Prima della pubblicazione gli articoli presentati a *Horti Hesperidum* sono sottoposti in forma anonima alla valutazione dei membri del comitato scientifico e di *referee* selezionati in base alla competenza sui temi trattati.
Gli autori restano a disposizione degli aventi diritto per le fonti iconografiche non individuate.

INDICE

TOMO II

EDITORIALE

CARMELO OCCHIPINTI

> Vide da lontano un busto grandissimo; che da principio immaginò dovere essere di pietra, e a somiglianza degli ermi colossali veduti da lui, molti anni prima, nell'isola di Pasqua. Ma fattosi più da vicino, trovò che era una forma smisurata di donna seduta in terra, col busto ritto, appoggiato il dosso e il gomito a una montagna; e non finta ma viva; di volto mezzo tra bello e terribile, di occhi e di capelli nerissimi; la quale guardavalo fissamente; e stata così un buono spazio senza parlare, all'ultimo gli disse: «Chi sei?»
>
> G. LEOPARDI, *Dialogo della natura e di un islandese*

Poco prima che si chiudesse l'anno 2013, nel sito internet di «Horti Hesperidum» veniva pubblicato il *call for papers* sul tema delle «Immagini vive».

Nonostante la giovane età della rivista – giravano, ancora, i fascicoli delle sole prime due annate –, sorprendentemente vasta fu, da subito, la risposta degli studiosi di più varia formazione: archeologi, medievisti, modernisti e contemporaneisti. In poche settimane, infatti, il nostro *call for papers* si trovò a essere rilanciato, attraverso i siti internet di diverse università e istituti di ricerca, in tutto il mondo. Risonanza di gran lunga inferiore, nonostante l'utilizzo degli stessi canali, riuscivano invece a ottenere le analoghe iniziative di lì a poco condotte da «Horti Hesperidum» su argomenti specialisticamente meglio definiti come quello della *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi* (1567) di Lodovico Guicciardini (a proposito dei rapporti artistici tra Italia e Paesi nordici nel XVI secolo), e del *Microcosmo della pittura* (1667) di

Francesco Scannelli (a proposito del collezionismo estense nel XVIII secolo).

Evidentemente era il tema in sé, quello appunto delle «Immagine vive», a destare una così inaspettata risonanza. Tanta risonanza si dovrebbe spiegare – mi sembra – in ragione di una nuova e sempre più diffusa esigenza, molto sentita ormai da parte degli studiosi di storia artistica (sollecitati, più o meno consapevolmente, dagli accadimenti del mondo contemporaneo): l'esigenza, cioè, di indagare certa qualità 'attiva' che le immagini avrebbero posseduto nel corso della storia, nelle epoche, nei luoghi e nei contesti sociali e religiosi più diversi prima che esse diventassero, per così dire, gli 'oggetti' – in un certo senso 'passivi' – della moderna disciplina storico-artistica, prima cioè che le stesse immagini si 'trasformassero' in 'reperti', diventando, così, non necessariamente qualcosa di 'morto' (rispetto a una precedente 'vita' perduta), bensì diventando, in ogni caso, qualcosa di 'diverso' da ciò che originariamente esse erano state. Già per il solo fatto di essere 'guardate' sotto una prospettiva disciplinare come quella della storia dell'arte, che è vincolata a proprie istanze di astrazione e di scientificità (in funzione, per esempio, delle classificazioni o delle periodizzazioni), le immagini non hanno fatto altro che 'trasformarsi': ma è vero che, per loro stessa natura, le immagini si trasformano sempre, per effetto della storia e degli uomini che le guardano, e dei luoghi che cambiano; tanto più, oggi, le immagini continuano a trasformarsi per effetto dei nuovi *media* i quali, sottraendole a qualsivoglia prospettiva disciplinare, ce le avvicinano nella loro più imprevedibile, multiforme, moderna 'vitalità'.

Il fatto è che, immersi come siamo nella civiltà nuova del digitale – la civiltà delle immagini virtuali, de-materializzate, de-contestualizzate che a ogni momento vengono spinte fin dentro alla nostra più personale esistenza quotidiana per ricombinarsi imprevedibilmente, dentro di noi, con i nostri stessi ricordi, così da sostanziare profondamente la nostra stessa identità – ci siamo alla fine ridotti a non poter più fare a meno di questo flusso magmatico che si muove sul *web* e da cui veniamo visceralmente nutriti, e senza il quale non riusciremmo proprio a decidere alcunché, né a pensare, né a scrivere, né a comunicare, né a fare

ricerca. In questo modo, però, le immagini che per via digitale, incessantemente, entrano per così dire dentro di noi sono immagini del tutto prive della loro materia, del loro stesso corpo, perché internet, avvicinandocele, ce le impoverisce, ce le trasforma, ce le riduce a immateriali parvenze. Ma così diventa addirittura possibile – ed è questo per molti di noi, come lo è per molti dei nostri studenti, un paradosso davvero mostruoso – diventa possibile, dicevo, studiare la storia dell'arte senza quasi che sentiamo più il bisogno di andare a vedere le opere d'arte, quelle vere, senza cioè riconsiderarle concretamente in rapporto, per esempio, all'esperienza nostra del 'paesaggio' di cui esse sono state e continuano a essere parte: non può che venirne fuori, ormai, una storia dell'arte fatta di opere ridotte alla parvenza immateriale la quale, distaccatasi dalle opere d'arte 'vere', non conserva di esse alcuna idea di fisicità, né possiede la benché minima capacità di coinvolgimento emotivo che derivava anticamente dalla 'presenza', dalla 'corporeità', dal rapporto col 'paesaggio' e col 'contesto', nonché dalle tradizioni e dai ricordi che, dentro quel 'paesaggio', dentro quel 'contesto', rivivevano attraverso le immagini, vivevano nelle immagini. La storia dell'arte ha finito per ridursi, insomma, a una storia di immagini 'morte', staccate cioè dai contesti culturali, religiosi, rituali da cui esse provenivano: in fondo, è proprio questo tipo di storia dell'arte, scientificamente distaccata dalla 'vita', a rispecchiare bene, nel panorama multimediale e globalizzato che stiamo vivendo, il nostro attuale impoverimento culturale.

