

Debra Pincus, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, xvii + 257 pp., 126 black-and-white illus., \$80 (U.S.)

John Osborne

Volume 25, Number 1-2, 1998

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1071621ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071621ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Osborne, J. (1998). Review of [Debra Pincus, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, xvii + 257 pp., 126 black-and-white illus., \$80 (U.S.)]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 25(1-2), 129–131. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071621ar>

histories” in order to change the way tradition pre-shapes history (306).

Whether Pollock’s theory of differencing will fulfil its promise to expand the canon rather than add to an already proliferous list of competing discourses remains to be seen. Nevertheless, her book succeeds in demonstrating that it is possible to conceive of a means of feminist engagement with the canon that goes beyond mere opposition to occupy a position that is both within culture and critical of its constructions. Other feminist theorists, such as Linda Alcoff, have sought solutions to the problem of exclusion using comparable models; the strengths of Pollock’s model are its theoretical intensity, its broad applicability and its self-critical stance.²

Throughout the book Pollock places her own story along-

side other stories of desire that emerge from her analysis of a diverse selection of paintings and prints. The brief epilogue underscores how feminist desire, in this instance Pollock’s own longings for her deceased mother, is the impetus behind the enterprise of differencing the canon.

SHANNON HUNTER HURTADO
University of Manitoba

Notes

- 1 Jdt. 10:3–5; 12:15 RSV.
- 2 Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” *Signs*, XIII, 3 (Spring 1988), 405–36.

DEBRA PINCUS, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, xvii + 257 pp., 126 black-and-white illus., \$80 (U.S.).

The doges of late medieval Venice occupied a position inherently different from other European rulers. As was often the case elsewhere, their office soon came to symbolize the very state itself; but unlike the King of France or the Emperor of Byzantium, the Doge of Venice could not pass on his title to his children, nor even participate in the process of choosing his successor. The dogeship was not hereditary, and any hint of dynastic ambition was greeted with great suspicion by the other families of the Venetian nobility. In some ways, then, the office of doge was closer to that of a powerful bishop or a pope. Complicating any assessment of this office is the observation that it did not remain static over the course of the Middle Ages. To the contrary, it changed substantially, with a series of increasing restrictions on the powers which could be exercised, as revealed in the changing nature of the *promissione*, or oath of office, which each new doge was required to swear upon his election.

The tombs of the earliest Venetian doges, mostly situated in monasteries like San Zaccaria or San Giorgio Maggiore, have not survived. But from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, a series of ducal tombs can be seen, in whole or in part, in the state church of San Marco, as well as in the churches of the two most important of the late medieval mendicant orders, the Dominicans at SS Giovanni e Paolo (or San Zanipolo, as the Venetians call it) and the Franciscans at Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari. These tombs, from those of Doge Jacopo Tiepolo (d. 1249) to Doge Michele Morosini (d. 1382), constitute the overt theme of this handsome book. But its true subject is the dogeship itself, as this position evolved over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and as its changes were manifested in

both the location and the form of the funerary monuments of Venice’s political figureheads. Interest in the ducal tombs is not some new phenomenon: already in 1484 they were commented on by the visiting German friar, Felix Fabri, and they have also been the subject of a classic book by the Venetian historian Andrea Da Mosto.¹ But what is new here is the idea of using the tomb monuments as evidence for tracing the evolution of this political office. As Pincus notes on her first page, the ducal tombs can be seen to constitute “a class of historical documents” which were important in the construction of ducal identity, and consequently they can be used in conjunction with other kinds of historical evidence to further our understanding of the nature of the dogeship during its formative years. No previous study has similarly sought to elucidate the public political function of the Venetian ducal tombs, as well as to relate this to their physical context.

Following a brief introduction to the history of the dogeship, this survey begins with the earliest ducal tomb which has survived: the sarcophagus of Doge Jacopo Tiepolo (1229–1249) on the façade of San Zanipolo. This was a time of great ambition for the city and its nobility, basking in the dramatic expansion of political and commercial power which had resulted from the infamous Fourth Crusade. But it was also the moment when both the Dominicans and Franciscans began to establish their presence in the city, and the land for the construction of the church had been granted to the Dominicans by Doge Tiepolo in 1234. Thus, there was a special connection between this doge and this site. The sarcophagus itself is examined in a formal way, and a detailed analysis is made of its carved motifs. Pincus argues that the body and lid of the sarcophagus are re-worked pieces dating ultimately from late antiquity, and that the later medieval carvings were deliberately intended to blur its age, the intention being “to summon up a sense of the past” in keeping with current Venetian political pretensions. In an appendix, a

convincing argument is presented for viewing the two extant funerary inscriptions as additions of the early fifteenth century.

