
Reviewed by CHARLES DAVIS

THE LABYRINTHINE HISTORY of Michelangelo’s monument to Pope Julius II is so long that many shy away from it. Bertolt Brecht’s ironic question, ‘Can the Moses of Michelangelo take hold of us only after a professor explains him?’, is answered by Claudia Echinger-Maurach, as by Brecht himself, in the affirmative. For Brecht, understanding works of art requires knowledge, and even more the art of observation, which the author possesses in a high degree. Her book is first of all an apologia for the finished monument that we see in S. Pietro in Vincoli, four of Michelangelo’s masterpieces forming the Jula whole in all its dignity and grandeur and an attempt to rescue it from its fate of neglect, and ultimately from the overshadowing dominance of the Moses, of the prolonged history of its genesis and of the portrayal of the monument as a personal and artistic tragedy in Michelangelo’s biography.

The Entstehungsgeschichte is re-explained to demonstrate how the final realization of the monument grew out of Michelangelo’s first idea. Instead of distinct phases in the tomb’s development, the author sees an almost continuous and fluid development in Michelangelo’s ideas. Surviving drawings appear to validate this interpretation. The genesis of the monument is explained in terms of the intersection of successive conceptions with other determining factors: artistic, logistic, political, and personal deadlines and the incidence of the many participants. The final form of the monument began to emerge as a project for a two-storey structure in S. Pietro in Vincoli in 1532. The first level, a piano terreno foundation, was erected in 1533–34, using marbles carved two decades earlier. Its resemblance to Michelangelo’s drawing of 1518 for the first level in London is astonishing (British Museum, 1859–9–14–824f). If the design of the first level emerges from the monument’s history, the second level was designed anew. This much taller second level is a kind of piano nobile, conceived in the style of Michelangelo’s ‘new’ architecture expounded in the Laurentian Library.

Viewed architecturally, the Julius Monument is simply a Hemengabamal – with anthropomorphic herms as supporting elements substituting the classical column orders: below, four robed men, their arms wrapped around themselves to help them support the structure’s weight – the same fiction found in illustrations of the Persian Porch in sixteenth-century editions of Vitruvius with muscular male supporting figures variously called herms, terms, atlases (e.g. Giocondo, Cesario, Goujon, Barbaro, Rivius) – here embedded in an opere di intaglio context. Above, herms again, with long tapering abstract shafts, in a new architettura piana with, as ornament, only opera di quadro in Michelangelo’s dramatic manner, a hybrid architecture, enlivened by a tension between nature and geometry. Here the canonical head-and-bust formula of the herm is nearly drained of its human element, and faces are reduced to simple grimacing unreal masks set on diminutive necks and shoulders. Michelangelo’s herms are what remain of his grandiose plans for prisoners and victories – a herm was also called a prigione. Owing to the recent restoration, we can better see the monument as it is proposed in this book: an architectural membrane through which pass light, sound and rite, in an building context of wall, door, sacristy, cantoria and church.

Echinger-Maurach re-identifies the centre of meaning of the monument. It is not Moses, but the papal effigy. The Imago Petatis of Julius, in conjunction with the Madonna and Child, is already present in Michelangelo’s drawings making the Julius Monument of 1505 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). This deictic centre reappears in all the project drawings, and it forms the centre of the completed monument, where its expression becomes more conventional and muted. Ultimately Julius’s monument is not a paean to pagan or secular virtue but a Christian one, infused with the hope for salvation.

The Moses is the only statue not made expressly for S. Pietro in Vincoli. In the course of the monument’s history so many statues, finished and partially executed, were cast aside that one must wonder if Michelangelo himself really wished to include the Moses in the final tomb, or was he forced to do so by his patrons? On the lower level, the centre of the monument seems conceived almost as a blank, an empty space to be filled or used, perhaps a real or fictive entrance with an inscription above. The monument is anepigraphic.