In considerazione di quanto detto, questa miscellanea sulle «Immagini vive» è stata pensata anzitutto come raccolta di testimonianze sugli orientamenti odierni della disciplina storico-artistica la quale – oggi come non mai afflitta, per di più, dall'arido specialismo accademico che l'ha ridotta alla più mortificante inutilità sociale –, ambisce, vorrebbe o dovrebbe ambire, alla riconquista dei più vasti orizzonti della storia umana, nonché alla ricerca dei legami profondi che uniscono il passato al presente e, dunque, l'uomo alla società e le civiltà, seppure lontane nello spazio o nel tempo, l'una all'altra.

Ebbene questi due fascicoli della V annata (2015) di «Horti He-
speridum», ciascuno diviso nei due tomi che ora finalmente pre-
sentiamo, raccolgono i contributi di quanti, archeologi, medievi-
sti, modernisti e contemporaneisti, abbiano voluto rispondere al
nostro *call for papers* intervenendo su argomenti sì molto diversi,
però tutti collegati a un'idea medesima: quella di verificare, nel
passato come nel presente, una certa qualità 'attiva' che sia sto-
ricamente appartenuta, o appartenga, alle immagini.

Esattamente come lo enunciavamo nel sito internet di «Horti
Hesperidum», alla fine del 2013, era questo il contenuto del no-
stro *call for papers*:

> La rivista semestrale «Horti Hesperidum» intende dedicare il pri-
> mo fascicolo monografico del 2015 al tema delle "Immagini vive".
> Testimonianze letterarie di varie epoche, dall'antichità pagana
> all'età cristiana medievale e moderna, permettono di indagare il
> fenomeno antropologico dell'immagine percepita come presenza
> "viva", capace di muoversi, parlare, interagire con gli uomini.
> Saranno prese in particolare considerazione le seguenti prospettive
> di indagine:
>
> 1. Il rapporto tra il fedele e l'immagine devozionale
> 2. L'immagine elogiata come viva, vera, parlante, nell'*ekphrasis* let-
> teraria
> 3. L'iconoclastia, ovvero l'"uccisione" dell'immagine nelle rispetti-
> ve epoche

Ora, una siffatta formulazione – cui ha partecipato Ilaria Sforza,
antichista e grecista – presupponeva, nelle nostre intenzioni, le
proposte di metodo già da noi avanzate nell'*Editoriale* al primo
primo numero di «Horti Hesperidum» (2011), dove avevamo
cercato di insistere sulla necessità di guardare alle opere d'arte
secondo un'ottica diversa da quella più tradizionalmente disci-
plinare che, in sostanza, si era definita, pure nella molteplicità
degli indirizzi metodologici, tra Otto e Novecento. Allora, infat-
ti, ci chiedevamo:

Ma sono pienamente condivisibili, oggi, intenzioni di metodo come le
seguenti, che invece meritano la più rispettosa storicizzazione? Ri-

muovere ogni «ingombro leggendario», auspicava Longhi, che si frapponesse tra lo storico e le opere. Considerare queste ultime con il dovuto distacco scientifico. Guardarle «in rapporto con altre opere»: evitare cioè di accostarsi all'opera d'arte – come però sempre accadeva nelle epoche passate – «con reverenza, o con orrore, come magia, come tabù, come opera di Dio o dello stregone, non dell'uomo». Negare, in definitiva, «il mito degli artisti divini, e divinissimi, invece che semplicemente umani». Queste affermazioni, rilette oggi alla luce di nuove esigenze del nostro contemporaneo, finiscono per suonare come la negazione delle storie dell'arte in nome della storia dell'arte. Come la negazione degli uomini in nome dello storico dell'arte. Come la negazione dei modi di vedere in nome della *connoisseurship*. Come la negazione, in definitiva, della stessa 'storia' dell'arte. Infatti la storia ha davvero conosciuto miracoli e prodigi, maghi e stregoni, opere orribilmente belle, sovrumane, inspiegabili, e artisti terribili e divini. Lo storico di oggi ha il dovere di rispettare e comprendere ogni «ingombro leggendario», senza rimuoverlo; dovrebbe avere cioè il dovere di sorprendersi di fronte alle ragioni per cui, anticamente, a destar «meraviglia», «paura», «terrore» erano i monumenti artistici del più lontano passato come anche le opere migliori degli artisti di ogni presente. Quell'auspicato e antiletterario distacco scientifico ha finito in certi casi per rendere, a lungo andare, la disciplina della storia dell'arte, guardando soprattutto a come essa si è venuta trasformando nel panorama universitario degli ultimi decenni, una disciplina asfittica, non umanistica perché programmaticamente tecnica, di uno specialismo staccato dalla cultura, dalla società, dal costume, dalla politica, dalla religione».

In effetti, dalla cultura figurativa contemporanea provengono segnali ineludibili – gli odierni storici dell'arte non possono non tenerne conto – che ci inducono a muoverci in ben altra direzione rispetto alle indicazioni enunciate da Roberto Longhi nelle sue ormai lontane *Proposte per una critica d'arte* (1950) alle quali ci riferivamo nell'appena citato *Editoriale* di «Horti Hesperidum» del 2011. Pensiamo, per esempio, a quanto si verificava in seno alla 55ª Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Biennale di Venezia (2013), quando artisti e critici dovettero condividere il bisogno di ritrovare la fede – quella fede che, anticamente, era così sconfinata – nel 'potere' delle immagini, e di ritrovare, tentando di recuperarla dal nostro passato, «l'idea che l'immagine

sia un'entità viva, pulsante, dotata di poteri magici e capace di influenzare, trasformare, persino guarire l'individuo e l'intero universo»: d'altronde una tale idea non la si poteva affatto ritenere estranea alla tradizione culturale da cui noi stessi proveniamo nonostante che la modernità 'illuministica' abbia tentato di cancellarla, respingendola come vecchia, come appartenente a una «concezione datata, offuscata da superstizioni arcaiche»[1].

