

**David R. Coffin, *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome.***  
**Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1979. 385 + xx pp.,**  
**243 illus., \$45.00**

Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey

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alors que l'essai n'en compte que six. Les mêmes types d'objets semblent se répéter dans chacune des sections du catalogue. À la section XI, « Wearing the Silver », il eût été plus convenable de présenter des Indiens portant des pièces d'orfèvrerie que les pièces elles-mêmes. La qualité des photographies est généralement bonne, malgré quelques exceptions (cat. 21, 44, 51, 52, 59, 79) ; le bracelet n° 161 est à l'envers. L'ouvrage se termine par une bibliographie (p. 163-164), une liste des sources des illustrations (p. 165-166) et un index de l'essai (p. 167-168). Malheureusement le catalogue n'a pas été indexé, ce qui n'en facilite guère la consultation.

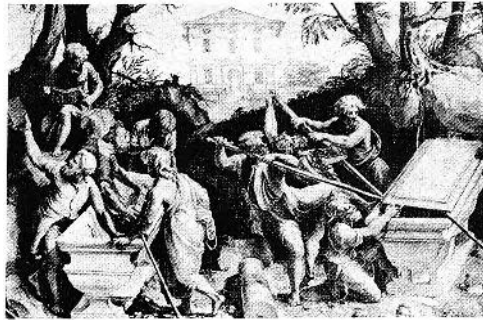
En définitive ce livre présente des déficiences dans sa structure et son contenu. Le lecteur attentif diagnostique rapidement un manque d'unité formelle : l'essai et le catalogue ne sont pas suffisamment liés l'un à l'autre. Trop de sujets sont abordés ; sujets, par ailleurs, que les auteurs ne semblent pas toujours bien posséder. D'un ouvrage comme celui-ci, on aurait apprécié qu'il soit élaboré suite à une recherche approfondie qui eût permis d'améliorer nos connaissances. À notre avis, Fredrickson et Gibb se sont trop fiées aux publications antérieures ; encore que l'on dénote certaines lacunes, difficiles à expliquer, dans la bibliographie. L'ouvrage est également disponible en français sous le titre : *La chaîne d'alliance. L'orfèvrerie de traite et de cérémonie chez les Indiens*.

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DAVID R. COFFIN *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome*. Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1979. 385 + xx pp., 243 illus., \$45.00.

In the Marquand Library at Princeton University there stood a reader's carrel stacked with grey ring binders. Little circular tags dangling down from them on strings recalled to mind the image of the apocalyptic book of the seven seals, so frequently depicted in Renaissance and Baroque art. The analogy may not be as far fetched as it sounds; the desk was the one at which David R. Coffin worked on the book under review here. With the publication of his *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome*, the seventh



Rome, Villa Lante,  
*Finding of the Sibylline Books*,  
fresco. Coffin, pl. 159.

seal has been broken. And opening the pages of this large and copiously illustrated volume is, indeed, a kind of revelation.

The revelation produced by Professor Coffin's book takes the form of rich primary source material, most of it available for the first time in English. This is completed by a compilation of information from secondary sources, culled mainly from obscure Italian journals. Using personal letters, ambassadorial dispatches, or the diaries of major-domos in the Vatican, Coffin weaves a vivid fabric of the charmed life of Renaissance Popes and their courtiers. We can now gauge the rise and fall of papal fortunes through their real estate spending sprees and the eventual sequesterings that followed in due course. Coffin shows that statutory church holidays, combined with special dispensations granted vacationing cardinals, gave rise to a brilliant, self-indulgent villa life, never excelled outside Rome and her environs.

The text falls into several distinct parts: Leisure its Setting and Pursuits; Enriching the Site; Recapturing the Past. These are completed by introductory and concluding sections. The beginning and end indicate some difficult limitations this work set itself. Where to start must have been a question most difficult for the author to resolve. He knew that the phenomenon of Roman *villeggiatura* had to be seen against the background of the slightly earlier revival of the theme in the Medici villas outside Florence. I was puzzled at Coffin's choice of the Careggi villa of Cosimo de' Medici as his prototype for Quattrocento Florence. At Careggi, as *catasto* documents attest, an existing building of some sort was enlarged for Cosimo. Furthermore, the later garden wings, which

Coffin mentions as embracing the landscape, were added on only after Cosimo's death. The villa of Giovanni de' Medici at Fiesole, on the contrary, was entirely new-built by Michelozzo around 1459. Although much altered, it still stands as probably the first structure consciously to revive the villa architecture of the ancients. As such it would have provided Coffin with a stronger example with which to begin his examination of the Tuscan influenced Roman developments. The conclusion to the book reveals the dilemma of where the investigation should end. The problem is weakly resolved by discussing the Villa Montalto of the late 16th century. If new, non-Renaissance trends are present here, then the point is not made clearly enough. In regard to this villa, the truth is that no such precise demarcation can be said to exist. For the sake of comparison, a flagrant example of later ideas might better have been chosen to throw the earlier style into bolder relief.

