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La Vita delle 'Vite' Vasariane: Profilo storico di due
edizioni (review)

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(Review)

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Other highlights of the catalogue include essays by Paolo Massalin on the history of the Alberti family, by Ferruccio Canali on the facade of S. Maria Novella and the changing plans for S. Annunziata, by Lucia Bertolini on the classical Greek precedents for Alberti's 1441 Certame coronario, and by Stefano G. Casu on Albertian themes in Renaissance painting. In addition, the early twentieth-century aquarelle drawings on Alberti's church architecture by Josef Frank, reproduced here, are noteworthy for their beauty and historical information.

Since the documentary evidence is scanty for Alberti's engagement in Florentine architectural projects, most of the authors' interpretations rely on intelligent deduction. More skeptical readers may question their forensic methods and conclusions. Morelli in particular assumes the *De re aedificatoria* as the dominant subtext for determining Alberti's influence: other factors, sources, and even causal relationships between work and text could receive more emphasis. The *De pictura/Della pittura* and the debate over the role of poetics and rhetoric in Alberti's aesthetic have been treated elsewhere more thoroughly. Yet even if the arguments are not always convincing, they deepen our appreciation for this vital thinker and artist.

Both volumes contain complete bibliographies. The Cardini catalogue also includes helpful indexes of cited documents, copyists, owners of manuscripts, Alberti's works, and the catalogue plates. The reproductions are of fine quality. The editors of both volumes might have afforded more attention to consistency in citing common editions of Alberti's works or in the translation of Latin quotations. These minor problems are easily outweighed by the contributions made by these catalogues to Alberti studies and to our understanding of Quattrocento culture in general.

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Carlo Maria Simonetti. *La Vita delle 'Vite' Vasariane: Profilo storico di due edizioni.*

Accademia Toscana di Scienze e Lettere "La Colombaria" Studi 230. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2005. 176 pp. + 12 b/w pls. index. illus. bibl. €19. ISBN: 88-222-5475-9.

Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* has often been referred to as the Bible of Italian Renaissance art. Vasari's monumental collection of artists' lives was first published in Florence in 1550 and much revised in a second edition of 1568. The *Lives* is an argument in three parts, in each of which Vasari presents not only accounts of artists' lives, but a history of art. He covers art from antiquity to his own day, with a focus on how art reached perfection in the work of Michelangelo. Vasari tells us not only about what it is to be an artist in his day, he tells us why this is important.

In the final life, which is on his own career, Vasari writes that the idea to commence the *Lives* originated at a dinner hosted by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese

at the Palazzo Farnese in Rome in the mid-1540s. The dinner was attended by the literati of Rome, including Paolo Giovio, Claudio Tolomei, Annibale Caro, and Francesco Maria Molza. According to Vasari, it was Giovio's intent to write a collection of artists' lives with his assistance, but Vasari was later convinced by Giovio and others that he, Vasari, should be the one to write the *Lives*. The dinner is both fact and fiction: fact in that Vasari most likely did enjoy such meals at the Palazzo Farnese; fiction in that it probably didn't happen in quite this way — at least one of the participants mentioned by Vasari, Molza, was deceased at the time Vasari claims this particular meal occurred. The fiction, however, allows us to consider how Vasari scripted his career and the writing of the *Lives*. The dinner places Vasari at the heart of Rome's literati, echoing Plato's *Symposium* in a way that is both critically significant and, by then, fashionable in sixteenth-century Roman courtly circles. This fiction places Vasari within a larger humanist context.