Così, persino sulle pagine del catalogo della stessa Biennale del '13 (come pure su quelle dell'11, dove era fatta oggetto di rimpianto addirittura la potenza mistica di cui in età medievale era capace la 'luce', contro il buio introdotto da una deprecata età dei 'lumi'), l'urgenza di un rinnovato sguardo sul passato e sulla storia era già di per sé un fatto sorprendente e audace: tanto più se, per contrasto, ripensiamo all'altrettanto audace rifiuto del passato che lungo il XX secolo fu provocatoriamente mosso, in nome della modernità, da parte delle avanguardie e delle neo-avanguardie.

Del resto, «la parola 'immagine' contiene nel suo DNA, nella sua etimologia, una prossimità profonda con il corpo e con la morte: in latino l'*imago* era la maschera di cera che i romani creavano come calco per preservare il volto dei defunti»[2]: ma visto che gli uomini del nostro tempo se ne sono dimenticati, serviva ricordare ai visitatori della Esposizione Internazionale che il misterio primigenio della scultura funeraria era, ed è, quello «di opporre alla morte, all'orizzontalità informe, la vericalità e la rigidità della pietra»[3].

Di fronte a questa nuova disponibilità dei 'contemporaneisti' nei confronti della 'storia', gli storici dovrebbero, da parte loro, tornare a cercare nel contemporaneo le motivazioni della loro stessa ricerca. Sottratte alle rispettive dimensioni rituali, magiche, funerarie, devozionali e religiose – quelle dimensioni che la civiltà moderna, multimediale e globalizzata ha tentato di annul-

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[1] *La Biennale di Venezia. 55ª Esposizione d'arte. Il palazzo enciclopedico,* a cura di M. Gioni, Venezia, Marsilio, 2013, p. 25.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 25.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 26.

lare definitivamente – le immagini sono diventate vuoti simulacri, come paiono esserlo quando le si vedono esposte, scientificamente classificate, dietro le vetrine o dentro le sale dei musei al cui interno esse hanno finito per arricchirsi di significati nuovi, certo, ma diversi da quelli che molte di esse possedevano al tempo in cui – citiamo sempre dal catalogo dell'esposizione del '13 – «magia, miti, tradizioni e credenze religiose contavano quanto l'osservazione diretta della realtà»4.

4 *Ibidem*, p 28.

THE INFLUENCE OF ANCIENT *EKPHRASEIS* ON THE PAINTERS OF THE RENAISSANCE: ROSSO FIORENTINO'S *THE SHIPWRECK OF AJAX MINOR* IN THE FRANCIS I GALLERY AT THE PALACE OF FONTAINEBLEAU*

ANASTASIA PAINESI

Ancient Ekphraseis: From Homer to Philostratos

In ancient Greek literature the term *ekphrasis* defined a group of educative texts aiming at the rhetorical refinement of young students – *Progymnasmata* –[1], before assuming a more specific sense: the literary description and interpretation of a work of art. Homer's description of Achilles' armour[2] is considered as the earliest example of this literary genre[3].
Beyond a mere verbal description of a pictorial composition, *Ekphraseis* constitute also a first attempt at demonstrating the

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* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the *Premières rencontres de la Galerie Colbert (INHA): Autour du "Radeau de la Méduse" de Géricault-Figures du désastre*, Paris Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, March 12th 2011.

[1] WEBB 2009, pp. 14, 17-19, esp. pp. 39-59.

[2] HOM., *Il.*, XVIII.468-617; ALPERS 1960, p. 196; LAND 1986, p. 212. For a thorough analysis on Homer's description of Achilles' shield, cf. BECKER 1990.

[3] GINZBURG 1988, p. 9; ROSAND 1990, p. 61; SHAFFER 1998, pp. 304, 305-306; BARTSCH, ELSNER 2007, p. i ; ELSNER 2007, p. 20; GOLDHILL 2007, pp. 2, 3. *Contra* CARRIER 1987, pp. 20-31, who debates on the contrasts between *Ekphrasis* and Interpretation.

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contiguity between myth – Achilles' military prowess – and real life – the preparation of a warrior for battle. Furthermore, these texts recurrently served as a point of reference for ancient authors who often juxtaposed literary accounts of specific past historical events with works of art representing some of them. Plutarch's[4] comparison between Euphranor's representation of the Battle of Mantineia at the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios at Athens and Thucydides' narrative of the events and battles of the Peloponnesian War constitutes a characteristic example of this practice[5]. From the second century A.D. on, the description of ancient works of art became very popular among scholars who considered it an appropriate means for the education and amusement of their young students.

These *Ekphraseis* among which figure Lucian's *The Hall*[6], Achilles Tatios' *Leucippe and Clitophon*[7], Heliodoros' *Aithiopica*[8], Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*[9] and Philostratos' *Images* – circa second-third centuries A.D. – described works of art mostly inspired by mythical themes, such as Perseus and Andromeda, the Gigantomachy and the Amazonomachy. During the presentation of the work, the author explained the represented motif introducing elements that often diverged from the original mythical version. He drew his readers' attention to the reactions of the protagonists – their gestures and facial expressions, as well as their postures – and analysed crucial stylistic elements, such as colour and design, aiming at rousing the public's curiosity and emotion. By fully exploring the paintings' diverse pictorial elements, the author lead the readers progressively to the purported sym-

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[4] PLUT., *Glor. Ath.*, IV.497-501 (346B-347A); GINZBURG 1988, p. 10. For further analysis on Euphranor's painting depicting the Battle of Mantineia, cf. PAINESI 2012, esp. pp. 173-179.

[5] All titles and references of ancient Greek texts are taken from the Loeb Classical Library.

[6] On Lucian's *ekphrastic* works, cf. MAFFEI 1994.

[7] For an analysis of the *ekphraseis* included in Achilles Tatios' *Leucippe and Clitophon*, cf. REEVES 2007.

[8] For a thorough study of Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*, cf. MORGAN 1982.

[9] On the works of art described in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, cf. CARDERI 1998.

bolic meanings some of these compositions were invested with, pertaining to the ideas and values each author favoured[10].

