we are surely invited to do by Jacopo Pesaro.

Such disagreements as I have mentioned do not substantially modify my admiration for this exceptionally interesting and valuable book. Wolters's careful and generally cautious interpretations of a vast range of imagery, his sensitivity to the problems of paralleling the apparent content of works of art with texts, his willingness to take account of the inevitable contribution of the artists, and his scepticism about the plausibility of forcing such imagery into some larger ideological or iconographic scheme, ought to set an example for any scholar of Renaissance art who has to deal with decorative schemes of a comparable kind. Like all good books, this one raises as many issues as it resolves; and even where it does not provide complete answers, it offers a wealth of new evidence on which such answers might be based. Much still remains to be understood about the imagery of the Doge's Palace and other Venetian public buildings; but I believe that Wolters has provided an impressive and indispensable model of how such investigations ought now to proceed.

Charles Hope

SUSAN PRÖSEL, MICHAEL KREMIN, *Berlin um 1700. Die Idealstadt Charlottenburg*. Hsg. TU Berlin, Der Präsident. Berlin, publica 1984, DM 29,80.

1705 gründete Preußens erster König vor dem kleinen Lustschloß seiner verstorbenen Gemahlin eine Stadt, die er ihr zum Gedenken, ebenso wie das Schloß, Charlottenburg taufte. P./K. versuchen, die Entstehungsgeschichte aufgrund vorhandener Sekundärliteratur neu zu bewerten. Sie arbeiten den Grundgedanken, Charlottenburg sei eine synthetische Idealstadt des Absolutismus, deduktiv klar heraus, durchsetzen aber ihre Darstellung mit diversen Spekulationen, die nicht überzeugen. Zu begrüßen ist die Koordination zweier einander oft ignorierender Disziplinen: Soziologin und Kunsthistoriker arbeiten zusammen. Mit Recht fordern sie, die „Rolle der Symbolik und des Zeremoniells für die Staatsverfassung des Barock“ und deren bauliche Auswirkung bewußter als bisher zu untersuchen (S. 164). Dabei werden auch Rechts- und Besitzverhältnisse analysiert, die die Planungen mitunter stärker beeinflussen, als die Kunstgeschichte vermutet.

Erstaunlich schmal ist das Quellenverzeichnis. Grundlegend für alle Charlottenburgforscher bleibt W. Gundlachs *Geschichte der Stadt Charlottenburg* 1905 mit gründlicher Auswertung der Primärquellen. Die früheste Geschichte der Stadt von dem dortigen Pfarrer Dressel 1813 und 1816 ist nicht berücksichtigt. Spezialliteratur zur Gartenkunst wie F. Wendlands *Berlins Gärten und Parke* 1979 fehlt. Stellvertretend für die Literatur über Städtebau erscheint W. Braunfels, *Mittelalterliche Stadtbaukunst in der Toskana* 1953. Das Verfahren befremdet besonders, da die Autoren es als Intention ihrer Arbeit bezeichnen, auf den „Berliner Boden der eigenen, der nationalen Geschichte“ zu verweisen und „neue Perspektiven in der wis-