

Lombard techniques of brick-vaulting in this area meant that the rectangular bays proposed in the original model would have been problematic, as the four arches flanking each bay had to be of equal height and width. In the new design the five rectangular bays of the lower nave were therefore replaced by four approximately square bays. In the centre of each bay a domical vault of the Lombard type rises to a significantly higher point than the crowns of the flanking arches, unlike the French-style even-level rib vault used in the two bays of the upper nave.

Bradford Smith goes on to suggest who designed the two stages of the medieval church. She argues that the first phase was master-minded and partly funded by Aldobrandini Cavalcanti (1217–79), the former prior of S. Maria Novella, who is reported to have asserted his authorship in his dying words. Bradford Smith attributes the subsequent building of the lower nave to the carpenter Fra Giovanni da Campi and the mason Fra Jacopo Talenti, under the supervision of Fra Jacopo Passavanti. The Florentine Commune not only contributed regular funding during the later stages, but also provided the large public piazza on the south side as a preaching arena in 1288.

This beautifully illustrated book includes an invaluable documentary appendix but sadly no index. The complex technical arguments are not easily summarised, but Bradford Smith's account is convincing and admirably clear, taking full account of the urban and spatial context as well as the technical issues of building construction. The mendicant orders' long-drawn-out building strategies, which Caroline Bruzelius called 'endemic incompleteness', allowed the original design of S. Maria Novella to evolve as funding, ambition and technological developments allowed.⁵ The use of technical art history provides a precious complement to recent cultural and institutional studies of the Dominican order.

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1 E. Borsook: *The Companion Guide to Florence*, London 1966, p.136.

2 J. Cannon: *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches: Art in the Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, New Haven and London 2013; and C. Bruzelius: *Preaching, Building and Burying: Friars and the Medieval City*, New Haven and London 2014.

3 S. Orlandi, ed.: *'Necrologio' di S. Maria Novella*, Florence 1955.

4 M.B. Hall: 'The operation of Vasari's workshop and the designs for S. Maria Novella and S. Croce', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 115 (1973), pp.204–09.

5 Bruzelius, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.104.

Mitteuropäische Schulen VII (c.1400–1500): Böhmen – Mähren – Schlesien – Ungarn (Die Illuinierten Handschriften und Inkunabeln der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, 17)

By Maria Theisen with Irina von Morzé, and contributions by Ulrike Jenni, Kristina Klebel, Milada Studničková, Maria Stieglecker and Edina Zsupán. 2 vols, 987 pp. incl. 780 col. + 107 b. & w. ills. (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna, 2022), €290. ISBN 978-3-7001-8861-2.

by SUSANNE RISCHPLER

This volume is the latest in the long-standing, renowned series of catalogues of illuminated manuscripts and incunables in the Austrian National Library, Vienna.¹ The roots of the project go back to the *Verzeichnis der Illuinierten Handschriften in Österreich* (Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts in Austria), which was established at the end of the nineteenth century by Franz Wickhoff (1853–1909), a representative of the Vienna School of art history. Among the series's past editors are such acclaimed scholars as Otto Pächt (1902–88) and Gerhard Schmidt (1924–2010). It is currently directed by Andreas Fingernagel, the former head of the Department of Manuscripts, Incunables and Rare Books at the Austrian National Library. The aim of the catalogues is not only to describe and illustrate the decoration of the manuscripts and incunables, but also – on Pächt's initiative – to classify them stylistically by means of comparisons and visual analysis. This has made it possible in many cases to locate the origins of the codices and provide a date, often to a decade or even more precisely. The inclusion of incunables is in line with a recent surge of interest in the subject and is particularly important, since, in the past, they have often been neglected.²

