

The Silver Caesars: A Renaissance Mystery. Julia Siemon, ed.

Exh. Cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018. xvi + 218 pp. \$50.

The volume *The Silver Caesars: A Renaissance Mystery* is the outcome of an impressive and exemplary research initiative. The elements of twelve sixteenth-century tazze, disassembled in the nineteenth century and now dispersed all over the world in public and private collections, were gathered together at the Metropolitan Museum of Art over a twelve-week period, from March to June 2014. There they underwent an elaborate photographic campaign as well as technical analysis in the departments of Object Conservation and Scientific Research. A symposium then discussed “questions of patronage, authorship, manufacture, use and display, iconography, provenance, and the significance of technical analysis” (xii). The resulting volume resembles less a compendium of conference papers than a multi-authored monograph in which all participants work to refine a set of shared hypotheses.

The twelve silver tazze feature the most famous emperors of ancient Rome based on Suetonius’s *De vita Caesarum* (Lives of the twelve Caesars). Each tazza is dedicated to a specific emperor, represented as a full-length figure in the round standing in the middle of the dish. The project participants were for the first time able to assign each emperor figure to his corresponding dish, a connection broken since the 1860s. On each dish, four enchased reliefs relate scenes from the life of the depicted emperor, mostly having to do with his character, his imperial attributes (e.g., generosity), and positive episodes of his career. The twelve dishes narrate forty-eight scenes and 150 years of Roman history.

Two essays by the editor, Julia Siemon, form the core of the volume. The first focuses on the design process. Different chiseling styles point to a group working process in the execution of the series. The question of a *spiritus rector*, whose careful reading of Suetonius forms the premise for the whole concept, leads Siemon to a broad variety of visual sources, freely transferred into the goldsmiths’ designs. Her thorough analysis presents objects of antiquity, such as coins, as well as antiquarian literature, prints, and contemporary editions of Suetonius. None of the scenes, however, indicate firsthand experience of Rome or even Italy.

Siemon’s second essay offers two new hypotheses in a bold attempt to demystify the “Renaissance Mystery.” She first seeks to explain how the Roman cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini came into possession of all twelve tazze, which were first inventoried together in 1603. Aldobrandini bought six tazze at the art market of Milan in 1602, but there is no information available about the other six. Giulio Coffini reported to the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo Gonzaga, that he had seen one of the six tazze available on the art market in Milan in Ferrara earlier. From this, Siemon reconstructs a plausible scenario explaining how the tazze were split up in two sets, one coming into Aldobrandini’s possession directly and the other to the Milan art market in 1599.

She connects the tazze to one major event in Northern Italy: the 1598 double wedding of Prince Philipp III and Archduchess Margaret of Austria and of Archduke Albert VII of Austria, governor general of the Habsburg Netherlands, and Princess Isabella Clara Eugenia. Siemon argues that the tazze were divided into two sets either by Margaret or by Albert, who traveled together through Northern Italy following their weddings. Both sets were likely then gifted, one to Pietro Aldobrandini and the other to an unknown person who sold his set immediately at the Milan art market after Margaret and Albert departed.

Having connected the tazze to Northern European nobles, Siemon proposes the Habsburg Netherlands in the 1590s, under the reign of either Ernest or Albert of Habsburg, as the production site. Instead of relying on stylistic analysis, Siemon again connects the question to a specific event—namely, Ernest's ceremonial entry into Antwerp in 1594. The subject of the twelve Caesars apparently played a big role in the festive architecture for the entry; the city of Antwerp commissioned local silversmiths to produce the tazze and probably offered them as a tribute to the Netherlands' new governor. Nevertheless, since the tazze do not appear in the inventories of Ernest, who died in 1595, the city of Antwerp possibly repurposed the set (and the ceremonial entry) as a tribute to his successor, Albert.

It is astonishing how far Siemon persuasively develops her hypotheses concerning both the production site of the tazze and their trajectory to Pietro Aldobrandini. Still, the complementary essays could have contextualized Siemon's arguments more precisely. Generally, since the technological analyses of the tazze constitute the basis for the whole study, they should be placed at the front, rather than the back, of the volume. These suggestions are marginal in assessing this brilliant volume, which offers unprecedented access to and dramatically enriches our understanding of the long-standing object biographies of each of the twelve tazze, from the moment of their production until today.

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Titian's Aretino: A Contextual Study of All the Portraits. Raymond Waddington. Biblioteca dell'“Archivum Romanicum,” Serie I: Storia, Letteratura, Paleografia 484. Florence: Olschki, 2018. x + 152 pp. + 32 color pls. €28.

As is well known, Titian and Pietro Aretino (1492–1556)—the famed writer, poet, playwright, and satirist—were close friends. During their long friendship Titian created many portraits of the Tuscan writer, some commissioned by Aretino himself. Five individual portrait paintings of Aretino by Titian are known in addition to those images that contributed to a wider diffusion of his likeness (engravings and woodcuts published in