

**Francis Ames-Lewis, *Drawing in Early Renaissance Italy*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1981. XII + 196 pp., 190 illus. (8 in colour), \$50.00**

**Barbara Dodge**

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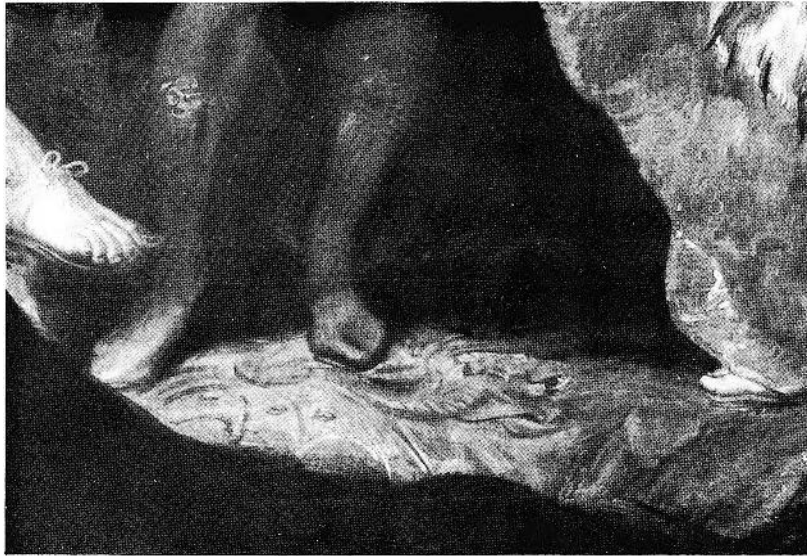


FIGURE 3. Van Dyck, *The Continnence of Scipio* (detail). Oxford, Christ Church Museum.

if van Dyck may not also have had another design in mind, viz. *The Procession of the Doge in Venice*, published in eight woodcut blocks after an anonymous designer by Matheo Pagano, Venice, ca. 1555-60 (cf. D. Rosand and M. Muraro, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*, 1976-77). The Venetian woodcut (Fig. 2), unlike the Gheeraerts etching, includes female spectators in loggie above the arches, as one sees also in the van Dyck.

There are some statements in the Introduction with which the present writer must express disagreement. On page 17 Sir Oliver says of van Dyck: 'He did not share Rubens's intellectual interests or understanding of architecture and sculpture. As De Piles said, "his mind was not of so large an extent as that of Rubens's." He had nothing of Rubens's enthusiasm for archaeology or classical history and classical literature; there is nothing in van Dyck's *œuvre*, for example, to compare with Rubens's title-pages.' Later, on page 28, Sir Oliver adds to this image of van Dyck as an 'unintellectual' artist: 'He was never seemingly interested in complicated iconographical statements.'

To refute such charges properly would require much more space than is offered in a review. But a few points may be made (many more are suggested in my paper 'Hidden Persuaders: Religious Symbolism in van Dyck's Portraiture,' given at the

'Young van Dyck Symposium' at Ottawa in 1980 and published in *Essays on van Dyck*, RACAR, x, 1, 1983). Venetia Stanley, *Lady Digby as Prudence* (cat. 9) (Private Collection) is surely a 'complicated iconographical statement.' Indeed it is even more complex than the present catalogue entry would suggest, as is demonstrated in an article not cited, E. de Jongh's 'Pearls of Virtue and Pearls of Vice,' *Simiolus*, VIII, 2 (1975-76), 94-97. It should be emphasized that *Venetia Stanley...* was made for one of the artist's closest friends, and hence *con amore*. Furthermore, it is very like a Rubens title-page design such as that for Jacob de Bie's *Numismata Imperatorum Romanorum...* (Plantin, 1617). Another important article which seems not to be cited in Sir Oliver's volume is R. Lee, 'Van Dyck, Tasso, and the Antique,' *Acts of the 20th International Congress of the History of Art* (1963), III, 12-26. The absence of this article is odd on two counts: Lee says useful things about van Dyck and the antique; also, he categorically rejects the identification of catalogue entry n° 42, the very beautiful picture from Blenheim which shows an unknown girl in armour attended by Cupid, as being Tasso's Erminia, or as having anything to do with the *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Instead he proposes that the picture represents Venus, in the armour of Mars, with Cupid. A final point concerns the Christ Church

