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Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and
Renaissance Italy (review)

Robert W. Gaston

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(Review)

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Some contributions stand out for provoking us to question what contemporaries understood as center and how the quality of peripheral could, in fact, engender artistic opportunity. These interpretations convincingly suggest a fractious and decentralized Italian peninsula that did not universally acknowledge Florence and Rome's predominance, contrary to what Vasari would have us believe. Štefanac demonstrated that patrons and artists in the Marche did not privilege Florence when making artistic decisions. For instance, although the Dalmatian sculptor Giorgio di Sebenico acknowledged Donatello and Ghiberti's innovations, he especially assimilated the style of the Venetian Buon brothers in whose workshop he trained. As a result, he produced high-quality sculptural programs that rivaled contemporary artistic production in Florence. Venetian art was also critical to Parma's first humanist monument. Although Talignani argues that Montini's interest in humanism and the modern style must have come from his Roman tenure, his funerary monument relies heavily on Venice, while evoking central Italian predecessors. Periti's vivid portrayal of early-sixteenth-century Parma convincingly discredits the notion that the city was a "peripheral refuge" (195) dependent upon intellectuals and artists in other centers. Expanding upon Castelnovo and Ginzburg's idea of the periphery as a place where alternative developments can happen, Kroegel's argument is compelling; being peripheral was an advantage in the case of altarpieces of the Immaculate Conception, a hotly debated issue in the Renaissance Church. Immaculists were able to express their belief more freely in outlying areas where their opponents exerted less control. The situation fostered innovation, as provincial artists were called upon to invent a new iconography for this ethereal concept, reversing the conceived relationship between center and periphery.

STEPHANIE C. LEONE

Boston College

Sally J. Cornelison and Scott B. Montgomery, eds. *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*.

Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 296. Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 2005. x + 274 pp. illus. bibl. \$45. ISBN: 0-86698-340-6.

Not so long ago certain art historians subscribed to the paradigm that the aesthetic celebration of the precious reliquaries in church treasuries should remain their professional focus. How far we have shifted from such a reductive approach is manifest in the present volume, and in the publications from 1997 to 2003 listed by Joanna Cannon in her characteristically incisive afterword.

The eleven studies gathered by Sally J. Cornelison and Scott B. Montgomery, and ably introduced by Montgomery, are uniformly strong contributions to knowledge. In "*Quia venerabile corpus redicti martyris ibi repositum*: Image and Relic in the Decorative Program of San Miniato al Monte," Montgomery describes

how the monks of the Romanesque church used Saint Minias's body relic, together with the visual program of the crypt and façade, to project toward Florence a competitor for the principal patron saint, John the Baptist. Giovanni Freni demonstrates, in "Images and Relics in Fourteenth-Century Arezzo: Pietro Lorenzetti's Pieve Polyptych and the Shrine of St. Donatus," that rivalry between the *pieve* and *duomo* over the possession and display of the relics of Saint Donatus and Saint James *intercisus* has a bearing on the iconography of Lorenzetti's high altar polyptych. Francesca Geens explores the iconography of Saint Galganus's head reliquary in Siena, relating it to Cistercian intervention in the hagiography during the late Duecento. In "Simone Martini's Beato *Agostini Novello Altarpiece* and Reliquary Altar: Sienese Program and Augustinian Agenda," Margaret Flansburg investigates Simone's altarpiece and Augustinian manipulation of local lay and pilgrim devotion toward this "unofficial" miracle-working saint. Sally J. Cornelison probes the "miraculous power" of St Zenobius's relics and reliquaries, in "When an Image Is a Relic: The Saint Zenobius Panel from Florence Cathedral," relating them to the Maestro del Bigallo's altar frontal and the decoration of the Saint Zenobius chapel. Leanne Gilbertson writes on the interaction of relic, image, and devotion in the *vita*-retable of Saint Margaret from the Cathedral of Montefiascone, which represented the saint's miraculous *potentia* to a predominantly lay, female audience. Jacqueline Marie Musacchio shows how the magical and devotional intersected in wax Agnus Dei pendants, coral branches, and animal teeth — objects accessible through artefacts and images relating to domestic well-being, particularly that of mothers and infants. Andrea Kann establishes the lay and monastic audience for Saint Luke's cult at Santa Giustina during the Quattrocento, relating Mantegna's Saint Luke Altarpiece to the history of the relics and their inventions. In "Relics and Identity at the Convent of San Zaccaria in Renaissance Venice," Gary M. Radke takes us to the rich relic collection guarded by the San Zaccaria nuns, clarifying how their altarpieces interacted with the relics and "addressed many audiences and articulated numerous identities" (189). Robert Maniura's contribution, "Image and Relic in the Cult of Our Lady of Prato," on image-relic relations in the cults at Santo Stefano and Santa Maria del Carcere, explores with deep methodological meditation "how an image can become the focus of pilgrimage" (195). Maniura challenges Richard Trexler's classic article of 1972, "Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image," and should set us all thinking about how vows worked in relation to images. Timothy B. Smith's "Up in Arms: The Knights of Rhodes, the Cult of Relics, and the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in Siena Cathedral" shows how the Cathedral's acquisition of the right arm and hand of Saint John the Baptist provoked Alberto Aringhieri, the head of the *opera* connected with the Knights, to initiate construction of the chapel — this perhaps "a substitute for one of the Hospitallers' primary sanctuaries" (238).