In most other respects, the thematic/geographical organization of the book works well, particularly in the climactic next-to-last subsection, entitled the Golden Age. Here Coffin's personal enthusiasm breaks through in his warm evocations of Caprarola, Tivoli and Bagnaia. Throughout the book the binding element is the author's intimate familiarity with the sites and his love of their beauty. A less successful result of using a thematic approach is that a certain amount of repetition occurs. In some instances, this becomes cumbersome. (Surely it was sufficient to mention only once the relationship of Agostino Chigi to his clients.) With so large an amount of historical material to assimilate, the reader cannot help but lose the

thread of the story at times; also, the accumulation of data tends to impede the making of interpretative assessments. The author, whose careful analysis is exemplary, was reluctant to commit himself to opinions not buttressed by overwhelming evidence. He mentions the doubts about the authorship of the Villa Le Volte near Siena, but does not take a stand on the attribution from a stylistic viewpoint. In the section on Classical Antiquity in Renaissance Dress I looked in vain for some unequivocal statement about the influence of classical writings upon Renaissance villa layouts. Coffin handles this question more convincingly in his own 1967 *Art Bulletin* article on the Villa Madama. Why in his book did he not reiterate the importance of the word 'dieta' written on Battista da Sangallo's Villa Madama plan (Uffizi 273 A), the same word that appears in Pliny's Latin letters describing his villas? A small detail such as this gives a fascinating, if somewhat inconclusive, insight into the 'iconography' of the architecture at this period. The excitement of such associations of ideas is missing. As for the symbolism of gardens or interior decoration, Coffin often discusses it in a surprisingly perfunctory way, as though he were quoting an inventory.

For the non-specialist reader, *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome* can serve as a stimulating visual introduction to the beauties of villadom. In general the illustrations are quite satisfactory though one could have wished, even in these times of restraint, that a few color plates might have been included to evoke the massed greenery of the *bosco*, or the glint of the sun on spray from a fountain. Among the photos, the specially commissioned ones of the Barco at Bagni di Tivoli are to be commended for clarity and for documenting a virtually unknown architect-designed farmhouse. But the captions describing these same photos are inconsistent and somewhat less informative than they might be. Why are the views of the barn near the Barco properly oriented to north and south whereas the illustrations of the Barco itself are not? This kind of editorial oversight applies also to several of the period maps included (e.g. figs. 116, 121, 134). Even though strongly convinced of the

importance and aesthetic worth of Renaissance maps, I found them difficult to use in conjunction with the text for two reasons. Firstly, the cardinal points were not referred to consistently, often leaving one more or less adrift. Secondly, entire maps were reproduced, whereas 'blow ups' of details could have helped to focus the reader's attention on pertinent areas. In several cases, a numbering system is laid over with an identifying key at the bottom. The numerals, however, being of the same color as the maps, tend to lose themselves in the ground. Without a magnifying glass and a copy of Frutaz's *Le Piante di Roma* close by, I might have gone astray in an intricate Renaissance maze, and become lost – pleausurably so I might add – among some of the finest scenes art and nature have ever produced.

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FRANCIS HASKELL *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion, and Collecting in England and France*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980. 234 pp., 255 illus., \$14.95 (paper).

With two important books in the subject already to his credit – *Patrons and Painters: A Study of the Relations Between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque* and *Rediscoveries in Art* – and with another just out – *Taste and the Antique* (with Nicholas Penny) – Francis Haskell must surely be the uncrowned king of taste. The topic of taste and changing artistic values is an engrossing and revealing one, and one to which Professor Haskell brings a great deal of learning and insight, indeed almost more than we could wish.

In this, the second edition of *Rediscoveries in Art*, now issued in paperback by Cornell, he addresses what he calls the phenomenal reversal of artistic values with regard to the Old Masters which occurred in England and France between about 1790 and 1870. This reversal, the author declares, was 'the most vociferous which we know' (p. 5). He has restricted his examples to painting, but nevertheless approaches the problem from a variety of angles. Taste, he states, was shaped variously by 'the availa-

bility or otherwise to the collector or connoisseur of recognized masterpieces; the impact of contemporary art; the religious or political loyalties that may condition certain aesthetic standpoints; the effects of public and private collections, (and) the impression made by new techniques of reproduction and language in spreading fresh beliefs about art and artists' (p. 7).

Haskell begins by citing two examples, one French and one English, separated in time by about a quarter of a century, which serve to illustrate changing tastes with respect to painters. In 1841 Paul Delaroche, a contemporary of Delacroix and then the most popular French painter of his day, completed a semicircular fresco on the apse wall of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In it were shown all of whom were thought to be the greatest artists of the thirteenth through the seventeenth centuries. Shown standing alongside Rembrandt, for instance, was Van der Helst, and next to Leonardo was shown Andrea Orcagna. But of all of the painters of this time, the greatest prominence was given to the delicate and reportedly sweet-tempered Fra Angelico.

In George Gilbert Scott's memorial to Albert, the Prince Consort, begun in 1864, a portion of the base of the monument was set aside to honour in a similar way the greatest painters of all time. Omitted on this occasion, however, were Van Dyck, Perugino, Andrea del Sarto, and all of the Dutch painters save Rembrandt. How to account for this virtual revolution in taste, epitomized by these two examples, is the subject of the remainder of the book.

As any visitor to a great museum knows, what is to be seen depends partly on what is available and partly on what is deemed worth showing by the art world – by critics, connoisseurs, historians, and collectors. One of the first great shifts in taste during the period in question took place, says Haskell, at the outset of the French Revolution when the Duke of Orleans put his fabulous collection of Old French and Italian Masters up for sale. Much of his collection was shown in London where nothing like it had been seen for over a century. The result was the beginning of a decided preference for Old Italian