*Continnence of Scipio* (cat. 3). Something has already been written about its iconography, by Pamela Gordon in her 'Young van Dyck Symposium' article on the picture (RACAR, x, 1, 53-55) and by the present writer in his review of the 'Young van Dyck' exhibition, *Burlington Magazine*, CXXIII (1981), 120-23. But to my knowledge, no one has yet commented on the elephant which appears on the carpet (Fig. 3). Most of the actors in the picture gesture towards the elephant, but he has, doubtless, remained unnoticed because of his steep foreshortening. I hope to deal more extensively with the elephant, and the rest of the symbolism in the Christ Church picture at a later date. It is clear that his purpose here is as a symbol of *Temperanza* (see Ripa), the virtue which Scipio's action exemplified. The elephant certainly adds greatly to an already 'complicated iconographical statement'; and he is also the best 'hidden' of the 'persuaders' in van Dyck's oeuvre.

Yet it would be wrong and unjust to end a review of this volume on a negative note. It is altogether a very attractive and substantial addition to the growing literature on van Dyck and on painting in seventeenth-century England. The Introduction is written with the same grace and fluency as the catalogue entries. Sir Oliver's knowledge of his subject is vast. Only a fraction of it appears in this volume. One wishes he were able to put everything else aside and give us a 'full-length' study of van Dyck — like the *Earl of Danby* as it were, in the full panoply of the robes of the Garter!

J. DOUGLAS STEWART  
Queen's University

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FRANCIS AMES-LEWIS *Drawing in Early Renaissance Italy*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1981. XII + 196 pp., 190 illus. (8 in colour), \$50.00.

Since Bernard Berenson's pioneering systematic study of the drawings of Florentine painters, interest in Renaissance drawings has grown steadily. Major studies have appeared on drawings from specific regions, notably the fundamental

studies of Venetian drawings by the Tietzes and the weighty volumes on Central Italian and Venetian drawings by Degenhart and Schmitt. Much of this work has of necessity concentrated on questions of attribution and the study of individual artists' styles. Now, Francis Ames-Lewis provides, to use his word, a 'primer' to this fascinating area.

In his preface, he states his aims: by examining Renaissance drawings 'in the context of the practice and preoccupations of the quattrocento artist ... I hope to cast fresh light on the role played by drawing in the development of Renaissance art, and on the value of the study of drawing to our understanding of the Early Renaissance.' The author centres his study on the evolution of artistic practice and creativity and the roles of drawings in the workshop context. He emphasizes this contextual approach over the more traditional analysis of attribution and style. As he puts it: 'What matters here is not whether, for example, a particular Florentine silver-point nude study was made in the circle of Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Filippino Lippi or another of their contemporaries, but how it was made and what artistic problem the draughtsman was investigating.' Despite this disclaimer, however, attribution is central to the determination of a drawing's function and role in the artist's workshop. Before one can determine the function of a drawing, one must first, *inter alia*, know who did it and whether it was a copy or a preparatory study. Admittedly, in a primer, the attribution issue should not crowd out other avenues of research, but a more detailed indication of the issues involved in defining the graphic oeuvre of artists, such as Domenico Veneziano, would have made the basis of examination clearer.

The study of quattrocento drawings is problematic not least because the loss of drawings, particularly from the earlier part of the century, leaves us only a small number of works on paper and parchment to serve as a corpus for the study of artistic practice and creativity in the early Renaissance. The relative scarcity and expense of paper and the lack of appreciation of drawings made trecento and quattrocento drawings already rare by the mid-sixteenth century; Vasari, the first

important collector of Renaissance drawings, comments in his life of Giotto that he had acquired drawings by the Florentine master only with great difficulty and expense.

