

OTA, Tomoko

Iconologia delle decorazioni interne della Villa di Poggio Imperiale a Firenze

This article presents an iconographic analysis of the fresco paintings in two rooms, Sala delle udienze di Maria Maddalena and Camera da letto della Granduchessa, of the Villa del Poggio Imperiale, Florence, as commissioned by the Archduchess Maria Maddalena of Austria, presenting compelling new information on the project.

Ota not only shows the discrepancies in the iconographic source articles that were used by the few previous studies on the subject, she also indicates new literary and iconographic sources and how the meaning of the subjects clarifies the political stances of Maria Maddalena and the Tuscan grand duchy of the period. In recent pre-modern European history studies there has been a tendency to reconsider the historical position and value of female rulers, and this has led to strong interest in the period when a Grand Duchess was the ruler of Tuscany. This article actively positions itself as an art historical element in such scholarly trends.

Ota discusses in particular four scenes – “Matilda of Canossa, countess of Tuscany”, “Isabella of Portugal”, “Pulcheria and Theodosius II” and “St. Helena discovering the True Cross”– from the 20 biographies of famous women scenes that make up the frescoes painted across the two rooms. Ota provides the new information that *Delle Vite delle donne illustri per santità* by Silvano Razzi was the textual source for the Matilda of Tuscany and Pulcheria scenes. Of particular note regarding Ota's thorough search for iconographic sources, is the fact that she personally viewed the reports written by the painter Matteo Rosselli on the temporary adornment planned for ceremonies. The painters of the period not only worked on regular painting production, they were also involved in such ad hoc projects, and her detailed indications of the connections between these two aspects of their works is deeply meaningful.

Ota reconstructed the issues pending for the commissioner Maria Maddalena at the time from historical materials, and thus reconsider the issues within a contemporaneous context. According to Ota, these frescoes provide a visual expression of the new Tuscan Grand Duchy government led by the Archduchess. That stance was, specifically on three points, political, diplomatic and religious, namely, the support for Pope Urban VIII, an alliance with her brother Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II to counter the infidels and protestants, and support for the Catholic counter-reformation that made the worship of relics orthodox. In this regard Ota makes the compelling argument that the specific iconography was chosen for the four scenes to accurately evoke a sense of the Archduchess' own motives. These arguments were underscored by extensive onsite investigations, and the amount of material presented in this article and its notes indicate the great efforts involved in its production.

However, the appeal of the political stance of the Archduchess as seen in these four scenes is not clearly discussed in a fully convincing fashion. As a result we wonder how to consider the other 16 scenes in the set. We can hope that in the future Ota will complete a full study of the entire iconographic program for all of the frescoes in these two rooms.

For these reasons we hereby award the Bijutsushi Prize to Ota Tomoko for her achievements in this article.