Among the *Ekphraseis* mentioned earlier, Philostratos the Elder's *Images* were by far the most popular educative text. The descriptions of the paintings inspired by ancient myths, – Perseus and Andromeda, the death of Ajax Minor, the punishment of Capaneus, Pentheus' atrocious end and the imprisonment of the Giants after their defeat by the Olympians[11] – confirm the author's profound knowledge of mythology, art and philosophy, which he intends to instil in his audience. Through vivid and detailed descriptions of the paintings he refers to and well-prepared oratorical discourses presenting the emotions and values generated by the representation, Philostratos succeeds to fully immerse his audience in the picture. He accomplishes, thus, to create the impression that the public witnesses the actual events depicted as they occur and induces them to share the feelings and reactions of the protagonists[12]. The description of these pictorial works, whose authors remain for the most part anonymous, emphasises on the style of the representation and on specific iconographic details that help Philostratos to transmit his intended messages. However, the existence of the paintings described in the *Images* has often been contested, generating much debate among scholars since the end of the nineteenth century[13]. Some specialists consider that the works of art

[10] ROSAND 1972, pp. 534, 538, 542-543, 544; ROSAND 1990, pp. 97-99; SHAFFER 1998, pp. 304, 306, 307, 311.

[11] PHILOSTR., *Im.*, I.29 (Perseus and Andromeda), II.13 (Death of Ajax Minor), II.30 (Punishment of Capaneus), I.14, 18 (Pentheus' *sparagmos*), II.17 (Imprisonment of the Giants).

[12] LEHMANN-HARTLEBEN 1941, p. 16; ALPERS 1960, p. 198; LAND 1986, pp. 212-213; ROSAND 1990, pp. 72, 89; SMALL 1997, p. 74; SHAFFER 1998, pp. 303, 304, 307, 308, 310, 315; WEBB 2006, pp. 113-114; ELSNER 2007, pp. 29, 33; WEBB 2009, pp. 19, 20, 194; PAINESI 2011, p. 38. Cf. also, CONAN 1987, pp. 162-171.

[13] ROSAND 1990, p. 72; SHAFFER 1998, p. 316-n. 4; ROUVERET 2006, pp. 68-69. Cf. also, LESKY 1940, pp. 38-53, who compares Philostratos' *Images* and Homer's description of Achilles' Shield and concludes that Philostratos evokes real paintings adding his own commentaries, while the shield of Achilles derived purely from Homer's imagination (p. 52).

existed but were not seen by the author in a villa in Naples as he claims[14]. Other scholars, based on some inconsistencies in the text, such as the seemingly incoherent succession of the paintings, have attributed the pictures entirely to Philostratos' imagination[15].

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, the diffusion of the *ekphrastic* texts diminished considerably without however disappearing completely. At the end of the fourteenth century, Byzantine scholars, such as Manuel Chrysoloras and his pupils, contributed significantly to the revival of interest in these works in the West[16]. The rediscovery of *Ekphraseis*, reintroduced to the European erudite public through Latin, and later Italian and French, translations, such as Guarino's translation of Lucian's *Slander*[17], rekindled the interest of many artists in iconographic themes that had long being forgotten, such as Ajax Minor's punishment and death. Additionally, Leon Battista Alberti in his work *De Pictura* written in 1435 assumed the structure of ancient rhetorical texts in order to analyse the classical approach to the study of painting evoking various examples of famous ancient works, such as *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* by Timanthes of Cyprus, *The Calumny* by Apelles, *The Death of Meleagros* and *The Three Graces*, rendering thus accessible to the use of Renaissance artists an extensive repertoire of ancient motifs whose originals had been long lost[18].

The Renaissance texts on art criticism inspired by ancient *Ekphraseis*, such as Alberti's *De Pictura* and Lodovico Dolce's *L'Aretino o Dialogo della pittura* published in 1557, as well as Franciscus Junius' later work *De pictura veterum* – 1637 – , focus on the

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14 LEHMANN-HARTLEBEN 1941, pp. 16-21, 40-41. Cf. also, BRYSON 1994, pp. 255-283, who provides a thorough commentary of the LEHMANN-HARTLEBEN 1941 analysis.

15 WEBB 2006, pp. 116, 117, 132-133; BARTSCH, ELSNER 2007, p. iv.

16 BAXANDALL 1965, pp. 190-191, 197-199; LAND 1986, pp. 212-213.

17 LUCIAN, *Cal.*, I.363-367 (2-7); ROSAND 1990, p. 63.

18 ALPERS 1960, pp. 198-199; ROSAND 1972, pp. 528-529; LAND 1986, pp. 208-209; ROSAND 1990, pp. 62-64, 66, 68-70, 71. For further analysis on Alberti's work and especially on his influence from Quintilian and Cicero, cf. SPENCER 1957, pp. 26-44.

dialogue and at the same time *paragone* between word and image and point out the importance of a vivid and realistic representation that successfully conveys to the public the feelings of the protagonists to the point that the spectators have sometimes the illusory impression that the picture is real[19]. Finally, a special reference must be reserved for Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* – 1550 – a work focusing on the lives and works of painters, sculptors and architects, but essentially painters. Vasari's text is not, *stricto sensu,* an *Ekphrasis*. It rather combines elements from various ancient texts, such as Plutarch's *Lives* for the artists' biographies, Philostratos' *Images* for the descriptions of the works of art and Vitruvius' *De architectura* as a source for technical terms, which he uses in order to better approach his subject[20]. The author continues the *ekphrastic* tradition by insisting on realistic narratives reflecting the *pathos* of the protagonists, which he aims to transmit to his readers, as ancient authors did before him. However, contrary to ancient *Ekphraseis*, Vasari is more interested in the technical aspect concerning the creation of a painting completely disregarding references to non-pictorial elements, such as smells and sounds[21], which are quite common in Philostratos' text. The author of the *Lives* is therefore not interested solely in educating his readers, but principally in tracing a path towards artistic perfection. In order to achieve his goal, he is using means available to him through ancient texts, as well as through the artistic breakthroughs of his contemporaries – artists, critics, philosophers and patrons – becoming an essential link connecting ancient and modern artistic traditions[22].

