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Louise Bourdua. *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. x + 242 pp. $ 75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-82158-2.

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The Franciscans and Patterns of Patronage in the Veneto, 1250-1400

In her recent book Louise Bourdua investigates the extent to which the Franciscan order participated in the artistic commissions that decorated their churches in the Veneto during the late medieval period, and how this participation resulted in images and architecture that reveal local influence rather than a particular visual formula emanating from the Mother Church in Assisi. Part of the reason Bourdua chooses these monuments is because of the extant primary sources that document many of the artistic and financial transactions–between the Franciscans, their guardians and the artists of the three monuments–that form the basis of Bourdua's study: San Fermo Maggiore in Verona, San Lorenzo in Vicenza, and Il Santo (the Basilica of St. Antony) in Padua. Bourdua's analysis of painting, sculpture, and architecture allows her to evaluate more completely how the artistic programs reflected patterns of patronage more completely than if the images had been discussed without relation to one another, which is often the case in art historical studies. In addition, she sets her analyses firmly into the larger context of how the friars used art as a means to instruct the faithful, reinforce Franciscan tenets and reconcile their artistic patronage with their devotion to poverty in late medieval Italy. Franciscan beliefs and practices in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries centered on the tension that divided the order, eventually permanently, with regards to the prolific and often sumptuous church decoration that appeared to contradict the Franciscan mandate for poverty. The paradox, of course, lay in the preference of the Order of Friars Minor (O.F.M.) to use art as a didactic tool, which at some point both justified and necessitated the use of extensive pictorial imagery. Bourdua's study reveals that depending on the needs of the friars, the artistic program of decoration sometimes followed the wishes of the friars, but sometimes followed the desires of the patron. Bourdua's analysis ultimately shows that the processes of patronage related to Franciscan churches in the Veneto were inherently complex in their modes of production.

Bourdua introduces her subject by explaining her focus on Franciscan churches located in the Veneto, and the important links that existed between St. Francis (the founder of the Order), St. Antony (the second Franciscan saint who had lived and died in Padua) and O.F.M. foundations in the area. By geographically limiting her examination Bourdua avoids the often cumbersome arguments regarding dating and attribution that accompany Franciscan churches in both Tuscany and Umbria. Bourdua relies heavily on examinations of contemporary primary sources, including those edited and archived by Antonio Sartori, in order to support her visual analysis. She is forthcoming about the parameters and limits of her study, and, by underlining the necessity of a concomitant analysis of extant textual sources, Bourdua demonstrates the importance of using both textual and visual analysis in order to arrive at the most complete conclusion possible. Such an approach provides a unique opportunity to trace patterns of patronage because of the numerous written items, including contract documents and requests for payment that exist with regards to larger artistic commissions in the late medieval Veneto.

The decoration of Franciscan churches, especially that of the Mother Church in Assisi, is legendary, although Bordua's bibliography is perhaps even more so. In the introduction, Bourdua reviews the considerable historiography of Franciscan art historical studies, focusing on the most recent studies of Franciscan patronage and iconographical developments; this emphasis means that the reader is not overwhelmed by the bibliographical references. She spends considerable time reviewing Dieter Blume's proposal that the Mother Church at Assisi followed a centrally directed *Ordenspropaganda*, an artistic directive to other Central and Northern Italian churches in an effort to standardize the creation and use of a coherent program of Franciscan iconography in the major apsidal chapels. This recount of Blume's argument

is central to Bourdua's book, since a major component of her study is to test Blume's thesis against the three Veneto churches that form the core of Bourdua's examination, only one of which was included in Blume's study. Bourdua prefers to see patterns of patronage within these churches as (here she uses Hoeniger's term) a "Franciscanisation," the process by which artistic programs and renovations were undertaken to make the atmosphere more suitable for the order. Thus, Bourdua's study has a dual purpose: to explain the processes involved and importance of Franciscan patronage in the Veneto, and to demonstrate that Assisi did not always play a determining role in the creation of contemporary Franciscan art programs.