In the 1990s Schmidt turned his attention to the Central European schools, encompassing Austria, Germany, Switzerland

and Eastern-Central Europe. As a result, two volumes were published in the series: *Mitteuropäische Schulen III* (2004), which catalogues the illuminated manuscripts produced in Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Hungary c.1350–1400, and *Mitteuropäische Schulen IV* (2014), which covers the production at the court of Wenceslas IV and its circle (c.1380–1400). The authors of these volumes were Ulrike Jenni and Maria Theisen, both renowned experts in the field of book illumination from the Bohemian lands. Jenni died in 2020 but had already completed at least four manuscript entries for the volume under review, which has been edited by Theisen, who took over management of the project in 2010 and was able to recruit additional scholars to help with the preparation of the book. She is the author of a preface, of parts of the introduction and of most of the 164 catalogue entries, amounting to over 80 per cent of the text.

Following the tradition of the series, the book consists of two handsome cloth-bound volumes. The text is substantial, totalling almost six hundred pages, including, at the end, comparative images. In addition to the illustrations, the plate volume provides five indices: of people, places and objects; of bindings; and of iconography; an author and text index; and finally, an index of the manuscripts, incunables and other works used as comparisons. The only slight disappointment is that the index of people, places and objects is somewhat short compared to the length of the text. The art-historical introduction is split into six sections. Theisen is responsible for four: the period after King Wenceslas IV's deposition in 1400 until his death in 1419; the period of the Hussite Wars (1419–c.1436); the era from the end of the Hussite Wars to the reign of George of Poděbrady (reg.1458–71), king of Bohemia, and Vladislaus II of Hungary, king of Bohemia (reg.1471–1519); and Hungarian book painting at the time of Matthias Corvinus (d.1490). This section is followed by additional remarks on the illuminators at the Buda court by Edina Zsupán, an expert on Corvinus's library. Irina von Morzé has contributed a section on illuminated manuscripts with texts by John Wycliffe from the collection of Kaspar von Niedbruck (1525–57). It is clear from the introduction that the catalogue is aimed not only at art historians but also at historians. One example of a manuscript that is of interest to historians is the Taborite Bible (1434; Cod.1217, cat. no.19), a sister manuscript to the Martinitz

5. Page from the missal of Archbishop Sbinko Zajic von Hasenburg. Prague, 1409. Parchment, 23.9 by 16.1 cm. (Austrian National Library, Vienna; MS 1844; fol.11r).

Bible (Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague MS 1 TB 3), which includes the first known depiction of the burning at the stake of the Church reformer Jan Hus in 1415 (fol.11v). With almost eighty ornamental opaque colour initials and one historicised initial, the Taborite Bible demonstrates that Bibles made in the reformist Hussite context could be lavishly illuminated.

The book provides the reader with numerous good quality illustrations. For the plate volume, the most significant or rarely illustrated book decorations have been chosen. In addition, reference is made to partially and fully digitised copies that are available online. Watermarks and bindings have been analysed and can be checked against the entries in the relevant online databases. Links to digitised copies and databases are provided in the bibliographies of the catalogue entries.³ And like *Mitteleuropäische Schulen IV*, the book is available not only in print but also online on open access.⁴

Among the scholars that Theisen was able to recruit, Milada Studničková provided three substantial catalogue entries, including one on the well-known missal of Archbishop Sbinko Zajic von Hasenburg (no.4; Fig.5); Von Morzé contributed fourteen entries and Zsupán six. The entries are organised geographically, according to the region of origin of the illuminations, and then by quality. The first section contains manuscripts that are richly illuminated, beginning with the most extensive group of sixty-three manuscripts and incunables from Bohemia, followed by thirteen books from Moravia, five from Silesia and Poland and eight from Hungary (including Croatia and Transylvania). The second section covers manuscripts and incunables with small amounts of decoration: fifty-three from Bohemia, nineteen from Moravia and three from Silesia, Poland and Pomesania. Within each group, the manuscripts are listed in chronological order. The headings of the entries provide the core information about each catalogued book: the shelf mark, the content, the provenance and the dating. This is followed by a detailed codicological examination, information on the binding, provenance, as well as a summary of the contents. The decorative elements are then described in ascending order in relation to the