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[19] LAND 1986, pp. 209-210, 217.

[20] ALPERS 1960, pp. 191-192.

[21] ROUVERET 2006, p. 74; WEBB 2006, pp. 120-121, 127; WEBB 2009, p. 187. Cf. also, MANIERI 1999.

[22] ALPERS 1960, pp. 193-194, 196-199, 200-201, 203, 206; BAXANDALL 1965, p. 192.

Ancient Ekphraseis and Renaissance Iconography: Rosso Fiorentino's depiction of Ajax Minor's shipwreck

One of the most characteristic examples indicating the influence of ancient *Ekphraseis* on the Renaissance iconography is the representation of Ajax Minor's death at the palace of Fontainebleau in France. The painting called *Ajax Minor's Shipwreck* or *The vengeance of Nauplios* was created by Rosso Fiorentino in 1536 and is part of a group of paintings decorating the Francis I Gallery[23]. The scene that Rosso chose to depict is related to the Homeric hero's punishment for the rape of Cassandra, Priam's daughter.

During the sack of Troy, Ajax, the king of the Locrians, ignored the divine laws protecting suppliants, dragged violently the Trojan princess from Athena's *xoanon*, where she had sought protection, and raped her. Acknowledging the gravity of Ajax's *hybris*, the Achaeans decided to stone him to death. However, the sentence was never carried out because the hero sought refuge to the statue of Athena, the one that he had previously disrespected. The escape of the Locrian king from punishment did not find favour with the goddess, who, upon the hero's voyage to Greece, provoked a dreadful storm that led to his shipwreck off the coast of the island of Euboea. Nevertheless, Ajax survived and found refuge on a large stone cursing the Olympians for his misfortunes. The second transgression enraged Poseidon, who, accentuating the storm's force caused the hero to drown. His body was found later by Thetis, Achilles' mother, who buried it in Myconos[24].

Ancient authors do not refer often to the life and exploits of Ajax Minor during the Trojan War. They focus mainly on the

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[23] BAROCCHI 1950, pp. 100-101, 110, 140-141, Pl. 117; PANOFSKY 1958A, pp. 119, 144-147, 152-fig. 38; PANOFSKY 1958B, pp. 6, 44-48, fig. 38; BÉGUIN, PRESSOUYRE 1972, pp. 129-130 (North wall); BÉGUIN, PRESSOUYRE, ZERNER 1972, pp. 97, 98, 100, 101; HERRIG 1992, pp. 112, 114.

[24] APOLLOD., *Bibl.*, Ep.VI.5-6; DAVREUX 1942, pp. 12-15; RÖSLER 1988, pp. 201-203; WATHELET 1989, pp. 127, 128, 145, 152; CRUCIANI, FIORINI 1998, pp. 39, 76; MAZZOLDI 2001, pp. 26, 31, 60; MOREAU 2006, p. 196.

episode of Cassandra's rape arguing whether he was entirely to blame for his transgression. Arctinos in his poem *Ilioupersis* – circa end of seventh-beginning of sixth century B.C. – summarised in Proclos' *Chrestomatheia*[25] – fifth century A.D. – considers the hero entirely responsible for the *hybris* towards the gods. Euripides[26] in *The Trojan Women* – fifth century B.C. – and later Virgil[27] in *The Aeneid* – first century B.C. – claimed that the Locrian king dragged Cassandra from Athena's statue but did not rape her. Finally, in the third or fourth century A.D., Quintus of Smyrna[28] stated that the transgression was not entirely the hero's fault because he was operating under a spell cast on him by Aphrodite who provoked in him a fervent passion for Priam's daughter.

Ajax's death is not often mentioned by ancient texts. Homer[29] describes briefly in *The Odyssey* the episode of the storm and the shipwreck, as well as the hero's death by a stroke of Poseidon's trident. Euripides[30] in *The Trojan Women* also refers to the shipwreck naming Poseidon and Zeus as the instigators of the storm, while he claims that it was Athena who killed the hero using Zeus' thunderbolt. In the Roman era, Virgil and Hyginus concurred with Euripides' version concerning Ajax's death[31].

The Locrian king's myth does not seem to have considerably inspired ancient authors and artists, who preferred to depict the exploits of the homonymous Homeric warrior, son of Telamon and king of Salamis. In ancient iconography, the Locrian king's rare apparitions focus mainly on Cassandra's rape and often constitute part of general depictions of the fall of Troy represented until Late Antiquity on Greek and Italiote vases, archi-

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[25] PROCL., *Chrest.*, 108.3-4; APOLLOD., *Bibl.*, Ep.V.22, 25; DAVREUX 1942, pp. 10, 18; RÖSLER 1988, p. 201-n. 1; NEBLUNG 1997, pp. 203-204; MAZZOLDI 2001, p. 32.

[26] EUR., *Troad.*, 69-71; DAVREUX 1942, p. 19; NEBLUNG 1997, pp. 39-40; MAZZOLDI 2001, pp. 36-37.

[27] VERG., *Aen.*, II.402-406; NEBLUNG 1997, pp. 141-143.

[28] QUINT. SMYRN., XIII.421-429, XIV.435-442; DAVREUX 1942, pp. 79-80; NEBLUNG 1997, pp. 221, 235.

[29] HOM., *Od.*, IV.499-511.

[30] EUR., *Troad.*, 73-97; NEBLUNG 1997, p. 40.

[31] VERG., *Aen.*, I.39-45; HYG., *Fab.*, 116.1-2.

tectural relief decorations – metopes and friezes – , Etruscan tombs and Roman sarcophagi[32].

Ajax's death in particular, has been represented only twice by Greek and Roman artists in works that have not survived. Pliny the Elder[33] mentions a painting that he saw in Pergamon attributed to Apollodoros of Attica – towards the end of the fifth century B.C. – depicting the moment when the thunder struck and killed the king. Finally, in the third century A.D., Philostratos the Elder[34] described a painting inspired by Ajax's shipwreck and death caused by a stroke of Poseidon's trident. The work was called *Gyrai* after the name of the small islands where Ajax's ship sunk. However, the existence of this painting, as well as of all the works mentioned in Philostratos' text, has often been contested while the pictures are considered by many specialists[35] as the author's invention.

