

RICCARDO GANDOLFI, *LE VITE DEGLI ARTISTI DI GASPARE CELIO. 'COMPENDIO DELLE VITE DI VASARI CON ALCUNE ALTRE AGGIUNTE'*, LEO S. OLSCHKI, FIRENZE 2021 (BIBLIOTECA DELL'ARCHIVUM ROMANICUM, SERIE I: STORIA, LETTERATURA, PALEOGRAFIA, 504), 390 PP., ISBN: 9788822267023.

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From the beginning of the foreword by Alessandro Zuccari, it is remarked the fortunate circumstance that led Riccardo Gandolfi to discover, as part of his doctoral research, the autograph manuscript *Le Vite degli Artisti* by Gaspare Celio (1571–1640) preserved in the library of the Stonyhurst College in Manchester. The work had been disappeared since the Seicento and was scarcely mentioned in a couple of sources, mainly in Giano Nicio Eritreo's *Pinacotheca* (1643). Degree in Art History and graduated in Archival, Paleography and Diplomatics, Riccardo Gandolfi put his experience as official staff at the Archivio di Stato di Roma to work on a thorough archival research, with this critical edition as a result. Regarding the structure of the original manuscript, Celio's text is preceded by a presentation to Giovan Vittorio de Rossi, in which the author declared his intention to resume and extend a previous text initiated in 1614, thereby transforming it into the *Vite*. The following is an introduction to the reader and some final dedications to Paolo Giordani, Sebastiano Vannini and Francesco Maria Torrigio. The central focus of the manuscript consists of a collection of celebrated artists' biographies by means of which Celio tried to contradict the underlying intentionality of the selection included by Giorgio Vasari in his highly influential *Le Vite de' più Eccellenti Pittori, Scultori e Architettori*. From this standpoint, Alessandro Zuccari emphasises the importance of Gandolfi's discovery so as to gain access to a whole picture of the theoretical context in Seicento art.

Indeed, the edition of the unpublished Celio's *Vite* due to Riccardo Gandolfi provides relevant information about anecdotes and details of the life and works of many artists, but more importantly, the book entails an innovative approach to crucial aspects in the realm of historiography. In this line, Zuccari states that the manuscript is not merely a compendium of Vasari's *Vite* intended to make it much

easier and manageable to the readers, albeit this objective was apparently Celio's declared intention. Actually, despite being constituted by comments and additions to Giorgio Vasari's book, the text written by Gaspare Celio certainly has conceptual entity in its own right. Celio engaged with a critical reading of Vasari and did not avoid entering into an argument on the risk of partiality. Thus Celio included his own opinions and new informations or added new biographies that were absent in Vasari's *Vite*. In this respect, it is noteworthy the careful investigation undertaken by Gandolfi in order to elucidate the sources used by Celio, who probably read only the first edition of Vasari's *Vite*, known as *Torrentina* (1550), and ignored the second, published by Giusti (1568). Apart from this, Celio obtained valuable first-hand information from his network of contacts among prominent artists of the moment, such as Federico Zuccari, Niccolò Circignani, etc. Hence Celio enriched the theoretical corpus contained in Vasari's work. In this sense, Gandolfi compares the contributions made by Celio to those by Vasari, finding out their significant differences. Gandolfi also remarks that Celio wrote a more synthetic version of Vasari than his rival Giovanni Baglione, as was said by Giovanni Bellori, who had access to Celio's *Vite*, thus influencing his *Vite de' Pittori, Scultori e Architecti Moderni* (1672).

Sometimes Celio included himself in certain biographies and tried to give the image of a multidisciplinary artist in the Renaissance style. However, he was primarily a painter, but also made some occasional incursions into civil architecture. On the basis of the direct observation of art works, in his *Vite*, Celio changed several author attributions and also proposed new ones. In order to analyze such a multifaceted nature of the manuscript, the edition conceived by Riccardo Gandolfi has three main sections: (1) a chronological study of the structure and sources of the text and an exploration of its central purposes, (2) the comments and additions made by Celio on the pages of his volume of the first edition of Vasari's *Vite*, kept at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, which gives a clue as to how Gaspare Celio approached Vasari's famous book, and (3) the full text of *Le Vite degli Artisti* found in Manchester. All this is preceded by a succinct but well-formulated biographical account of Gaspare Celio in his facets as a painter and writer. Here it is interesting to note that before the recent discover of the *Vite*, Celio was basically known for his *Memoria*, a brief guide of Rome in which he listed the art works of the principal churches in the town, adding some remarks about preservation and restoration. Above all, Riccardo Gandolfi's investigation ultimately puts its finger on the most relevant and singular aspect of Celio's manuscript, which is none other than emphasizing the great influence of Rome on the Renaissance artists, as well as counteracting the centrality that Giorgio Vasari conferred to Florence.

