

Reviews

Le temps revient—'l tempo si rinnova: Feste e spettacoli nella Firenze di Lorenzo il Magnifico. Exhibition presented by the Provincia di Firenze and the Istituto Ludovico Zorzi per le Arti dello Spettacolo in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi, 8 April—30 June 1992; curator Paola Ventrone; catalogue Milan, Silvana Editoriale, 1992, Lire 60,000 (paper).

La Chiesa e la Città a Firenze nel XV secolo. Exhibition presented by the Curia Arcivescovile di Firenze in the crypt of San Lorenzo, 6 June—6 September 1992; curators Gianfranco Rolfi, Ludovica Sebregondi and Paolo Viti; catalogue Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1992, Lire 50,000 (paper). Both catalogues available from Libreria Salimbeni, Via matteo Palmieri 14R, 50122 Firenze, Italy. Tel. (055) 234-0904; fax 234-6137.

Although all of the dozen or so exhibitions mounted in Florence this year as part of the celebrations to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the death of Lorenzo de' Medici (1492) have enriched our understanding of the social, intellectual and physical context of fifteenth-century Florence, two in particular have contributed significantly to our knowledge of Florentine confraternities.

The first is the *Feste e spettacoli* exhibition, curated by Paola Ventrone in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi. Notwithstanding the difficulty of presenting an exhibition to document what is essentially an ephemeral art form, Ventrone and her collaborators succeeded in putting together an interesting collection of very disparate works, paintings, minor arts (though often, unfortunately, only in reproduction), and linking them in an intelligent and well-constructed catalogue. The seven parts of the

exhibition—the *Festa dei Magi*, the Nature of Courtly Ceremony, Lorenzo's "Romance" Joust of 1469, Giuliano's "Classical" Joust of 1475, the *Feste* of 1471 and the Nature of Religious Ceremony, Florentine Revival of Classical Theatre, and Mythology and Classicism in the Last Laurentian *Feste*—are complemented by five major essays: Paola Ventrone, "Feste e spettacoli nella Firenze di Lorenzo il Magnifico"; Franco Cardini, "Le insegne laurenziane"; Mario Scalini, "Il *Ludus* equestre nell'età laurenziana"; Rossella Bessi, "Lo spettacolo e la scrittura"; and Roberto Pacciani, "Immagini, arti e architetture nelle feste di età laurenziana". Although none of these sections or essays deals directly with confraternal practices, or engages systematically with confraternal documents, the curators have assembled a range of materials that enriches our visual documentation of various aspects of Florentine festive life, including the *rappresentazioni sacre* mounted by the confraternities of *laudesi* and *fanciulli*.

The second exhibition had a totally different set of problems to confront. The archives and the artistic patrimony of the Florentine Church are so immeasurably rich that they raise the problem of how to select objects and documents that will present a comprehensible ensemble to the viewer. It is here that the exhibition succeeds admirably. From the moment the visitor enters the crypt of San Lorenzo, and walks past the unadorned tomb of Cosimo de' Medici, *Pater Patriae*, another world is revealed.

Two sections in particular deal with confraternities. Section 4, "La catechesi a Firenze nel XV secolo," curated by Gilberto Aranci, deals with the transmission of faith and the teaching of doctrine, or catechism, to adults and to the young. It presents primarily documentary material, such as Antonino Pierozzi's doctrinal works, and also, and very importantly, the Bull of Eugenius IV dated 24 June 1442, by which the boys' confraternities of the Natività (called also della Scala, or dell' Arcangelo Raffaello), of the Purificazione (also known as di San Marco), of San Niccolò del Ceppo, and of San Giovanni Evangelista were established. Sectioni 5, "La Chiesa e i laici: Le

confraternite," curated by Ludovica Sebregondi, presents little-known visual material, and contextualises it clearly in its ritual setting. Sebregondi's particular contributions are the way in which she has been able to identify furnishings and cult objects that belonged specifically to confraternities, and the way she has been able to illustrate the documentary evidence with visual material—miniatures, woodcuts, painted panels, confraternal registers and more.

The other sections of the exhibition, each with one or more specialist essays, cover patristic texts, Florentine archbishops, the Council of 1439, documentary sources and images relating to the various ecclesiastical orders and to the teaching of theology, Savonarola, and liturgical furnishings. In this final section, an essay by Ilaria Ciseri, "Cerimonie, riti e feste religiose", looks in particular at the devotional and sacralising aspects of the processions of Corpus Domini and Santa Maria d'Impruneta, yet another activity in which the lay confraternities of Renaissance Florence were involved.

Inevitably, comparisons will be drawn between the crowds that engulfed the *Mostre medicee* of 1980 and the relatively scarce attendance at this year's Laurentian exhibitions. We should perhaps recall that many of the 1980 exhibitions offered bi-lingual explanations, and all were backed by the economic resources of the Council of Europe. Those who do not read Italian must unfortunately have found some of this year's cycle of exhibitions all but unintelligible. But for the many specialists to whom Florence is a second home, the ease with which the exhibitions could be viewed contributed greatly to the pleasure of visiting them.

Their grey catalogues, with lavish colour reproductions, and excellent up-to-date bibliographies, will join the silver ones of 1980 (Milan: Electa) as a rich and indispensable resource for years to come.

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