In Late Antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages, Ajax's figure had lapsed into oblivion. In the middle of the twelfth century, Benoît de Sainte-Maure[36] made a brief reference to the hero's *hybris* and death in his work *Le Roman de Troie* dedicated to Eleanor of Aquitaine. This text, belonging to the literary genre called *roman historique*, presented in vernacular language the history of Troy from its creation to its destruction by the Achaeans praising the bravery of the Trojan hero Francus from whom the Francs originated, according to Medieval legends[37].

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[32] For further information on the ancient representations of Cassandra's rape, cf. PLIN., *Nat. Hist.*, XXXV.144 (Theoros' painting); PAUSANIAS, I.15.2, X.26.3 (Polygnotos' painting *Iliupersis* in Athens and in Delphi); DAVREUX 1942, pp. 151-n. 82B, 176-n. 121, 209-210-nos. 187-188, Pls. XXXIX-fig. 70, LVI-fig. 121; NEBLUNG 1997, pp. 160, 189-190; CRUCIANI, FIORINI 1998, pp. 29, 31, 37-39, 58-60, 62, 65, 119-120; MAZZOLDI 2001, pp. 39, 324-n. 64, Pl. V; PAINESI 2011, pp. 105-106.

[33] PLIN., *Nat. Hist.*, XXXV.60.

[34] PHILOSTR., *Im.*, II.13; LEHMANN-HARTLEBEN 1941, pp. 25, 26-Fig. 2, 29.

[35] GINZBURG 1988, p. 9; ROSAND 1990, p. 72.

[36] BENOIT DE SAINTE-MAURE, *Le Roman de Troie*, 27209-27214; GAUTHIER 1992, pp. 45-46, 47, especially n. 46; PAINESI 2011, pp. 30-32.

[37] FARAL 1913, pp. 415-417; SEZNEC 1980, pp. 23-25, 28, 29, 34, 39; LÓPEZ-TORRIJOS 1985, pp. 189, 192, 211; GAUTHIER 1992, pp. 40, 41; BAUMGARTNER, HARF-LANCNER 1997, pp. 12-16, 17, 19; CROIZY-NAQUET 1997, pp. 73, 76, 81, 82,

Among the multitude of heroes' and gods' exploits that the author evokes, his reference of Ajax's toils constitutes a unique and rare apparition of the king of the Locrians in the literature and art of this period. As most of his colleagues, Benoît de Sainte-Maure would be able to consult ancient sources, through the extensive collection of ancient texts in the libraries of eminent monasteries – when access to them was granted – , but principally through certain oriental manuscripts containing Greek and Latin texts that were diffused to the West through Arab translations[38].

However, a new series of translations of classical texts in Latin published in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, mentioned earlier, contributed significantly to the revival of the artists' interest in ancient literature and art[39]. The translated texts provided access to a wide iconographic repertoire principally inspired by ancient myths whose initial meaning had been almost completely forgotten thus giving the artists the possibility to invest the rediscovered ancient themes with contemporary messages.

Rosso Fiorentino's depiction of Ajax Minor's punishment in Fontainebleau (Fig. 1) seems fully adapted to this new perception of ancient traditions clearly demonstrating the artist's profound knowledge of Greek and Latin texts[40]. The representation of the shipwreck reflects the confusion and despair of the ship's crew, mentioned in all the ancient sources referring to this event. Rosso, inspired by Homer's, as well as Philostratos' descriptions of the hero's end, did not choose to represent Ajax's battle with the waves. He preferred to depict in the centre of the painting some of the Locrian king's companions who, having found refuge on the remains of their ship, are trying to stay afloat. In their effort to survive the onslaught of the waves,

90-n. 4, 94-n. 41; NEBLUNG 1997, pp. 196, 199; BAUMGARTNER, VIELLIARD 1998, pp. 5, 6, 7-8, 9, 10, 18, 19, 20; LE GOFF 1999, pp. 92-94, 96-97.

[38] FARAL 1913, pp. 169-187, 398; SEZNEC 1980, pp. 18-21, 141, 149; HOPE 1994, pp. 55, 56; VERNANT 2001, pp. 18-19, 27, 34.

[39] On «the evocative power and vividness of Philostratos' language», that inspired the work of Renaissance artists, cf. WEBB 2006, p. 123.

[40] PANOFSKY 1958A, pp. 116-117; TERVARENT n.d., p. 31.

the seamen also have to fight against their companions who, drifting away in the sea, are trying to climb on the already over-crowded remains of the vessel. In the middle of this cruel battle for survival, Ajax is barely visible on the far left of the work. Rosso depicted his soulless body fallen on one of the *Gyrai* rocks after the gods inflicted on him the thunder's fatal blow.

The representation of the seamen's fear and despair revealed by their expressions and gestures during their agonising battle against the waves follows the *ekphrastic* texts' tendency to rouse strong emotions in the readers enticing them to feel the agony and the *pathos* of the protagonists as if they were witnessing the actual shipwreck. From a stylistic point of view, the painting bears certain similarities with contemporary infernal representations depicting the torments of the damned, such as Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine chapel. Furthermore, the extraordinary resemblance between the central figure of Rosso's painting – a man brandishing an oar – with the figure of Charon in Michelangelo's work (Fig. 2) lead Panofsky and Jukovsky[41] to consider that the painter was indeed inspired by the idea of divine judgement choosing to represent the Greeks' judgement and consecutive punishment for the violation of the temples of the gods during the sack of Troy.

This theory could be supported by the fact that Rosso included in his work an almost imperceptible representation of a second myth on judgement and punishment, the vengeance of Nauplios, depicted in the background of the painting. According to Hyginus[42], who was the artist's main source, Nauplios was the king of Euboea and father of Palamedes, one of the Greek warriors in Troy. After the death of his son, he sought vengeance against Palamedes' former companions who had slandered and stoned him to death. In order to avenge his son's unjust death,

[41] PANOFSKY 1958A, pp. 144-145; PANOFSKY 1958B, p. 45; JOUKOVSKY 1992, pp. 73-74, 125, 126, 165.

