GAZETTE

DES

BEAUX-ARTS

QUATRE-VINGT-DIX-NEUVIÈME ANNÉE
VI' PÉRIODE — TOME CINQUANTE

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AN OBSERVATION
ON " MEDIEVALISM "
IN EARLY SIXTEENTH
CENTURY STYLE

I N two articles published some thirty years ago, Friedrich Antal defined and traced what he called a "late-Gothic" trend in Italian Renaissance painting [1]. Certain of the formal qualities inherent in Italian painting of the late fourteenth century were preserved all through the following century as a traditionalistic background behind the more advanced developments that produced the classic Renaissance style. Unfortunately, Professor Antal broke off this story at the eve of the High Renaissance, with a footnote promise that it would be continued.

Perhaps one of the reasons why the sequel to Antal's basic contribution has not yet been written is that the situation henceforth becomes far more complex. Certainly, after the flourish of the 1470's and 80's the conservative trend was eclipsed during the rise and "Blütezeit" of the High Renaissance. But then with the

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1. "Studien zur Gotik im Quattrocento," *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, XLVI, 1925, p. 3 ff.; "Gedanken zur Entwicklung der Trecento- und Quattrocento-malerei in Siena und Florenz," *Jahrbuch fuer Kunstwissenschaft*, II, 1924-25, p. 207 ff.

succeeding generation, Gothic elements are once again strongly in evidence [2]. Here the fundamental question arises as to the processes by which these elements were transmitted. Doubtless, the factor of survival was of great importance, for it is becoming increasingly apparent that the conservative tradition never really disappeared during the High Renaissance [3]. Yet, one suspects also that certain important "late-Gothic" elements were directly revived by the artists of Mannerism. Indeed the latter is perhaps the most interesting side of the phenomenon, since it gives a basis for comparison which is useful in determining just what qualities of the Gothic tradition appealed to Mannerist artists, and how they were transformed for sixteenth century purposes.

An example of such direct resurrection is revealed by a comparison of the scene of *Christ before Pilate* in Pontormo's series of frescos at the Certosa di Galluzzo (fig. 1) with the representation of that subject on Donatello's south pulpit in San Lorenzo (fig. 2); the close dependence of the former upon the latter is at once clear. Pontormo, using just the left half of the Donatello relief, has retained the deep architectural background, with the small figures seen indistinctly behind the raised balustrade. Pilate, seated at the left, similarly extends his left hand toward the melancholy figure of Christ, behind whom there appears a crowded group of soldiers [4]. Very telling also are the several half figures of armored guards introduced at the bottom of the scene. The only major change is that Pontormo has transferred the young servant carrying a pitcher and water from Pilate's side to the high isolated position atop the background steps. Yet even here there is a strong reflection of the winged adolescents who stand upon the spiral columns framing the scenes in Donatello's relief, particularly that in the center.

At first thought it may seem strange to consider this particular reference to Donatello as an instance of the revival of Renaissance Gothicism; indeed, the *Christ before Pilate and Caiphus* with its vast and complicated "ambiente" is a prime example of early Renaissance illusionism, or rational spatial construction, in relief sculpture. Yet, if in the *Christ before Pilate* one considers the figures alone they seem, in spite of all their overlappings, crowded into one narrow plane and do not really take advantage of the space defined by the airy vault above. The half figures below also seem squeezed into the same plane; rather than in front of the

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2. W. FRIEDLAENDER. "Die Entstehung der Antiklassischen Stiles in der italienischen Malerei um 1520," • *Repertorium fuer Kunstwissenschaft*, XLVI, 2, 1925, pp. 49-86, *passim*; PANOFSKI, *Idea*, Leipzig, 1924, p. 41 ff.
3. Cf. for example, the case of the early Bronzino and Raffaelino del Garbo; C. H. SMYTH, "The Earliest Works of Bronzino," *Art Bulletin*, XXXI, 1949, p. 184 ff., especially p. 205.
4. Standing just at the legs of Pilate in Donatello's relief will be seen the figure of a woman who wears a shawl over her head, and extends one arm in a protective gesture toward Christ. This is the wife of Pilate who pleads the innocence of the Savior (Matt., 27, 19); she is extremely rare in Florentine representations of the subject, and the fact that she appears similarly in Pontormo's scene (the tall figure wearing a white turban immediately next to Pilate) demonstrates Pontormo's awareness of the iconographical as well as the formal qualities of the relief.

main figures they remain below them, in a kind of vertical perspective [5]. Thus, Donatello has created two clearly distinct spatial areas: one deep and receding represented by the architectural setting; the other flat and toward the surface, actually containing the figures. While the space of the setting conforms to the principles of Renaissance illusionism, that of the figures preserves an essentially medieval system [6].