I. [...] Se [Vasari] non avesse avuto incontro la Scrittura, haveria detto che il primo uomo fuesse creato in Toscana

Riccardo Gandolfi insists on the idea that the principal objective of Gaspare Celio's *Vite* is to proclaim the relevant influence of the city of Rome in the scenario of Renaissance art instead of the widely accepted view that praised Florence as the focal point. In Celio's opinion, such a general view is due to Giorgio Vasari's *Vite*, which had a huge impact on critical literature and forged strong cultural stereotypes about artists, this way establishing a sort of official discourse about Art History focused on Florence. In the same vein, Celio argued against Vasari's undisputed authority and complained about the many inadequacies of his book simply because Vasari made every effort to legitimate his region of provenance, Tuscany. This is arguably the reason why Vasari intentionally chose a wide range of biographies of numerous artists that worked in the capital. On the contrary, Celio vindicated his own beloved town, the Eternal City, in the conviction that it had been deliberately neglected by Vasari. In the words of Riccardo Gandolfi, « [...] il principale obiettivo dello scritto è in realtà quello di rimettere Roma al centro del discorso » (p. 29). This purpose becomes evident by considering the comments that Celio wrote in the margins of his edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Vite*. The use of irony and a few touches of humor served the biographer to expose Vasari's biased view. In this context, Gaspare Celio consciously tried to subvert the prevailing theory developed by Vasari, pointing out its contradictions and calling into question some of its central statements concerning the origin of the perspective quadratura and other modern plastic techniques that Vasari located principally in Florence.

For instance, in Filippo Brunelleschi's biography, Vasari praised the ability of the Florentine artist to build the most novel and impressive architecture. To this respect it is telling the satirical observation by Celio: « [...] e che Giorgio [non] avesse visto Panteone, ne Terme Diocletiane, ne le Anto[ni]ne, et era stato [a] Roma molto » (p. 82). Gaspare Celio thus remarked Giorgio Vasari's intentional forgetfulness and highlighted the illustrious predecessors that surely influenced Brunelleschi's talented mind. Vasari was also unequivocal in his praise for the great figures of painting in Florence, therefore he dedicated dithyrambic eulogies to Masaccio, Uccello, etc., as if they were the sole creators who gave birth to the Italian Renaissance. Here it is quite revealing that Celio characterized these artists with pejorative euphemisms strategically located in their biographies. In these circumstances, Celio showed his commitment to the vindication of Rome's artistic heritage, its ruins and magnificent monuments, classic architecture and painting, stating that they were the influential legacy that led to renewed interest in the fields of perspective, geometry and proportions, which is crucial to understand the great achievements of the Renaissance. As explained by Riccardo Gandolfi: « Roma, come si è visto, rappresenta il centro della costruzione teorica di Gaspare Celio [...] ».

Se per Vasari furono gli artisti toscani a favorire il rinnovamento delle arti, per Celio la preminenza di Roma si manifesta attraverso le opere in essa custodite » (p. 41–42).

Consequently, Celio emphasized the fundamental role of ancient Rome in the education of renowned artists such as Michelangelo and Raffaello Sanzio. Interestingly, this gave rise to some intriguing anecdotes, for instance, the admiration that Celio felt for Michelangelo was not an obstacle for negative comments about his bad temper and other problematic aspects of his life. Such an ambivalent approach makes sense inasmuch as Michelangelo was undoubtedly the most relevant figure within Vasari's theoretical corpus. Likewise, in line with the above, Celio argued that Raffaello's *Isaiah* was inspired by the decorations of the Bath of Diocletian instead of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, as Vasari had established. That said, Celio disagreed with Vasari even in the opinion about the posture of the body and position of Michelangelo's head when he was painting his mentioned masterpiece. Then it could be said that Gaspare Celio himself fell prey to the same incoherence that he previously denounced in Vasari, in the sense that he also rewrote some biographies for his own intentional purpose. What is more, Celio did not confine himself to simply adding several remarks on his book of Giorgio Vasari nor did he introduce some comments. Apart from that, he frequently expanded or reformulated the content of many biographies and also added new ones, which thus substantially changed the canonical list uplifted by Vasari.