[42] HYG., *Fab.*, 116.2-3, 249; APOLLOD., *Bibl.*, Ep.6.7-11; PANOFSKY 1958B, pp. 44-45; BÉGUIN, PRESSOUYRE 1972, p. 129; JOUKOVSKY 1992, pp. 74, 113; CLIMENT-DELTEIL 2007, p. 83; TERVARENT n.d., pp. 37-38, fig. 27. For a brief reference to Nauplios' vengeance, cf. also, EUR., *Hel.*, 766-767, 1126-1131.

Nauplios set large fires on top of the island's mountains that were supposed to help the Greek ships to avoid the reefs. However, the king placed the fires on top of the very point where the reefs were situated provoking the destruction of the Achaean ships. In the background of the painting, Rosso represented one of the fires still burning and next to it Nauplios standing between the prow of a ship and a large rock ready to throw himself to the sea, concurring, thus, with Apollodoros and Seneca who state that after his revenge was complete the king met the same death he had inflicted on the Achaeans[43].

The subtle references of the painter to ancient myths rarely and briefly included in ancient texts allude not only to Rosso's extensive erudition, but also to an intentional choice on behalf of the painter and most probably his royal patron. Panofsky[44] considers that the painting constitutes an allegory of an adverse event in the life of Francis I, just as the depiction of the *Death of Adonis* in the same Gallery purportedly alluded to the death of his son and heir to the throne[45]. In this context, Panofsky interpreted the *Death of Ajax* as an allegory of the demise of Ugo de Moncada, a ferocious Spanish warrior, whose role in the sack of Rome in 1527 was as sinister and as destructive as Ajax's during the fall of Troy. The Spanish warrior was killed one year after the fall of Rome, in 1528, at sea, when Odet de Lautrec – commander of the army fighting against Charles V – and Philippino Doria – member of the royal family of Genoa – won the naval battle of Amalfi and destroyed the Spanish fleet[46].

The *Vengeance of Nauplios* constitutes also, according to Panofsky[47], a political allegory alluding to the treason committed by

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[43] APOLLOD., *Bibl.*, II.1.3; SEN., *Med.*, 658-659. For further information on the genealogy and the destiny of Nauplios in the Underworld, cf. ROBERTSON 1980.

[44] PANOFSKY 1958A, pp. 145-147; PANOFSKY 1958B, p. 47; BÉGUIN, PRESSOUYRE 1972, p. 131.

[45] BAROCCHI 1950, pp. 146-148, Pl. 138; PANOFSKY 1958A, p. 145; PANOFSKY 1958B, pp. 38-44, 45-46; HERRIG 1992, p. 114; JOUKOVSKY 1992, pp. 58-60, 68, 69-70; CLIMENT-DELTEIL 2007, pp. 83, 85.

[46] PANOFSKY 1958A, pp. 145-146; PANOFSKY 1958B, p. 47.

[47] PANOFSKY 1958B, pp. 46-47; CLIMENT-DELTEIL 2007, p. 83.

Charles III, Duke of Bourbon, once loyal to Francis I. The Duke offered his allegiance to Charles V after the French king's mother Louise of Savoy tried to claim as her own the estates left to Charles III by his wife. The plan orchestrated against the Duke – comparable to the calumny of Palamedes by his fellow warriors – lead to his fall from the king's graces and his subsequent alliance to Charles V, who appointed him commander of his army in Italy. The Duke was responsible for the defeat of the French army in Pavia in 1525 where Francis I was captured by the enemy. Charles III, Duke of Bourbon, was killed in 1527 during the sack of Rome, leading Panofsky to compare his demise to Nauplios' death after the fulfilment of his vengeance.

The theories concerning the symbolic significance of Rosso's painting advanced principally by Dora and Erwin Panofsky seem to concur with the ancient texts that inspired the artist, as well as the general historical context of the painter's era. However, the extensive restorations and additions made to the painting since its creation and the complete absence of testimonies dating to the sixteenth century explaining the Gallery's iconographic programme and its potential symbolic significance[48] do not allow the theories of the two specialists to «claim either completeness or finality»[49].

Rosso Fiorentino was not the only painter inspired by ancient texts – *Ekphraseis* in particular – for the depiction of Ajax's punishment, as well as other mythological themes. Giulio Romano was also influenced by ancient sources for the decoration of the Sala di Troia of the palazzo Ducale in Mantua. The *Death of Ajax*[50] – 1538-1539 – figuring among the compositions decorating the hall is represented according to the Homeric description of the shipwreck and Virgil's testimony that Athena killed the transgressor using her father's thunderbolt[51]. The artist, a

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[48] Panofsky 1958a, pp. 115-116; Climent-Delteil 2007, p. 75.

[49] Panofsky 1958a, p. 115; Panofsky 1958b, p. 8.

[50] Hartt 1958, pp. 181, 182, Pl. 397; Carpeggiani, Tellini-Perina 1987, p. 116; Talvacchia 1988, pp. 235-237, 240-242; Salvy 1994, p. 161; Furlotti, Rebecchini 2008, p. 182.

[51] Salvy 1994, p. 169; Burns 1998, p. 139.

great connoisseur of ancient literary sources, seems to have combined the classical iconographic themes with his noble patron's political agenda. Therefore, mythical motifs, such as the death of Ajax Minor, the judgement of Paris, the abduction of Helen, Hecuba's dream and Laocoon's punishment[52], were invested with the principles of the Gonzaga family, such as power, bravery, territorial expansion, military triumphs and the continuity of their dynasty, and displayed in the palace's audience hall in plain view for all the official emissaries to see[53].

