

future studies to chisel away at the densely stratified layers of meaning that fostered the development, dissemination, and collection of paintings on stone supports made between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2023.114

Piero della Francesca and the Invention of the Artist. Machtelt Brüggem Israëls. Renaissance Lives. London: Reaktion Books, 2020. 368 pp. £15.95.

Israëls's multifaceted approach to Piero della Francesca's paintings and treatises is innovative and comprehensive. In her quest to demystify Piero's intentions, she interweaves every aspect of his work (iconography, sources, methods, etc.) with biographical and historical information. The arrangement of the chapters follows the chronology of Piero's progression from pupil to master to scientist. Before turning to his corpus, the author explores his roots in Borgo San Sepolcro.

In the section on the *Baptism of Christ*, Israëls proposes that the transparency of the water, caused by reflected light, signals the divine mystery of God manifested as light, based on an optical theory that differentiates reflected from refracted light. Diverging from Lavin, she identifies the men in Byzantine costume as priests and Levites rather than Magi. From her stylistic analysis of this painting, the author deduces that Piero learned from Gentile da Fabriano and Masolino.

The reader is then taken on Piero's many travels. During the Council of Ferrara-Florence, he would have encountered the costumes worn by the Byzantine participants, and would have seen paintings by Masaccio, Uccello, Domenico Veneziano, and Netherlandish artists. The author credits Netherlandish paintings as a source for Piero's techniques and the luminosity of his pictures. Another of Piero's stops was Rimini, where he portrayed Sigismondo Malatesta in a fresco once located in a tiny sacristy in the Tempio Malatestiano. Israëls's discussion of its original placement is enlightening, but impossible to visualize without an illustration.

A high point of the book is Israëls's analysis of the Legend of the True Cross cycle in Arezzo. She explains its narrative sequence, the significance of the costumes, and Piero's use of panel painting techniques to simulate reflections in the water. Innovations include the depiction of a constellation in a nighttime sky and arrows seemingly headed in the viewer's direction. The author's attempt to equate genre elements in two of the scenes to the devices of the rhetorician seems overwrought.

One of the small-scale paintings Israëls considers is the *Flagellation*. She argues that Piero represented Pilate both seated in the scene on the left and standing in the

foreground at the far right along with Joseph of Arimathea, who seeks Pilate's permission to bury Christ's body. But the visages of Pilate and his presumed reiteration on the right are, apart from their bifurcated beard, quite different, particularly in the shape of the eyes. And Joseph is not shown appropriately kneeling before Pilate in a supplicant pose, as in previous renderings of this scene. The young man identified here as Joseph's assistant, barefoot and garbed in a fashion Piero favored for angels and prophets, stares off into space, disengaged from the other two figures.

In Borgo San Sepolcro, Piero painted the *Misericordia*, Antonine, and Augustinian polyptychs, and the *Resurrection*. Israël reconstructs the polyptychs and provides interesting information about their patrons. Not mentioned are the mourner on the *Death of Meleager* sarcophagus that inspired John the Evangelist's pose in the *Misericordia Crucifixion*, or Donatello's Padua altar which influenced the Augustinian polyptych. Regarding the *Resurrection*, Israël perceives a shift in perspective between Christ, shown straight on, and the sleeping soldiers, shown from below, which she ties to a medieval theological-optical theory that states that direct vision, as opposed to refracted vision, was possible only after the Resurrection. But Piero uses one consistent perspective, rendering her argument implausible.

Israël's description of Piero as a courtier at Urbino is misleading because the word for courtier was not *familiare* as she believes, meaning familiar or houseguest, but *corregiano*. Her mock-up of the Montefeltro altarpiece in its intended architectural setting in San Bernardino is convincing. But her suggestion that Peruzzi's sketch of an altarpiece *in situ* in this church reflects Piero's painting is unpersuasive, as it lacks his *Sacra Conversazione* and kneeling figure.

The chapter on Piero's mathematical treatises on the abacus, geometric solids, and perspective is informative. Israël demonstrates his novel methodology and his elevation of painted perspective into a science. She plausibly names the intended recipients of these manuscripts. The author takes the reader to Piero's twilight years, when he designed and decorated his own palace in Borgo San Sepolcro. She envisions his *Hercules* in a hall of illustrious men on the *piano nobile* and speculates that his *Adoration* was in the master bedroom.

Some of the author's interpretations are strained, and the occasionally dense passages, arcane terms, and tiny illustrations make the book challenging. Nonetheless, the reader is rewarded with glimpses into Piero's origins, ambition, methods, and innovations.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2023.115