The concluding chapters examine the individual statues. The effigy of Julius and the statue of the Madonna and Child finally receive their due as works conceived and partially executed by the master. A half-century ago the Rachel and Leah were viewed unfavourably in a volume that is now difficult to imagine. One facet of the monument that deserves greater emphasis is the ambiguity that surrounds the identity of four of its seven statues. Codivini and Vasi identify the lateral female personifications as Rachel/Vita contemplativa and Leah/Vita attiva (Matilda). The Leah, at the right, clearly looks into an object which she holds in her right hand, and this object is, just as clearly, a hand-mirror with a concave upper surface, a fact verified in situ some years ago. Thus it is visually obvious that the lateral personifications, among their other identities, represent Hope (Rachel prays, kneeling, hands folded, eyes closed, ever-present confidence. Leah studies circumspectly the mirror of past, present and future). The implications of the resemblances of the two statues to Hope and Prudence are doublely open to interpretation, but the resemblances themselves are inescapable and too apparent to be ignored. Although Hope and Prudence do not accord fully with the testimony of written sources, works of art, in this case unchanged in the course of nearly five hundred years, are equally valid testaments to their own identities as are narrative primary sources.


Reviewed by SABINE EICHE

ANYONE SEEING DANIELA LAMBERINI’S two massive volumes from a distance would be excused for thinking that, at the least, they were yet another publication on Michelangelo, Leonardo or Raphael. No one would expect a book of this size to be about Giovan Battista Belluzzi, called Il Sanmarino, a native of the Republic of San Marino in central Italy, who was unknown to all but a few specialists on Italian Renaissance fortifications. With her exhaustive study, Lamberini, an international expert on Renaissance fortifications, brilliantly fulfills the request of the Fondazione San Marino – Casa di Risparmio – SUMS to write about its most famous citizen for the celebration of the five-hundredth anniversary of his birth. Lamberini not only restores to Belluzzi the reputation that he held in his lifetime as one of the most highly regarded military architects and theorists of his time, but she also manages to provide an immensely informative context. If this had been a book about Michelangelo, the author’s lens would have been fixed on countless minute details of Michelangelo’s life, career or works, leaving the larger picture out of focus; what Lamberini has done is to take both a wide-angle and close-up view, which allows her not only to meticulously analyse Belluzzi’s work and working methods, but also to reveal him immersed in the society and politics of the period.

In elegant and readable prose, Lamberini reconstructs the historic context – the first half of the sixteenth century, in territory extending from the Adriatic to the Tyrrhenian sea – and presents all there is to know about this architect of remarkable achievements, whose most important work was done for Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici. Thanks to her careful research carried out over more than two decades, our knowledge of Belluzzi is now enriched by a considerable body of previously unidentified manuscript and graphic material. Her scrupulous investigation has also led to the correction of earlier misconceptions and factual errors. As if all this were not enough, Lamberini provides a welcome
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some of her colleagues, is therefore extremely welcome. Her research project began in

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nical characteristics were noted, among them traces of cold afterwork (chasing, filing and polishing), remains of sprues, casting defects, core pins, old repairs, etc. Where possible, samples of core material were taken from the interior of the statues; these were used for petrographic analysis and dating research using theromoluminescence (TL). X-radi-

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Lastly, the composition of the alloy of each bronze was measured with the aid of X-radi-

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Although the use of technical data in analysing bronze-casting methods and estab-

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B ew er also seized the opportunity offered by the Adriaen de V ries exhibition to undertake the first scientific research into the sculptor’s work, and this resulted in two publications. Now, almost ten years later, the research by B assett and her colleagues has been published in a substantial volume with a number of essays – including an enlightening introduction by Peggy Fogel-

man – followed by twenty-five technical entries or case studies (‘chapters’).

Adriaen de V ries emerges from this study as an artist of remarkable technical consistency: he almost always cast by using the direct method; he used an unchanging binary bronze alloy (copper and tin); he preferred particularly clay for constructing models; he had his own specific way of making his armatures; he finished the surface of his models according to fixed patterns; and he

The Craftsman Revealed. Adriaen de V ries. Sculptor in Bronze. By Jane Bas-

sett, with contributions by Peggy Fogelman, David A. Scott and Ronald C. Schmidting.


