

Barbara Agosti. *Paolo Giovio: Uno storico lombardo nella cultura artistica del Cinquecento*.

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For a long time, Paolo Giovio's reputation as a discerning collector of art stood high: his descendant Luigi Rovelli, for example, in his apologetic *L'opera storica ed artistica di Paolo Giovio comasco vescovo di Nocera* (1928), stressed that Giovio was a subtle collector who was able to exploit his friendship with distinguished noblemen, popes, cardinals in order to obtain many portraits painted by the most important artists of his age. In the last two decades, Paolo Giovio's portrait museum and historical writing have been subject to more critical scrutiny. Recent studies, including Linda S. Klinger's "The Portrait Collection of Paolo Giovio" (PhD thesis, Princeton [1991]) and Sonia Maffei's edition of Giovio's writings (*Scritti d'arte. Lessico ed efrasi* [1999]), have illuminated Giovio's art-historical and collecting interests. Maffei convincingly analyzed, for the first time, the physiognomical relationship between the portraits of Giovio's collection and the

incipits of the *elogia* accompanying them. Price Zimmerman, on the other hand, published his intellectual biography of Giovio (*Paolo Giovio, The Historian and the Crisis of Sixteenth-Century Italy*), in 1995.

In this book Barbara Agosti hints at combining the two approaches, by dealing with central issues in the figurative culture of Giovio in a biography written from the point of view of the history of art. But despite the second part of the title of the book, it is precisely the connection between history and art that remains elusive. Nowhere is Giovio's historical methodology related to his artistic interests, not even in connection with physiognomy — Giovio, after all, was a physician, a pupil in Padua of Achillini and Pomponazzi, who are not mentioned here. Rather, Agosti reverts to the idea that Giovio is principally an extraordinary collector of masterpieces. As he collected his portraits, at least from 1518–19, with a sort of furious voluptuousness, he managed to obtain some painted by artists of exceptional value, for example, Mantegna, Dosso, Titian, and Bronzino. Twenty portraits or so by famous artists, however, of the more than 400 in the *Museo*, do not seem representative of the whole, and nowhere in her book Agosti is able to demonstrate her case. It is easier to show that more often Giovio was satisfied with copies or even sketches painted by disciples, as in a 1545 letter to Pietro Aretino (*Lettere*, 2:11 [1958]), quoted by Agosti (121, and n. 301). Receiving a painting of this sort, Giovio could be ironic (see, for example, *Lettere*, 2:183 [1958]). That Giovio the historian commissioned portraits on his own design from great painters, suggested by Agosti, seems unlikely: see, for example, the comments of Luca Contile, in a 1545 letter to Vendramini from Como, ignored by Agosti (*Delle lettere*, Pavia [1564], 1:124^v–125^r).

Without a global approach to Giovio's intellectual formation — Thucydides, for example, one of the foundations for Giovio's methodology, is never quoted — misrepresentations of historical texts are not infrequent. When analyzing Giovio's program for Vasari's frescoes of the Cancelleria, for example, Agosti (127–28) misunderstands Zimmermann's comments (167–68) on the apparent anti-Hapsburg tone of the previously imperialist Giovio in *Historiae*, books 39 and 40: Giovio's priority "shifted from the maintenance of Milanese independence to peace at any price, even by a return of the French," according to Zimmerman, but his judgment of Charles V was unchanging. In spite of rich erudition about writings on art and the pictures of Giovio collection, this book, strongly conjectural, is framed with old-fashioned ideas, such as the emphasis (160–61) on Croce's role in Giovio's rehabilitation (corrected by Zimmermann): ideas which Agosti, with the zeal of a neophyte in Giovian studies, offers as if they were new, systematically passing over every fact that contradicts them.

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