Joanna Cannon closes the collection with a supportive and thoughtfully critical essay on the approaches represented here and their implications for further

research. All of the contributors undertake their difficult tasks with reassuringly refined textual and visual skills. The editors are to be congratulated for producing a stimulating and informative book.

ROBERT W. GASTON

La Trobe University, Australia

Claudia Bertling Biaggini. *Lorenzo Lotto: Pictor Celeberimus*.

Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2006. 246 pp. index. illus. bibl. €49.80. ISBN: 3-487-13003-3.

This 6 × 8 inch paperback intersperses about ninety text pages with sixty-nine illustrations. As the title confirms, it presents the artist as a whole. That its aim is to be a popular introduction is reinforced by the one color image: the cover, a female portrait by the artist combining a gorgeous costume with somewhat strange facial expression, used also in at least two previous Lotto books. Yet the text assumes scholars as its readers, citing previous debates, often in their original languages. (In one odd case the translation of a Latin text is given, but into Italian.) So too the book's Latin name rather neatly combines the generalist message with a quote from an actual document and with a claim for the significance of the theme. The footnotes and bibliography, in smaller type, are actually longer than the text, and the bibliography consists of 270 items.

The author tells us right away that a birthday present of Berenson's classic study of Lotto first interested her in the artist and, at the end, that among the artist's many and varied original explorations "the Rosetta stone for his works was not to be found." One may rightly infer a certain casualness. Her many quotations almost always adopt her predecessors' conclusions. The concerns of portraiture, landscape, and religious teaching all have weight, and the book can be recommended for one seeking a summary of the Lotto literature. It is too brief to do much more, and the analyses are rather limited. The label of *proto-Baroque* recurs at numerous points, and may seem a problem when we are told that Parmigianino, Correggio, and Pontormo are proto-Baroque too, because their figures show mobility. Comparisons with other artists are extremely numerous and not always convincing, as with a long comparison with Holbein. The recent sound monograph by Humfrey is much quoted, and its 160 illustrations are no more than what is needed — here there are too many descriptions without a picture.

Two conspicuous cases suggest that when, by exception, a hypothesis outside the critical mainstream is adopted, it does not convince, and the lack of any reasons for doubt seems usual. The *Stanza cella Segnatura* of Raphael, a minor scene for which a preparatory drawing by Raphael survives, is attributed to Lotto mainly since its technique is unlike Raphael's. The composition is commonly assigned to Raphael's workshop in the year in question (1511), and this seems plausible. It is less so to think that one, who had already been called *celeberimus* and paid a 100 florin fee by the pope, might function here as a virtually mechanical helper. I