Review Of "The Stained Glass Of Saint-Père De Chartres" By M.P. Lillich

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The Stained Glass of Saint-Père de Chartres by Meredith P. Lillich
Review by: Michael Cothren

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supposes the existence of some authority among the masters powerful enough to induce the individual (who may have had family commitments) to leave the prospect of another year’s work in a building site where funds were ample to seek uncertain work elsewhere. Moreover, how could the organizers of the fabric be sure of the arrival of another qualified team to continue the work? James describes the master of the crew of masons as a “feudal chieftain.” Having commented that the conclusions relating to the organization of the construction of Chartres Cathedral could provide valuable insights into 13th-century society, James does little to defend or define this concept of authority over the masons, who, among the corps de métier in France seem to have enjoyed the greatest degree of freedom.

Perhaps if the numbers of the “crews” were reduced some, the theory might be more workable. In a typical 13th-century half a dozen or so elite masons and their apprentices might, conceivably, have moved fairly freely, and could have had a great impact upon the buildings where they worked. But James is talking about a crew of some hundred artisans. This would enforce the credibility of the argument over the decorated plinth stones of the north transept porch, which might be the work of individuals, rather than “crews.”

To demonstrate the presence of successive teams, and their occasional return, James might have presented the reader with a careful analysis of the work of the “Scarlet” group or some other in two or more different parts of the building. He suggests that a group might evolve its design procedures over a period of years; it would obviously be very difficult to control the extent to which two different corbel designs might result from evolution within the group, or from two different teams. Eight groups of corbel profiles are presented in the French edition (missing in the English version), each one of the variations on a theme. It is noted that several of the profiles could easily be transferred from one group to another. A careful presentation of the work of one of the Chartres teams in another building mentioned by James (Orbais, Essames, and so forth) would also have provided valuable documentation of the peripatetic framework of the 13th-century mason’s life, as postulated by James. Without this kind of demonstration, the possibility is left in the reader’s mind that a mason of that time might learn (as an apprentice) the habit of thinking in terms of a variety of potential solutions to any given design problem, and that in a 10 or 20 year span, he might be inclined to apply more than one of them. Similar forms might appear in a neighboring workshop where masons had been trained in the same tradition.

While most rewarding in some respects, this book is also frustrating. The binding of the French edition disintegrated as the pages were turned. The English language version, while solidly bound, was characterized by an appar-
lengte of harmonizing these combinations of color and grisaille with the architectural frame-
work. For example, in the nave of Saint-Père the early 14th-century artist who reglazed the mid-13th-century windows was even able to alter the appearance of the opening provided by the architect through such a combination. By designing his lancet in three vertical strips, he imparted a feeling of Rayonnant tracery to a High Gothic window and produced a "skilled variation on themes" of designs used in the earlier glazing of the choir and hemicycle.

The 12 color plates are an important feature of the book. They effectively reproduce the experience of encountering stained glass in its architectural setting. We are treated to faithful tonalities set into gently lighted architecture. The arrangement of the illustrations in clusters throughout the text is, however, inconvenient for the reader, making a coordinated study of text and plates quite difficult. In addition, there are mistakes in some of the labels: those for the plates following pages 88 and 140 are transposed; plate 68 is, in fact, a repetition of plate 32. The distillation of basic information into a series of reference charts, lists, and figures, and the inclusion of a plan that folds out at the back of the book are extremely useful.

This is not always an easy book to read. It is not intended for the casual reader (a knowledge of French is assumed), but for the serious student who will patiently consult footnotes and plates while carefully following the text. Because of the importance of Lillich's subject and the careful crafting of her argument, the rewards are great. The reader will have understood a monument of crucial importance not only in the history of Gothic stained glass, but in the history of Gothic architecture as well. Jean Lafond, to whose memory the book is dedicated, would be pleased.

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The Italian text appeared in 1972, the English text with a copyright date of 1975 in 1978. Villa Badoer, like the other volumes in this handsome series, provides an unequaled photographic survey of the building, accompanied by measured drawings especially prepared for the purpose. In addition, this volume illustrates the newly restored frescoes inside the villa and includes a "Comparative Table of Measurements given by Palladio, Bertotti Scamozzi, and the Centro Internazionale di Studi d'Architettura." An impressive list of manuscript sources and a lengthy bibliography document the scholarly foundations for the text of 61 pages including notes. Within this brief compass, dictated by the format of the series, Puppi brings together important archival research, and a specialist's knowledge of Palladio's works and of the social milieu of 16th-century Venice.