Just to mention a few revealing examples, Federico Zuccaro's biography is one of those that were considerably expanded by Celio, especially taking into account that he personally knew Zuccaro and his environment. The biography of Giulio Romano is also longer in Celio's *Vite*. Not casually, the biographer created a link between Romano and Raffaello concerning the artistic education of the latter in the Eternal City as well as the influence received from the Baths of Diocletian and Hadrian's Villa (Tivoli). In addition, Celio partially provided new facts about artists such as Sofonisba Anguissola, Federico Barocci, Francesco da Volterra, and Tomaso Laureti, and added the complete biographies of Pompeo Cesura, Domenico da Passignano, Henrico Golzio, Iacomo della Porta, Giovanbattista Pozzi, Antonio Tempesta, Agostino and Anibale Carazzi, and also Caravaggio, among others. Celio finished his *Vite* with two sections, the first dedicated to Greek and Latin painters and sculptors mentioned by Pliny the Elder, and the second dedicated to architects referred by Vitruvius. A last part is constituted by a full index of names of living artists.

II. Adunque era la pittura, et il musaico in Roma avanti Cimabue

As has been seen, it can be inferred that Gaspare Celio's work is intended to topple the city of Florence from the pedestal where Giorgio Vasari put it, while

proclaiming the supremacy of Rome. On the one hand, Celio managed to fulfill this task by dispelling common myths around the aura of the Florentine artists, especially Cimabue and Giotto, who were supposed to be at the origin of Renaissance painting. Indeed, the fact of locating the beginning of this kind of artistic achievements in the figure of Cimabue has become commonplace in the theoretical construction of Art History spread by Vasari. Then it constitutes one of the targets refuted by Celio, who looked for early precedents in Rome. Thus, in the introduction of Celio's *Vite*, the author traced the genealogy of the primacy of Roman art and highlighted the façade of Cortile del Paradiso, decorated « 564 anni avanti la nascita di Cimabue ». On the other hand, Celio also argued in favor of artistic techniques that were used in Rome long before they arrived in the region of Tuscany. This is the case with mosaics. In particular, Celio complained about the lack of veracity of Vasari's text, which stated that the mosaic technique first came from Venezia and arrived in Florence without referring to the Roman artists who knew the technique much earlier. Celio pointed out that there have always been mosaics in Rome and mentioned Pietro Cavallini as an expert in the field before Giotto.

Then, it is no coincidence that the first biography of Celio's *Vite* is dedicated to Cavallini. According to Gandolfi: « Per delegittimare la figura di Cimabue in favore di Cavallini, Celio sceglie di porre la sua biografia in seconda posizione, riassumendola in modo estremamente sintetico e inserendovi un commento negativo [...] » (p. 103). So, the choice and location of the biographies are neither accidental nor trivial issues. The specific way in which they were arranged framed an internal order with clear theoretical implications depending on the author's intention. In line with the above, Celio noticed that the tradition of mosaics among Roman artists had been obliterated in Vasari's *Vite*. That is why Gaspare Celio could not stand the enormous, but inconsistent, recognition given to Cimabue. « Celio, orgogliosamente romano, non tollera ad esempio che Vasari ignori la fiorente tradizione del mosaico medievale nell'Urbe, che sia Cimabue ad aprire l'elenco dei pittori, o che sia sottovalutato il decisivo influsso delle antichità romane, compresa la pittura, sui grandi artisti del Rinascimento » (p. 29). That said, Celio did not only criticize the agreed preeminent role of the Florentine artists who were considered to be the fathers of the Renaissance, and the many inaccuracies about artistic techniques spread by Vasari, but he also denounced the marginality of Roman classic art. Precisely, as Celio was interested in restoring Rome's influential role in the artistic sphere, it was absolutely necessary for him to vindicate the ancient monuments that left their mark in the artists of the Cinquecento.

Therefore, the purpose of *Le Vite degli Artisti* by Gaspare Celio was basically to amend Giorgio Vasari's intentional arbitrariness. It is interesting how Celio raised suspicion about the incontestable truth of Vasari's text just by adding the expression « secondo il Vasari » in the middle or at the end of certain phrases,

which made the reader realize that, in effect, the information contained in the book was displayed according to Giorgio Vasari's point of view. Ultimately, Vasari's *Vite* was its author's interpretation in favor of Tuscan art. Plenty of sentences of this sort appear throughout the whole text with the clear objective of discrediting the supposed superiority of Florence against Rome. Such a confrontation between Celio and Vasari reached the extreme of affecting architectural orders, specially regarding Tuscan and Compound orders, which can be appreciated in the additions to Vasari's first edition. Be as it may, as said earlier, Celio could not escape from his own preferences, likes and dislikes. He was enthusiastic about Correggio but relegated Parmigianino and problematized Caravaggio. These intriguing implications become even more evident thanks to the practical criteria used in Riccardo Gandolfi's critical edition of Celio's *Vite*, which printed Vasari's basic text in black and highlighted the parts by Celio in red. This method enables a direct comparison between the two authors and combines both texts in one, as it were. This promotes a transverse reading of the material and makes it clear how Celio interacted with Vasari's work by easily locating the additions, subtractions and modifications of the text, which thus serves the reader to get a clear idea of the interpretative changes that it underwent.