Conclusions

It appears that during the Renaissance ancient *Ekphraseis* played a significant role in the renewal of the artists' repertoire marking a turn towards ancient myths and traditions that had been set aside during the Middle Ages. Eminent artists, such as Titian, Giulio Romano, Raphael and Rosso Fiorentino, often kept copies of these works in their extensive libraries and used them as guides to their representations[54]. The translations of ancient *Ekphraseis*, original works, such as Alberti's *De Pictura*, studying the principles and canons of ancient art, as well as the presence or the excavation of ancient objects in most of the Italian regions, established a valuable link between the ancient world and Renaissance art[55]. Nevertheless, the pictorial compositions of Renaissance artists did not constitute mere illustrations of the texts' narrations, or simple imitations of the works described. These sources provided artists with a thorough analysis of ancient *mimesis*, a variety of literary and iconographic elements and

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[52] TALVACCHIA 1988, pp. 236-237, 240-242.

[53] HARTT 1958, p. 181; CARPEGGIANI, TELLINI-PERINA 1987, pp. 114, 116; TALVACCHIA 1988, pp. 241-242; SALVY 1994, pp. 161, 164, 168; FURLOTTI, REBECCHINI 2008, pp. 182, 185.

[54] ROSAND 1972, p. 530; ROSAND 1990, pp. 89-94.

[55] JAMOT 1938, pp. 234, 239-240, 241, 246, 247; GOMBRICH 1966, pp. 123, 124, 126-128; PANOFSKY 1967, pp. 25, 26, 126; CHASTEL 1978, II, pp. 60, 348, 350, 353; HOPE 1994, p. 55; PHILIPPOT 1994, pp. 14, 16, 144, 146-148; PREST 2010, pp. 18, 20-21; RESSOUNI-DEMIGNEUX 2010, pp. 24, 26.

a wide repertoire of classical motifs that they adapted to their own perception of artistic expression[56] – such as Botticelli's version of the *Calumny of Apelles*.

Furthermore, the lapse of many centuries between the creation of the *Ekphraseis* and their reintroduction into the West had resulted to the loss of the original meaning and possible symbolism for most of the ancient – mythical for the most part – motifs. This event enabled artists to introduce contemporary allegories into their works alluding principally to the political ideas and affiliations of their noble patrons[57]. Thus, an initially purely educational group of texts – *Ekphraseis* – became the means for the creation of contemporary allegories adaptable to all sorts of political and social contexts and aiming principally at the demonstration of the patron's power and military prowess[58].

Rosso Fiorentino, fully immersed into the artistic tendencies of his era, created a painting for Francis I invested with three successive levels of significance[59]. The first was addressed to the public's visual perception featuring a variety of artistic elements, such as colour and design, whose combination resulted in the iconographic theme inspired by the chosen ancient myths – the death of Ajax and the vengeance of Nauplios. The second level concerned the style of the motif's depiction depending on the literary version of the myths that most influenced the artist – Homer, Philostratos, Apollodoros and Hyginus.

The third level – the most difficult to perceive – refers to the symbolic meaning of the painting and depends greatly on the perception and the interpretation of the image by the spectators themselves through the filter of contemporary historical events. It is possible that in Fiorentino's painting, this goal was accomplished by the association of the work to the death of Ugo de Moncada and the treason of the Duke of Bourbon. However,

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[56] ROSAND 1972, pp. 529, 532-534.

[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 532-533, 534.

[58] PANOFSKY 1958A, pp. 145, 146-147; SEZNEC 1980, pp. 141, 178, 181; LÓPEZ-TORRIJOS 1985, pp. 321-322; HOPE 1994, p. 56; WYSS 1996, pp. 133-141, 153, n. 82.

[59] FRANCASTEL 1977, pp. 10, 12, 40; SEZNEC 1980, p. 11; GINZBURG 1989, p. 132; DES BOUVRIE 2002, pp. 27-29, 60.

this purported message was not accessible to all the spectators. Only those knowledgeable in both the ancient texts and the French king's politics would be able to establish the hidden link between ancient myths and contemporary events and fully grasp the complete meaning behind the depiction of two otherwise insignificant ancient motifs.

It is rather safe to say that by re-establishing the link with Antiquity through the study of Greek and Roman texts and the creation of works inspired by ancient mythology, Rosso Fiorentino and his colleagues aimed to explore the literature and the art, as well as the values and principles, of a culture which fascinated them and from which they considered themselves to be descended[60]. Renaissance artists studied the works of Greek and Roman authors, including ancient *Ekphraseis*, trying to reproduce in their pictorial compositions the harmony, the realism and the depiction of profound emotions – pain, agony, suffering and despair – that characterised ancient art[61]. Nevertheless, despite their quite successful efforts that rendered ancient iconography very popular in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their works were often perceived through a filter of modernity and were appreciated only for the significance they had acquired in Western societies expressing their own ideas and principles[62].

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[60] PANOFSKY 1976, pp. 82, 83, 113; SEZNEC 1980, pp. 23-25, 28, 29; SCHNAPP 1993, pp. 113, 116, 124-125, 128, 146, 148; BAUMGARTNER, HARF-LANCNER 1997, pp. 12-15, 19; WÖLFFLIN 1997, pp. 16, 23, 24, 251, 271, 274-275, 281; BAUMGARTNER, VIELLIARD 1998, pp. 6, 9, 10.

[61] WÖLFFLIN 1997, pp. 21-22, 23, 24, 251, 254; DÉMORIS 2004, pp. 34, 36-38, 39; WINCKELMANN 2005, pp. 15, 17-18, 21-22, 26-27, 39-41, 45.

[62] PANOFSKY 1967, pp. 22-n. 13, 33; FRANCASTEL 1977, pp. 45, 52, 143, 316-n. 31; LEE 1991, pp. 21-22, 35-37; JOYCE 1992, p. 419; WÖLFFLIN 1997, pp. 306, 307, 309-312; DES BOUVRIE 2002, pp. 59-60; PAINESI 2011, pp. 525-531.

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Images

Fig. 1, Rosso Fiorentino, Ajax Minor's *Shipwreck* or *The vengeance of Nauplios.* Francis I Gallery, Palace of Fontainebleau, France. Image Credit: [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 2, Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Last Judgement, Charon.* Sistine chapel, Vatican City. Image Credit: [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

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