Reviewed by F RITS SCHOLTEN

ALTHOUGH BRONZE IS an i d eal medium for reproducing small sculptures and artefacts, it was not this that attracted the Dutch sculptor Adriaen de V ries (1556–1626) to the material. In contrast to most of his colleagues, he chose to work in bronze for its intrinsic value. The majority of De V ries’s compositions therefore exist in only one version, or at most a few. His style is also unlike anything his contemporaries were doing: De V ries was a modeller to the fingertips – ‘der Aller berinbist Kunstler auß

dem B ozziren’ (‘the most celebrated artist in modelling’), as he was described in 1620 – and in many cases his statues are more like overgrown wax or clay bozzetti executed in a mod-

durable bronze. As far as we know, he never worked in stone – again unlike many of his fellow sculptors. The thorough scientific research into the technical aspects of the work of this artistic and highly individual sculptor, carried out by Jane B assett (Associate Conser-

vator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles) and

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 bonus when she examines the different roles

that a man of B elluzzi’s standing and profes-

sion was expected to play, providing insights that will be useful to historians for under-

standing the careers of many other prominent Renaissance men.

The first of the two volumes is dedicated to B elluzzi’s biography and career. Following a chapter proliferating with newly unearthed details of the Belluzzi family and Giouv B attista’s early years, when, because of his marriage to the daughter of the Urbino archi-
tect Girolamo Genga, he served the della Rovere dukes of Urbino, Lamberini shifts her focus to Florence, where B elluzzi was sent by the Republic of San Marino as ambassador in 1543, and where he realised his full potential under the patronage of Duke Cosimo I. Lamberini’s skills both as narrator and architect-

ural historian come to the fore here in her gripping account of the turbulent events of those years and the challenges facing B elluzzi as the Medicis principal engineer and architect.

The second chapter covers the final years of B elluzzi’s life, which ended in 1554, during the war with Siena, when he was shot in the head by enemy fire while explaining to the Florentines where to place their artillery. An examination of B elluzzi’s architectural treatises constitutes the bulk of the fourth and fifth chapters. Chapter four, the longest in the book, is devoted to a discussion of the treatise that Duke Cosimo commissioned B elluzzi to write in 1550, which was to show the fortified places of Italy and other countries. The treatise survives in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (Fondo nazionale, II.I.280).

Lamberini publishes and discusses in an exem-

plary manner the sixty-two drawings made by B elluzzi for this manuscript. Anyone who

struggles to understand how Renaissance architects/engineers used the mathematical instruments developed by their predecessors will greatly benefit from Lamberini’s explanation, in the fourth chapter, of B elluzzi’s bussola topografica, or surveyor’s compass. Invented by B elluzzi to aid him in measuring city plans and drawing fortifications, this compass is a modification of the one used by Raphael a few decades earlier to draw a plan of ancient Rome. In the fifth chapter Lamberini analyses theory and practice in military architecture, using, among other manuscript sources, B elluzzi’s treatise in Pesaro’s Biblioteca Oberianese (MS.106).

Vasari’s life of B elluzzi in the second edition of his biographies, and the identification of B elluzzi’s portrait in the tondo in the Sala di Cosimo I, Palazzo Vecchio, that shows Dukes Cosimo surrounded by his artists, are the subject of the final chapter of the first volume.

In volume two Lamberini publishes B elluzzi’s writings, both known and unknown, beginning with his Diano (Bib-

lioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, Vitt. Em.476), first brought out by Pietro Egidii in 1597, which Lamberini checked against the original, making emendations and including the final folios that Egidii had omitted. We can read fascinating letters by the architect discussing his architecture and working meth-

ods in the next chapter. Lamberini transcribed

and annotated fifty-six letters, the majority by or to B elluzzi, which are found in the state archives of San Marino and Florence. The remainder of the second volume contains a number of important treatises on fortifi-
cations by B elluzzi. Lamberini’s illuminating research revealed that an unknown, badly damaged manuscript in the Archivio storico di Anghiar (C arte Taglieschi, MS.1624), inventoried as by G irolamo Maggi, was, instead, an original by B elluzzi. It was always assumed that this particular B elluzzi treatise had survived only in a copy, now in the Archivio di Stato of Turin (Z.II.34). Lamberini publ...