Given the inherent limits of the corpus, it is difficult to know why Ames-Lewis would constrain himself to an almost purely technical discussion of *sinopie*, the full-scale drawings done on the first layer of plaster for mural paintings. The discovery in the last 40 years of large numbers of these underdrawings, with their wide variety of line and modelling systems, their varying degrees of finish, and their different roles, has contributed substantially to our knowledge of the graphic history of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. *Sinopie* are especially valuable precisely because we possess so few small-scale drawings on paper or parchment from the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. And, since they were almost always executed by the master of a workshop, they can usually be attributed to an individual artist, thereby contributing salient evidence to our knowledge of artists' oeuvres. Finally, *sinopie* are extremely important for the study of creative processes of tre- and quattrocento artists because of their preparatory and often exploratory roles. We have, for instance, no small-scale drawings that can be securely attributed to Masolino or Castagno, but we do have *sinopie* which we know were definitely by these early Renaissance masters.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the following chapters present much valuable material on the techniques and functions of Italian Renaissance drawings. In chapters two and three, Ames-Lewis thoroughly examines the techniques used by Renaissance draughtsmen and the surfaces upon which they drew, and thus provides a foundation for the assessment of style and function. The significant developments in technique which occurred in the fifteenth century were closely linked to the artists' expansion of the roles of drawings. In particular, the quill pen, one of the most versatile of all drawing tools, was used to create a wide range of line and modelling systems, which were capable of capturing a form with great immediacy and verve as in Stefano da Verona's figure sketches, or recording precise details of form and texture as in Pisanello's horse studies. The enhanced ability of draughtsmen to

render three-dimensional effects on two-dimensional surfaces marked another considerable step. The capacity of a single line to delineate plastic forms and even anatomical stress is clear in Pollaiuolo's drawings, and sophisticated modelling systems are exemplified by Mantegna's parallel hatching and Ghirlandaio's elaborate cross-hatching. A parallel development to these technical achievements with the quill pen was the greater availability of paper, a less expensive surface than parchment.

Ames-Lewis' discussion of techniques is particularly informative when he relates technical developments to artists' practical and creative concerns. One example is his discussion of the increasing use of chalk at the end of the fifteenth century, just when artists needed a means to render smooth transitions between values in order to represent 'fully modelled anatomical forms in movement.'

The author's account of the evolution of drawings within the context of the creative practices of the artist's workshop begins with model and sketch books. He traces the transition from mediaeval pattern books – probably common workshop tools which recorded motifs in a precise fashion for the shop's use – to true sketchbooks drawn increasingly from nature. The pivotal position of Pisanello, whose bound books included both traditional pattern sheets and original preparatory sketches, is traced in exemplary fashion, as are the contributions of Gozzoli and Ghirlandaio. By the late fifteenth century, Florentine artists were exploring forms and compositions with much greater freedom, and 'the relatively restrictive form of the bound book gave place to the loose working sheets on which the draughtsman increasingly pursued his growing preoccupations with anatomical form and compositional design.'

It is to the growing preoccupation with figure and composition studies that Ames-Lewis turns his last two chapters. By the end of the fifteenth century, Italian artists were confronted with new iconographies and the necessity to render the human form in anatomical and narrative exactness. These challenges required the development of a more complicated and experimental creative process. The artists responded with exploratory compositional

sketches, followed by more precise figure and drapery studies.

Figure drawings, particularly the representation of naturalistic figures who could convey a narrative, were a major artistic concern. Ames-Lewis contrasts the Central Italian artist's intense interest in rendering the nude with the North Italian draughtsman's interest in rendering surface textures. A clearer exposition of the author's understanding of the relationship of Alberti to developments in figure drawings would have been welcome in this section. It is somewhat confusing when Ames-Lewis alternatively refers to the 'impact of Albertian ideas' and the reflection of Alberti's suggestions, but then comments on how much Alberti 'summed up, and probably extrapolated from, his experience of artistic activity in early Renaissance Florence.'

In the final chapter, contract drawings and compositional sketching are examined as part of the creative processes of fifteenth-century workshops. By the second half of the quattrocento, the working methods of artists like Carpaccio and Ghirlandaio can be reconstructed on the basis of their more numerous extant drawings. The author describes well the various stages that could play a part in the evolution of a major pictorial design such as Ghirlandaio's mural paintings: compositional sketches, patterns, preparatory studies for single figures, contract drawings, cartoons.