Carlo Maria Simonetti's *La Vita delle 'Vite' Vasariane: Profilo storico di due edizioni* offers the reader an appreciation of the practical side of humanism in the sixteenth century: specifically, what was involved in getting the *Lives* printed. Simonetti presents an account of the two printing houses in Florence that produced Vasari's work, the Torrentino press in 1550 and the Giunti press for the second edition. We read here about the financial and physical difficulties of developing a printing house in Florence at this time, as well as the uses to which the Medici sought to adapt this business. The Fleming, Laurens Lenaerts van der Beke, known in Florence as Lorenzo Torrentino, brought the Torrentino press to Florence. Simonetti suggests that Cosimo I preferred Torrentino probably because the printer was non-Florentine and his Northern European contacts presented opportunities to Florence and thereby to the Medici court. This suggests, further, that Vasari's own text would reach a public north of the Alps (as it did), further expanding Vasari's renown and the glory of the Medici as patrons of the arts, a dominant theme in the *Lives*.

Simonetti outlines Vasari's dealings with the printers as well as with his numerous friends who were critical to the completion of the text. At the time the first edition was being printed, Vasari was in Rome seeking the favors of the new pope, Julius III (Vasari's former patron, Giovanni Maria del Monte, had been elevated to the papacy in February 1550). In spite of the anticipated success of the *Lives*, Vasari was committed to the art of painting and his swift turn to Rome in 1550 was a move to secure a position at the papal court. One gets the impression from reading the letters to Vasari from his friends in Florence — namely, Vincenzio Borghini and Pier Francesco Giambullari, who were checking facts, preparing indices, and otherwise shepherding the manuscript through to its printed completion — that Vasari was pleased to set the *Lives* aside, if only for a while. Nevertheless, this dated correspondence indicates that Vasari responded promptly to questions raised by Borghini and Giambullari, clearly indicating the author's desire to see his work finalized.

Simonetti's references to the portraits of artists in both editions illuminate Vasari's appreciation of an artist's singular identity, and his descriptions of the

frontispieces and the images of Fame and the Arts, rich in symbolic meaning for each edition, add to our understanding of iconography in Vasari's literary and visual productions. Carlo Maria Simonetti's *La Vita delle 'Vite' Vasariane: Profilo storico di due edizioni*, a welcomed contribution to current scholarship on Vasari, will serve as a critical reference for scholars of the *Lives* and other humanist texts printed in the sixteenth century.

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Anne B. Barriault, Andrew Ladis, Norman E. Land, and Jeryldene M. Wood, eds., *Reading Vasari*.

London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2005. 296 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$65. ISBN: 0-85667-582-2.

Reading Vasari, a collection of twenty-one essays, was conceived as a tribute to Paul Barolsky, whose own readings of Vasari as mythmaker, in books such as *Giotto's Father and the Family in Vasari's Lives* (1994), have resulted in many scholars reconsidering why Vasari wrote as he did and how we should now read his book. Some of the essays were presented at a symposium held at the Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, in November 2001; others were collected for the volume by Norman Land and Andrew Ladis. Together, the authors offer a range of responses, of varying sensitivity, to the literary qualities and historicity of Vasari's *Lives*.

The book aims, in part, to preserve the flavor of the 2001 symposium. Accordingly, it begins with the keynote address by Hayden Maginnis, followed by Barolsky's own exhortation to "reflect . . . upon the deeper significance of Vasari's fictions and what they might tell us" and the necessity for art historians themselves to make use of historical imagination, rather than "analyzing problems by chopping, dicing, and mincing art and its story" (34). In many of the remaining contributions, scholars take Barolsky's advice on board, unveiling how Vasari sometimes blends fact and fiction as part of his overall rhetorical strategy. In a couple of cases, authors seem content to provide a warmed-over version of previous scholarship, but such essays, mercifully, are few.

The bulk of the essays are divided into six sections. In the first, five scholars consider individual biographies from each of Vasari's three ages of art — corresponding roughly to the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. This is followed by a section devoted to Vasari's representation of Rome as an important artistic and spiritual center. Part 3 concerns Vasari's approaches to women — mothers and artists — in the *Lives*. The remaining sections are dedicated to Vasari and the poetic imagination, Vasari and humor, and Vasari's perceptions of himself as an author and an artist.

In a short review such as this, it is impossible to do justice to all of the authors and their essays, or to engage fully with the ideas they present. Rather, it seems