Again in Pontormo's *Christ before Pilate* a spatial recession is suggested by the perspective of the architectural background. But the youth descending the stairs, to cite only one instance, is much too large and intensely plastic for the distance at which we would assume him to be judging from his position on the steps and within the perspective system as a whole. He is set deep in space, and yet also appears in the same plane as the foreground figures. Thus, the space itself seems to have become malleable, strangely expansible and contractible, while the figures, however distorted, remain firm and solid [7]. The situation here is thus roughly similar to that which obtained in Donatello, where also the space of the figures was different from that of the setting. The same kind of contradiction is present in each case. It is in this sense that we may understand the attraction which Donatello's composition held for Pontormo, and what is meant by the "Gothicism" of Mannerist style [8].

There is an obvious difference, however. In the earlier conception we feel that the space of the figures and that of the background remain separate and consistent within themselves; the contradiction involved in juxtaposing them, however effective, is external and quite naive. Pontormo, on the other hand, makes use of the unity achieved in the High Renaissance, since his figures are distributed through the space. He introduces a stairway at the bottom of the scene, for example, by way of justification for the half-figures appearing above the frame. But the space thereby created for the figures is not quite sufficient, and we feel all the more the illogicality of their presence. A rational device is employed, while its rational effect is deliberately denied. The contradiction has now become internal, and utterly conscious.

The example discussed here thus illustrates a peculiar aspect of the "Gothic" revival in Mannerism. A medieval tradition, in its *quattrocento* form, is transform-

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5. It was formerly the policy to attribute such elements in the reliefs to Donatello's pupils, in this case Bellano; e.g. SEMRAU, *Donatellos Kanzeln in S. Lorenzo, Italienische Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte*, II, Breslau, 1891, p. 171. That the panels generally attributed to the assistants are in some ways the most expressive in the pulpits, has been pointed out by J. WHITE, "Developments in Renaissance Perspective II." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XIV, 1951, p. 65.

6. A similar kind of duplicity in Gothic style is discussed by DVORÁK, *Idealismus und Naturalismus in der gotischen Skulptur und Malerei*, Munich and Berlin, 1918, pp. 52-3. For a recent discussion of Donatello's relation to the late Gothic tradition cf. G. WEISE, "Donatello und das Problem der Spaetgotik." *Zeitschrift fuer Kunstgeschichte*, XVII, 1954, p. 79 ff.

7. Concerning this Mannerist dichotomy of an amorphous space containing precisely defined and modelled figures, cf. PANOFSKY, *op. cit.*, pp. 41, 43.

8. The simple fact of Donatello's scene being a relief may also have influenced Pontormo's choice; compare the incisive analysis of Parmigianino's spatial system in S. FREEDBERG, *Parmigianino*, Cambridge, Mass., 1950, p. 19 ff., where the relief-like quality of the figures is pointed out, in contrast to the deep space extending behind them.