As James Ackerman has pointed out (Palladio's Villas, 1967), the villa Badoer is unique among Palladio's villas with curving porticoes as being the only one of that type of design to reach near completion. Before Puppi's discovery of a map of 1557 showing the villa site and its enclosing wall, it had also been one of the few works by Palladio almost totally lacking in documentary evidence for its date. The 1557 map and other archival material relevant to villa Badoer were first published by Puppi in 1966. His discoveries were incorporated in Ackerman's study and in Zorzi's volume on the same subject (1973). The Corpus Palladianum volume, despite its later date, may be recommended for its accessibility, and for the better quality and quantity of photographs devoted to the villa Badoer. It is, therefore, ironic to note that the correct identity of the artist who frescoed the piano nobile of villa Badoer is the only new information to be found here. Puppi establishes that the artist who decorated the villa was not Jacopo dal Giallo, miniaturist, but Giallo Fiorentino, a fresco painter and assistant to Giuseppe Salvati in work on the façade frescoes of Palazzo Loredan at St. Stefano. The chapter devoted to this discovery is the best in the book: the previous literature is reviewed in depth, the problem is succinctly stated, and new interpretation of the data is clearly and directly presented.

Those of us familiar with Puppi's work know him to be one of the most active scholars in Renaissance architecture. He characteristically presents his readers with a wealth of historical data brought together in a complex critical synthesis with a distinct Marxist bias. Hence, the suggestive allusions found throughout this book will be more meaningful to fellow scholars than to undergraduates and laypersons who may consult it.

The text of the Villa Badoer is divided into two parts. The first, devoted to the architecture of the villa, consists of three chapters. Chapter V documents the life of the patron, Francesco Badoer. It is revealed that Badoer's marriage to Luciaetta Loredan was essential to his decision to build in the Polesine, for he inherited land near Fratta through the death of Luciaetta's only brother Giorgio. Badoer's father had had property in the province of Padua. In this chapter and in chapter 3 the reader must draw up his own time chart and family tree to appreciate the chronological and familial relationships being discussed. The author assumes his readers are familiar with the topography of the Venetian terra firma. Important distinctions, such as the difference between the province of Padua and the Polesine region, are not explained, and the location of frequently mentioned 16th-century place names such as "Bragola" and "Ves para" is never made clear.

Chapter 2 concentrates upon the sources for the scheme of the curving porticoes and the hierarchy of structures found at the villa Badoer. The piano nobile of the villa is raised four meters above the level of the foreground where the curving porticoes stand. Puppi traces the evolution of the design for Fratta in a series of drawings connected with the villa for Leonardo Mocenigo to which he adds a plan of the villa Madama. (R.I.B.A. x, 18) and two plans for the Temple of Hercules at Tivoli (R.I.B.A. ix, 7 and ix, 8).

Chapter 3 is devoted to the documentation of the Badoers at Fratta until their extinction in 1678 and the passage of the villa to the Mocenigos by inheritance. Post-Palladian alterations to the site and the building are discussed, the most notable of which is the extension toward the east of the service buildings hidden by the curving porticoes of the 16th-century structure. Puppi notes that the line in the masonry fabric marking the junction of the old and new construction is clearly visible. This is not illustrated here but is reproduced in his article cited previously. He argues that these additions to the villa Badoer must date after 1776 because they do not appear on the plates of Bertotti Scamozzi's book published in that year. The same reasoning should apply to the fountains in the foreground at Fratta, which are also missing from Bertotti Scamozzi's plates. Puppi, however, dates the fountains in the first half of the 17th century.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the fresco décor of the villa. While the first chapter, in which the correct identity of the artist is established is exemplary, the second chapter, "Notes on the Iconography and Style of the Frescoes," is less successful. Here Puppi presents an interpretative key for the decorations. The choice of grotesques, illusionistic architecture, and mythological scenes in landscape settings is traced to Vitruvius, and the Rape of Ganymede in the large room on the right side of the villa is considered an expression in mythopoetic guise of Badoer's grief at the premature death of his friend and brother-in-law Giorgio Loredan in 1538.

An appendix provides a room-by-room description of the frescoes, omitted in the main text. This description is tied to a floor plan on which the rooms are numbered for ease of reference.

For the most part, the author may rejoice in his translator; she has made a coherent, if