The church most closely associated with the dogeship was the Venetian state church of San Marco. Not surprisingly, this was the stage for many of the city's important events, including the ceremonies associated with the installation of a new doge, and also their funerals. The doge was, after all, the *gubernator et patronus* of the church, with special responsibility for looking after the relics of the city's saintly patron, and for providing a worthy setting for their veneration. Appropriately, the first doge whose *promissione* specifically comments on his privileges and responsibilities with regard to San Marco, Marino Morosini (1249–1253), is also the first whose tomb survives intact in the church (although a number of earlier doges are also known to have been buried there).² Pincus notes that the placement of this tomb in the north arm of the narthex coincides with the actual construction of this space, although she does not consider the possibility that the north arm might have been added for the specific purpose of functioning as a ducal "pantheon," paralleling a common function of nartheces elsewhere. The Morosini sarcophagus itself has long been a subject of debate, and it was used by Otto Demus as one of the cornerstones for his theory of a Venetian "Proto-Renaissance."³ Is it also an example of re-used *spolia*, or a Venetian attempt to invoke a mythical historic past by using a much older style and iconography? Our author's detailed analysis of the carved reliefs does much to support Demus' late dating.

The identification of the Venetian state with the office of the doge appears to have reached its maturity in the time of Doge Ranieri Zeno (1253–1268), and it is a great pity that only a fragment of his tomb in San Zanipolo has survived. Even less has survived of the funerary monuments of most of his immediate successors; but we are on firmer ground with a series of fourteenth-century doges who also chose the peripheral spaces of San Marco as their place of final burial. Chief among these was Andrea Dandolo (1342–1352), whose interest in the church is revealed in a number of important projects, among them the final refurbishing of the Pala d'Oro and the redecoration with mosaics of the Baptistery, the site also chosen for his funerary monument. In this choice of location Andrea Dandolo had been preceded by Doge Giovanni Soranzo (1312–1328), and Pincus views this site as indicative of the increasingly sacral nature of the dogeship. Soranzo's tomb chest reveals a fusion of Byzantine and French Gothic elements, which is also characteristic at this time of Venetian art as a whole. The book concludes with a brief discussion of the cluster of tombs around the high altar of San Zanipolo, dating to the second half of the fourteenth century. In each example the author examines the meanings inherent in tomb type, tomb place-

ment, and the style, iconography and medium of any decorative enhancements.

Debra Pincus is to be congratulated for a text which is concise and wonderfully written, while at the same time brimming with thought-provoking insights. I was particularly impressed by her expansive footnotes, many of which are mini-essays in historiography. My quibbles are few. One omission from the discussion which does appear significant is the tomb of arguably the most famous member of the Dandolo clan, Doge Enrico Dandolo, mastermind of the Fourth Crusade which captured Constantinople in 1204. The blind octogenarian never returned to Venice, dying in the Byzantine capital the following year, and his tomb was placed in no less prestigious a space than the great church of St Sophia itself. While it is no longer extant, and its nature and location within the church are now difficult to determine,⁴ it must have exercised a powerful influence on the Venetian understanding of what a ducal tomb should be, and hence potentially on the funerary monuments of his immediate successors – and it surely deserves at least some mention, however brief. Another puzzling omission is any significant discussion of the potential role of the Christian names of individual doges in determining their place of burial. For example, can the unprecedented choice of the San Marco Baptistery for the tomb of Doge Soranzo perhaps be explained by the simple fact that his patron or "name" saint was St John the Baptist? Perhaps not, but any attempt to read into this unusual location broader implications for the changing nature of the dogeship, as Pincus does, needs to take this possibility on board. The same is also true for the tomb of Doge Francesco Dandolo (1329–1339). The author makes much of his choice of a mendicant church, in this instance the Frari, and relates this to the growing importance in Venice of the Franciscan order. But the choice may well have been determined much earlier by his parents, who in giving the future doge his name placed him under the spiritual protection of St Francis, shown presenting the deceased to the enthroned Virgin and Child in Paolo Veneziano's painted lunette (cf. fig. 86). This possibility might at least have been considered.

At a rough estimate, over the past thirty years at least 500 Canadian undergraduate students, participating in the Queen's University Summer School in Venice, have spent a morning in San Zanipolo examining its rich collection of early Renaissance ducal tombs. It is thus appropriate that a scholar who spent much of her career teaching in Canada should have produced such a splendid study of the visual and political context which informed the production of those later monuments. This book represents a significant and badly needed addition to the literature on late medieval ruler tombs, and more importantly, it enhances our understanding of how the Venetians manipulated

their built environment to construct their civic identity. It is a monument of scholarship that is unlikely to be surpassed for many years to come.