FIG. 1.—PONTORMO.—Christ before Pilate, fresco. Certosa di Galuzzo.
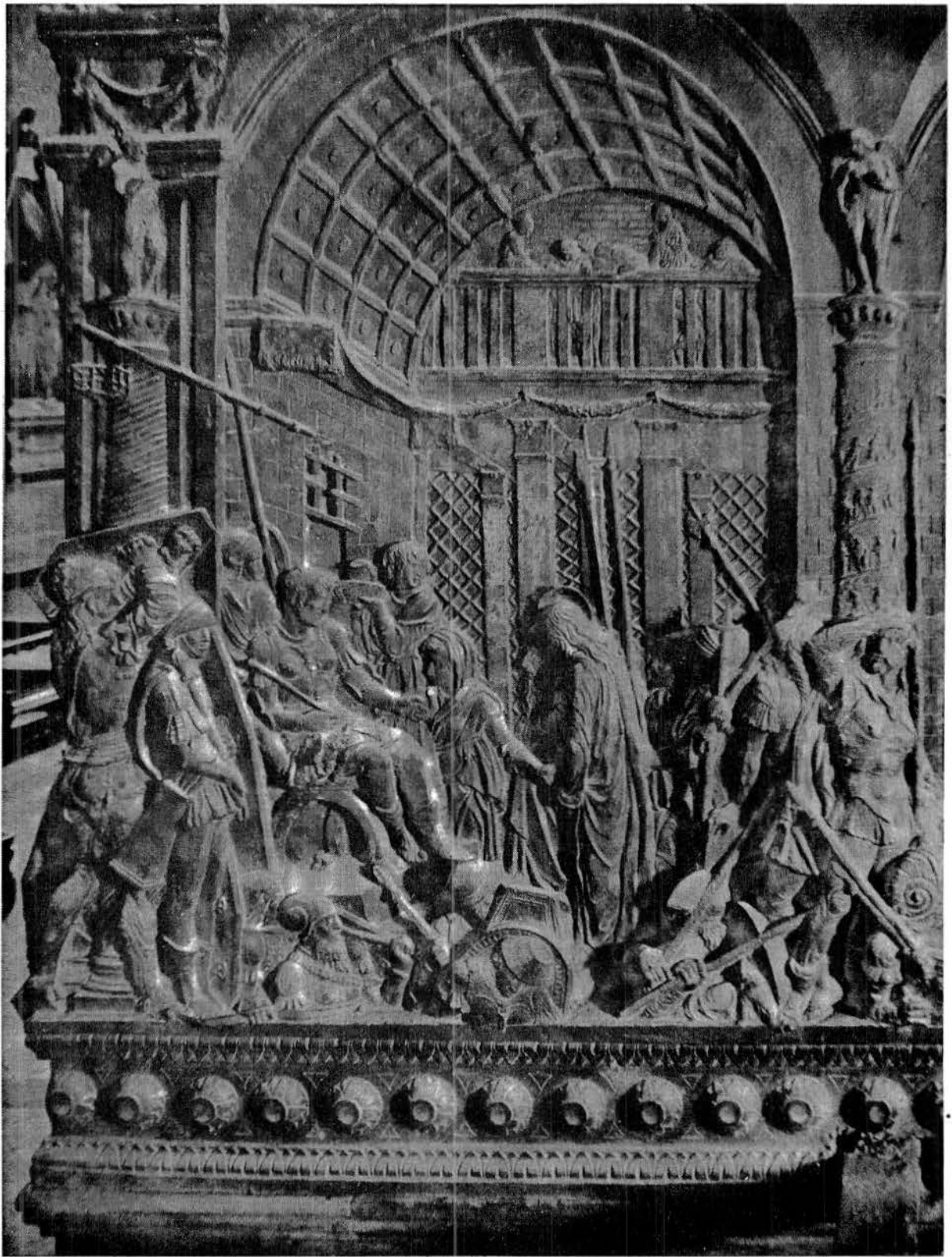(*Phot. Alinari.*)

FIG. 2.—DONATELLO.—Christ before Pilate, south pulpit in San Lorenzo.
(*Phot. Alinari.*)

ed according to High Renaissance principles, which in the process are themselves inverted. Clearly, there was no simple retrogression to medieval formulae. Medieval art was in a sense far too homogeneous for Mannerist taste. What interested the new generation of the early sixteenth century were rather the incongruities and complexities which preservation of the medieval tradition had generated in the Renaissance [9].

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Résumé : *Remarque sur le « médiévalisme » dans le style du début du XVIe siècle.*

L'auteur montre que si les traditions gothiques ont naturellement survécu un peu dans la Haute Renaissance, certains éléments de la fin du Gothique ont, par contre, été repris volontairement par les artistes du Maniérisme. Un exemple de cette renaissance lui est donné en comparant la scène du *Christ devant Pilate* de Donatello et le même sujet traité par Pontormo. Ce dernier s'est manifestement inspiré de la composition de son prédécesseur. En outre, dans l'une et l'autre scène, si la perspective a bien été respectée dans la mise en page architecturale, certaines figures, disposées sur un même plan chez Donatello, ou de proportions fausses chez Pontormo, révèlent une composition quasi médiévale. C'est cette contradiction dans le relief de Donatello qui a dû attirer Pontormo. Toutefois, selon l'auteur, alors que celle-ci est pour Donatello une création naïve et extérieure, elle est au contraire, chez Pontormo, un effet conscient et voulu.

9. After this article had been prepared, Dr. H. W. Janson very kindly called my attention to passages in Professor Antal's posthumous work *Fuseli Studies*, London, 1956, pp. 47 ff., note 86, in which reference is made to a relationship between Pontormo's Certosa frescos and Donatello's San Lorenzo pulpits (cf. also E. Wind and F. Antal, "The Meanad under the Cross," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, I, 1937/1938, p. 72). Add thereto the further influences on Bandinelli and Vincenzo de Rossi adduced by U. Middeldorf ("An Erroneous Donatello Attribution," *Burlington Magazine*, 54, 1929, p. 184 ff.; "A Bandinelli Relief," *ibid.*, 57, 1930, p. 65 ff.), and we have all the ingredients of a deliberate revival of the San Lorenzo pulpits during the sixteenth century.