Chapter 1 provides the historical context for the remainder of the book and is essential to understanding the role that the friars played in artistic patronage in the late medieval period. What distinguished the Friars Minor from other mendicant orders was the prohibition against owning objects, including property, although from the very beginning this issue had been a significant problem in spite of later attempts to distinguish between use and ownership. As Bourdua notes, the situation was certainly exacerbated by the seemingly conflicting attitudes of Francis himself towards art and architecture: Francis believed that liturgical items such as chalices and illuminated manuscripts should be of the highest quality and decoration (i.e. expensive), and he both recognized and acknowledged the power of images in the instruction of the faithful, literate and illiterate alike. At the same time, however, Francis imposed strict limits on what the friars could "use" in good faith, including where and how they could live and the number of robes they were allowed to have in their possession. By the end of the Dugento there appear to have been fairly cohesive guidelines about decoration in place, which included restrictions on the subject and placement of images within the church. Beginning in 1283 the friars were granted the right to appoint proctors—those who physically handled financial transactions since the friars were not allowed to touch money—made even more necessary by the papal bulls of 1312 and 1322, which allowed friars to bring a certain amount of assets with them when they joined the order. The significance of these regulations lies in the fact that the assets could only be used for very limited purposes, the major one being the use of goods to address any artistic concerns of a given chapter. In her examination of the extant letters between the guardians and the Franciscans, Bourdua clearly illustrates the complications that often ensued because of the third party nature of the transactions, made more difficult in cases where the artists working on a given commission were friars themselves. It is the issues related to Franciscan doctrine and artistic practice that Bourdua seeks to address in her following three chapters.

Chapter 2 examines the nave frescoes of San Fermo Maggiore, in Verona. In 1250 the friars assumed control of both the church and its contents from the Benedictines, and by 1350 the church had been renovated and much of the interior had been frescoed. Bourdua shows that the fresco program at San Fermo was not dictated by Assisi, but rather that its images were influenced more by the desires and interests of the Franciscan friar Daniele Gusmerio than the lay patron, one Gugliemo Castelbarco, both of whom appear in donor portraits on the nave's triumphal arch. In chapter 3, Bourdua's focus shifts from painting to sculpture as she examines the portal sculpture and the development of Franciscan iconography, here relying heavily on extant documents. While we know little about the artists at San Fermo, at San Lorenzo we learn the name of the master stonecutter, a Venetian named Andriolo de Santi, as well as the friar responsible for ensuring the portal's completion, Fr. Pace da Lugo. De Santi's design for the portal sculpture at San Lorenzo, which is the oldest known sculpted tympanum in the entire Veneto, reveals that likely models for its design were the frescoed images from the tomb lunettes of local churches and the jamb and archivolt sculptures from San Marco in Venice. The image of the lay donor, one Pietro da Marano, appears kneeling on one side of the central Virgin and Child, with St. Francis and the titular St. Lawrence on either side respectively. Bourdua cautiously suggests that, since Pietro was a distant relative of Castelbarco, San Lorenzo's sculptural design was both emulative of and competitive in nature, with regards to the fresco program at San Fermo Maggiore. Bourdua's main challenge to Blume's thesis comes in her analysis of San Lorenzo's sculpture and is well argued. In chapter 4 Bourdua tackles the subject of art patronage at the Santo, which is as daunting and imposing as the building itself. Bourdua traces the massive transformation of a simple single nave church into a large pilgrimage one, and within this context examines systems of patronage, specifically the "single rights of usage," found in the chapel of San Giacomo, the chapel of SS. Filippo and Giacomo and the Oratory of San Giorgio (p. 108). Her research reveals that unlike what is seen at San Fermo and San Lorenzo, it was the individual families who appeared to exercise the greatest control over the iconographic decoration, not the friars. This contrasts with the patterns of patronage seen at San Fermo and San Lorenzo, where it appears the friars were more in control; at the

Santo, the friars apparently allowed the patrons a freer hand in decoration because they were more concerned with the financial aspects of the endowments.

Bourdua's book is well organized, although there are so many different topics within each chapter (which are divided according to monument), that it might have been better to organize some of the information thematically. In addition, one of the most important discussions, one that underlies the entire investigation and that concerns the specific use of terms like "patron" vs. "purchaser" or "artist" vs. "provider," is relegated to the conclusion, which is neither the appropriate time nor place to introduce such fundamental distinctions. The photographs, while sometimes blurry, do offer rarely seen views of the subjects under discussion. While Bourdua has clearly done her research and arrived at sound conclusions, the biggest drawback to the book is that one must often comb the footnotes for information that is fairly central to her arguments and conclusions. For example, when she discusses the portal sculpture at San Lorenzo, one must consult the notes for descriptions of other monuments, monuments that she argues demonstrate that the friars and artists were more heavily influenced by local trends than ones coming from Assisi. Bourdua's eventual conclusion that she is unable "to standardize a single commission" because the "model of patronage is … complex and multiform" distracts from arguments that were presented earlier in the text (p. 151). It would have been better to have discussed these difficulties in the preface or introduction, and emphasize that different patterns of patronage reveal the complexity of artistic commissions and dealings in the late medieval period.

Louise Bourdua's investigation stands as an insightful and welcome addition to the subject of Franciscan art and patronage, both in general and more specifically with regards to Franciscan churches in the Veneto during the late medieval period. Her work clearly demonstrates the benefits of juxtaposing sound archival research with acute visual analysis, setting a standard for continuing research in the field.

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