III. *Rewriting the Foundations of Art History*

The recently rediscovered manuscript of Gaspare Celio somehow constitutes the written testimony of a new 'version' of Art History that did not exist until now, before Riccardo Gandolfi's book came to light. Celio's text offers new insight into the hidden face of Art History away from official narratives. It would be no exaggeration to say that the study of Art History has been traditionally characterized by Giorgio Vasari's *Vite* as one of its most relevant founding principles and 'sacred book'. In fact, when Art History appeared as such in the XVIII century, Vasari's work was considered a canonical text and the first reference source in the field of Art History by definition. In this sense, Julius von Schlosser described Giorgio Vasari as the « true patriarch and father of the church of Art History », and Berenson saw him as the « Herodotus of Art History ». That being the case, it is remarkable to find a « Celio antivasariano ». It is indeed fascinating to see how, just a few decades after the publication of *Le Vite de' più Eccellenti Pittori, Scultori e Architettori*, Gaspare Celio dared to question the established criteria and speak against the hegemony of Vasari's discourse. What is more, it is intriguing to discover that, as Gandolfi points out (p. 9), Celio was systematically marginalized by the historiography of Art History during the Ottocento, while Vasari served as a cornerstone. If according to Georges Didi-Huberman, Art History was born three times – Pliny, Vasari, Warburg – Gandolfi might add a fourth time dedicated to Celio.

Gaspare Celio thus changed the approach to Art History so as to make it pivot on Rome rather than on Florence, a gesture that might have had important consequences for the development of historiography inasmuch as it entails a profound rereading – and rewriting – of official Art History. Therefore, the text conceived by Celio has a broader scope than a compendium. Certainly, the text introduced transversality, decentralization and non-hegemonic narratives. Here, one might wonder whether the manuscript had any influence on authors of the time or later. Given that it disappeared quite soon, one might conclude that Celio had little echo among artists and theorists, except Bellori. Further investigation on this respect and a more extensive contextualization of the general scenario of Renaissance historiography would have strengthened Gandolfi's in-depth analysis, especially bearing in mind that Celio seemed to be one of many authors who promoted critical bibliography against the centrality of Florence at that time. Gandolfi just remarks that

Nel corso del Seicento si moltiplicarono le confutazioni del primato dei toscani da parte de scrittori interessati a ridare prestigio e preminenza alle proprie tradizioni regionali: esemplari sono gli scritti di Ridolfi (1648), Scannelli (1657) e Soprani (1674), come importante fu la critica di Malvasia, impegnato a nobilitare la scuola bolognese contro il parere di Vasari [...] [e] le *Considerazioni* di Giulio Mancini [che] contiene un organico quanto erudito attacco alla parzialità del Vasari [...] (p. 29-30).

In order to gain a more precise idea of this situation, a comparison between the history of the text's influence and the development of the biographical genre in the Renaissance would have been of interest, particularly regarding the authors which wrote artists' biographies before and after Vasari. On the one hand, some relevant precedents were, for instance, Lorenzo Ghiberti's *I Commentarii*, which located the origin of painting in Cimabue and Giotto. Antonio Billi and Anonimo Magliabechiano's books also repeated this cliché. On the other hand, remarkable imitators of Vasari were Raffaelle Borghini (*Il riposo*) and Karel van Mander (*Schilderboek*), without forgetting Carlo Ridolfi's *Le Meraviglie dell'arte o vero le Vite degli illustri Pittori Veneti e dello stato*, Giambattista Passeri's *Vite de Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti che anno lavorato in Roma morti dal 1641 fino al 1673*, and Roger de Piles's *Dissertations sur les ouvrages del plus fameux peintres*. On a different note, Celio's *Vite* also included comments about materials and techniques and gave guidance on how to prepare pigments and utensils. In this regard, the text recalls Cennino Cennini's *Trattato della Pittura*, which served the Renaissance artists to learn these practical skills. Some remarks on this topic would have broadened Gandolfi's research. In any case, the present edition makes a great discovery of a source that was supposed to be lost and gives a complete account of an interesting counterpoint in the historiography of Art History.