Subject to the caveats mentioned, Ames-Lewis' text is generally well organized and persuasively argued. It gives the reader a good sense of the working procedures of fifteenth-century artists, particularly Central Italian painters. This book succeeds admirably as an introduction to the study of Italian drawings, particularly their roles in the creative process of a master's workshop. A large number of excellent illustrations are intermingled with the text which makes consultation both pleasant and efficient.

BARBARA DODGE  
York University

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FRANCIS ROBICSEK and DONALD M. HALES *The Maya Book of the Dead; The Ceramic Codex*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press (with University of Virginia Art Museum), 1981. 257 pp., 90 figs., 27 tables.

*The Maya Book of the Dead* is an attempt to show that certain pre-Columbian ceramics, known as 'codex style' ceramics, did not 'merely look like a codex', but collectively constitute a document that 'actually is a codex' (their italics).

Maya literate civilization had almost vanished by the time Europeans began arriving in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Copies of ancient manuscripts still existed, possibly in considerable numbers, but nearly all were destroyed in the conquest. Three survived and a fragment of a fourth has recently been discovered. Presumably these must now be referred to as the paper codices; gate-fold manuscripts made of bark paper sized in white or cream, and inscribed calligraphically with symbols and figures mostly in black paint. Their subject matter is the supernatural world of powers that affect human destiny; the astronomy that provides access to a knowledge of these powers – and therefore the possibility, if not of control, at least, of favourable intervention; divination, the practical value of the system; and chronology – the operational-mathematical model through which the ancient Maya could understand the actions of supernatural powers.

Codex style ceramics have a light cream slip as a ground for black-line calligraphic representations of images, scenes, and glyphic inscriptions. Thus, they clearly resemble the paper codices. To substantiate their hypothesis that certain sets of ceramics literally formed an equivalent 'book', Robicsek and Hales examine 308 painted vessels purporting to be from the southern Maya lowland area, a zone of maximal late classic urbanization and cultural climax centering on the Peten district of Guatemala, but including adjacent regions of Mexico and Belize. The vessels are thought to originate in the late classic period, conventionally taken as 600 to 900 A.D., although the authors themselves

concede that some of the vessels included might be modern fakes. None of the vessels are from archaeologically controlled excavations and, therefore, none have any provenance or known association with other Maya artefacts. In fact, it may be that no codex style ceramics have ever turned up in archaeological investigations although fragments are reported from El Mirador. A possible exception might be the Actun Balam vase discovered by David Pendergast in a cave in Belize. Robicsek and Hales do not discuss the issue of authenticity except in passing, nor do they consider the implications inherent in the apparent discrepancy between the archaeological ceramics and those produced through looting, faking, and the antiquities market. Robicsek and Hales do refer to physical analyses carried out on fifty-five codex style vessels. But this work is aimed at identifying source locations of raw materials, not date of manufacture. The conclusions that they reach, that the vessels come from four or six major centres in the Peten, are based on stylistic analysis alone.

The study is based on a sample of very unclear structure. The material illustrated includes 'most photographs taken during the course of the study,' and 'all presently known vessels ... by Codex Style Site A artists that were currently available.' Apparently this would admit any vessel with figurative or inscriptional representation in black outline on a light ground. There is no discussion of the possibility that this technique might be used for ceramics not making up pages of a codex.

The major substantive portion of *The Maya Book of the Dead* consists of iconographic and epigraphic readings for 184 vessels of the sample (they have designated 186 vessels by number, but n<sup>os</sup> 132 and 133 are neither illustrated nor discussed, although n<sup>o</sup> 133 is assigned to their hypothetical 'painter 1'). The remaining vessels are illustrated in 27 'tables' which are just photographic plates without specific stylistic identification or commentary, and 90 'figures,' which again are mostly photographs. Documentation is black and white roll-out photographs or drawings of adequate quality and readable size.

Primary descriptive treatment of the material is broken up into two