level of decoration, that is, from the simplest forms, such as rubrication, to elaborate decoration, such as miniatures. Particularly helpful is the summary of the manuscript decoration at the beginning of the section, in which the number and type (for example, fleuronée initial, ornamental opaque colour initial and pen and ink drawings) are listed in bold type. A section titled 'style and classification' comes next. It includes analyses of the decoration with reference to comparative examples. Just how detailed this

section can be is shown by Theisen's entry for a New Testament in Czech (MS 485; c.1440; no.32), which runs to ten pages. In addition to sixty-three detailed entries for copies with high-quality decoration, there are twenty short descriptions for less richly illuminated manuscripts (which are marked by the addition of the letter 'K' to the catalogue number). A brief mention is provided for eighty-one manuscripts and a number of incunables with 'minor' book decoration (marked by the addition of 'L' to the catalogue

number), whereby ‘minor’ refers to both the quality and the extent of the decoration.

Although many legal, humanistic, historical, medical-scientific and astronomical-astrological volumes are included, it is theological-philosophical works that are the most numerous. Next best represented are liturgical manuscripts, a group that includes graduals from the music collection of the Austrian National Library, such as the richly illuminated Smíšek Gradual (MS Mus. Hs. 15492; no.50), illuminated in 1492–94. It is a good example of the catalogue’s lavish provision of illustrations: the plate volume includes thirty-eight colour images of the manuscript, and a fully digitised copy is available online on the website of the Austrian National Library.

The meticulous research on which the catalogues are based and the precision with which the texts have been written cannot be overemphasised. The editorial work was also carried out with the great care. This publication is the ‘gold-standard’ of art-historical manuscript cataloguing.⁵

1 See the list of volumes in the series published by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, www.oeaw.ac.at/imafo/forschung/schrift-buchwesen/publikationen/reihe-i-die-illuminierten-handschriften-und-inkunabeln-der-oesterreichischen-nationalbibliothek, accessed 27th February 2024.

2 See C. Zöhl: ‘Buchschmuck in Inkunabeln: Perspektiven einer kooperativen Exemplarerschließung’, in C. Fabian, ed.: *Faszination (Buch-)Handschriften im Jahr 2022: Tradition und Zukunft ihrer Erschließung*, Wiesbaden 2022, pp.203–35, esp. pp.204 and 206.

3 For watermarks, see *Wasserzeichen des Mittelalters*, Austrian Academy of Sciences, wzma.at, accessed 27th February 2024.

4 For the open access publication, see doi: [org/10.1553/978OEAW88612](https://doi.org/10.1553/978OEAW88612).

5 See J.F. Hamburger: review of K. Hranitzky et al., eds: *Mitteleuropäische Schulen V*, Vienna 2013, in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 142 (2013), pp.383–86, esp. pp.383–84.

Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Second Commentary in Context, with a New Transcription, English Translation, and Commentary
By Janice L. Hurd. 333 pp. incl. 10 b. & w. ills.
(Janice L. Hurd, Scarborough MA, 2022), \$50.
ISBN 979-8-218-00864-2.

by GIULIO DALVIT

It is no small feat to publish one’s life’s work at the age of eighty-seven. Janice Hurd submitted her PhD thesis on Lorenzo Ghiberti’s second commentary to Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, in April 1970 but it remained unpublished. This book is a much expanded, updated and revised edition of it. Ghiberti’s unfinished *Commentarii* (usually dated 1452–55)

was the first text since Antiquity in which a professional artist addressed not only the technical aspects of making art but also the fundamental principles of art, outlining ‘the interdependent resources necessary for the creation of excellent sculpture and painting’, be they intellectual or practical (p.53). The text was known to select readers, including Vasari, from the late fifteenth century and survives in just one non-autograph and highly defective copy at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence (MS II.I.333). Aside from mistranscriptions, it contains numerous passages of obscure meaning and presents significant philological problems, most notably in distinguishing between the author’s text and the copyist’s interventions.