JOHN OSBORNE
University of Victoria

Notes

1 Andrea Da Mosto, *I dogi di Venezia, con particolare riguardo alle loro tombe* (Venice, 1939).

- 2 See Otto Demus, "Zwei Dogengräber in San Marco, Venedig," *Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft*, V (1956), 41–59.
- 3 Otto Demus, "A Renaissance of Early Christian Art in Thirteenth-Century Venice," *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Matthias Friend Jr.*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann (Princeton, 1955), 348–61.
- 4 N. Barozzi, "Sulla tomba del doge Enrico Dandolo a Costantinopoli," *Nuovo Archivio Veneto*, III (1892), 213; and Da Mosto, *I dogi di Venezia*, 58.

KATHRYN BRUSH, *The Shaping of Art History. Wilhelm Vöge, Adolph Goldschmidt, and the Study of Medieval Art*. Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 263pp., 28 black-and-white illus., \$69.95 (U.S.).

Kathryn Brush's *The Shaping of Art History. Wilhelm Vöge, Adolph Goldschmidt, and the Study of Medieval Art* deserved to be reviewed when it first appeared in 1996. It contributes significantly to English-language studies of the art historiography of Germany, and especially to an understanding of the beginnings of what became – perhaps only during the twentieth century – the institutionalized discipline of art history. In an increasingly borderless and global post-modern academic era, in which disciplines seek continuous redefinition and renewal, it is edifying to contemplate the territorial preoccupations of our European ancestors.

For a number of reasons, Brush singles out two art historical forebears, Wilhelm Vöge (1868–1952) and Adolph Goldschmidt (1863–1944) for intensive study. Neither art historian has received much scholarly attention in recent years, despite the self-reflexive nature of the field over the past two decades. This is in part explained by the lack of translations of their publications into other languages. Both men were active in the early decades of the discipline (1880s and 1890s), and both chose to focus on the sculpture and painting of the Middle Ages in an epoch privileging the Italian Renaissance. "Vöge and Goldschmidt stand out because they represented fresh blood, conceptually speaking, for the study of medieval art during the 1890s" (p. 5). Furthermore, a substantial body of unpublished material provides "remarkably comprehensive evidence of a creative intellectual partnership between the two young men, particularly during the crucial decade of the 1890s" (p. 10). The most curious of the documents in question are 360 letters and postcards written by Vöge to Goldschmidt between 1892 and 1938.

Using both published and unpublished writings, Brush proposes in her introduction to address two related interpreta-

tive issues: 1) "how, and with what tools of analysis, does one assess the role of the artist, and of the artistic process, when evaluating works produced in the past, and how does one determine the relationship between form and artistic content in those works?" (p. 11); and 2) how were art history debates related to the study of the history of Germany in the 1880s and 1890s? "To what degree, for instance, can medieval artistic monuments be read as historical documents recording the mentality and cultural behavior of a period?" (p. 11) As we shall see, her analysis of Vöge's and Goldschmidt's scholarship presents these issues as most fully addressed in 1894 in Wilhelm Vöge's *Die Anfänge des Monumentalen Stiles im Mittelalter* which takes into account both the macrocosmic view of "mentality" and the microcosmic perspective in an art history which is a cultural history empathizing with individual creators.

The first chapter provides the university background for Goldschmidt's and Vöge's work by discussing the influence of the art historian Anton Springer, with whom both students studied in Leipzig, and the impact of the historian Karl Lamprecht on Vöge in particular. These two elder scholars were both involved in the 1880s with the study of manuscripts, and thus the art history of the Middle Ages. Although they were not academic enemies, they represented divergent methodologies: Springer's Morellian scientific connoisseurship contrasted sharply with Lamprecht's cultural historical approach, which was more sensitive to psychology and aesthetics and even more interdisciplinary than Jakob Burckhardt's *Kulturgeschichte*. The contrast between fact and psychic energies, of matter and mind, which will constitute the novelty of Vöge's approach over Goldschmidt's is already apparent in Brush's focus on Springer and Lamprecht as poles of influence. Goldschmidt is influenced heavily by Springer, whereas Vöge, also influenced by Springer, is perhaps even more indebted to the more "unsystematic" and inspired Lamprecht. "Vöge declared that he found Lamprecht's view of history 'fresh' and 'invigorating' for his own work in art history, for Lamprecht did not concentrate on a mere accumulation of facts and data but rather on cross-sectional and interdisciplinary