Selected parts were published for the first time in 1816 by Leopoldo Cicognara in his *Storia della scultura*, and the text was edited and published in full by Julius von Schlosser in 1912 as *Lorenzo Ghibertis Denkwürdigkeiten*. Von Schlosser introduced the now traditional division of the text into three parts: a first commentary on ancient art (almost exclusively after Pliny and Vitruvius, who were freely and often incompetently translated by Ghiberti); a second, highly readable, commentary on modern art (entirely in Ghiberti’s voice and culminating in an account of his career); and a third commentary, which is by far the most cryptic part. It consists of a long discussion of optics, which occupies two thirds of the manuscript. Schlosser’s edition was lightly (and poorly) revised by Ottavio Morisani in 1947, but it was only in 1998 that a new critical edition of the Tuscan vernacular text was published by Lorenzo Bartoli, based on his PhD thesis submitted to the University of Toronto in 1996. Arguably the best version currently available is also the least known (it is not even mentioned in Hurd’s detailed bibliography): it is an unpublished dissertation by Guido Gatti Silo submitted to the Università degli Studi di Firenze in 1981/82.¹ The only comprehensive translation of the text is into Russian, published by Andrei Gruber in 1938. A new edition with a full English translation is currently being prepared by an international team of scholars that includes this reviewer.

Hurd offers a valuable introduction to the Biblioteca Nazionale manuscript and to Ghiberti’s *Commentarii*, including a full transcription and translation of the second commentary and a thorough and useful apparatus of 115 pages of endnotes. Here the vocabulary and, most importantly, each work of art mentioned by Ghiberti, is discussed in

relation to its history and historiography, with details of all pre-Vasarian sources. It is thanks to the author’s determination that most of the numerous existing publications on the subject have been taken into account; however, as Hurd admits, active research for the book ended in 2015.²

Hurd’s painstaking work demonstrates that much of what Ghiberti saw is now lost. Clearly, ‘this has made not only our evaluation of these artists flawed and misleading, but a realistic assessment of their influence impossible’ (p.34). As the author rightfully stresses, his idea of art and artistic hierarchies was fundamentally different from Vasari’s and that of all his followers. Ghiberti was not driven by local or regional patriotism, he was uninterested in writing biographies and in exposing teleology in art; he was ‘strangely neutral’ about Giotto (p.28), and enthusiastic about both Ambrogio Lorenzetti and an anonymous goldsmith from Cologne (later called Master Gusmin). However, according to Hurd, Ghiberti’s *Commentarii* ‘cannot be called a history’ because, interesting as they may be, they are neither ‘comprehensive’ nor ‘systematic’ (p.36). Indeed, as Christopher Wood pointed out, ‘Ghiberti had a judgmental eye, but he reveal[ed] his verdicts mainly by inclusion or exclusion’.³ Yet it is open to question whether such a history is less of a history and whether history has to be systematic. Writing histories about works of art has always been difficult. Narratives can create the illusion of continuity where there was none. Among all the possible histories, Ghiberti’s is certainly subjective and fragmentary. Denying it the status of history, however, is yet another concession to dominating historical accounts such as Vasari’s. From this point of view, although it is reasonable for Hurd to highlight that scholars have wrongly considered the *Commentarii* to be a treatise and to suggest that ‘when the scribe [of the extant manuscript] began his work, there was no fully consolidated text’ (p.60), her notion that ‘Ghiberti died pen in hand’ (p.86, n.437) nonetheless depends on modern ideas of scholarly writing, which may be anachronistic. At least initially, his approach would have probably been that of a Florentine craftsman or merchant, accustomed to excerpting texts and recording them in *zibaldoni* (notebooks). Although his attempts at translating selected Latin texts and his arrangement of them into an order demonstrate his intention to produce a coherent theoretical work, that work may never actually have been completed. Handed down to a copyist in a *zibaldone*-like state, this material, whatever its unfulfilled ambition, should not be read today