

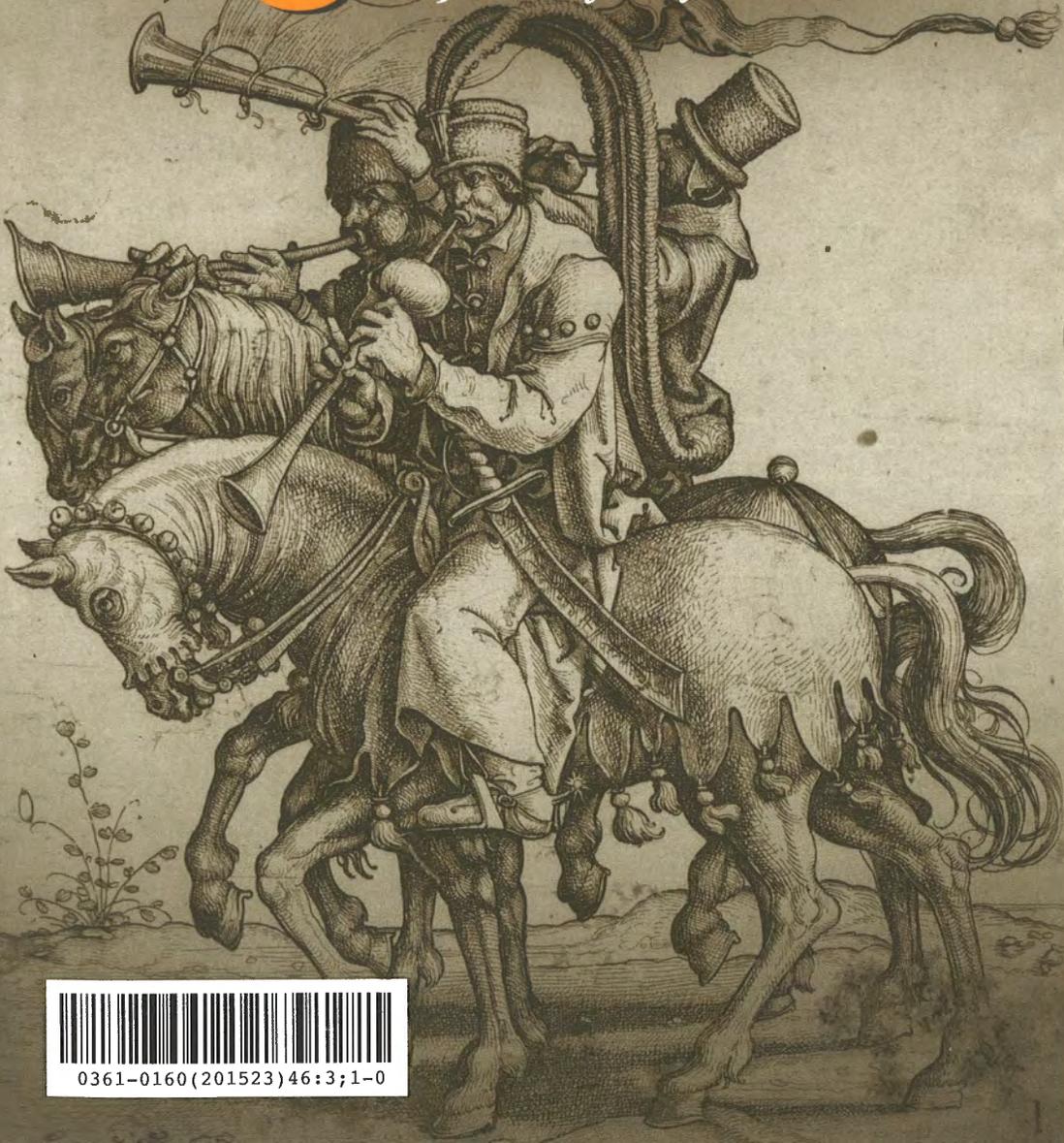
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**Veronese.** Xavier F. Salomon.

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This catalogue accompanied the grand, if somewhat narrow exhibition of Paolo Veronese's paintings at the National Gallery, London (19 March to 15 June 2014): grand because of the size and quality of the fifty works it included, notably pendant portraits, sparkling allegories, and matching altarpieces. Some loans were extraordinary; the *Martyrdom of Saint George* (San Giorgio in Braida, Verona) stood more than sixteen feet tall in its frame and dwarfed even the large gallery in which it was displayed. Yet the show, England's first solo exhibition of Veronese, was also narrow since it included none of Veronese's drawings, revealed little about his process, and contained no paintings by any other artist. Following recent examples, the catalogue discusses the exhibition works chronologically within thematically titled chapters and with comparative illustrations. It also contains helpful maps, the artist's family tree, and a biographical timeline with selected contemporary events, and concludes with a checklist of exhibited works. On the whole—given some slight reservations discussed below—this well-illustrated catalogue succeeds in synthesizing recent scholarship and in introducing this artist to a wide audience.

The beginning section "Stonecutter to Noble Painter" relates most of what is known biographically about Paolo Veronese (1528–88). Quotations from Carlo Ridolfi (1594–1658) are used particularly well to explain the artist's development from stonecutter's son to leading painter in one of the largest artistic centers of Europe. Yet curator/author Xavier Salomon commits a factual error in declaring that the "transcription of the interrogation by the Inquisition in 1573 is the only glimpse we get of the artist in his own words" (22). At least ten letters written in Veronese's own hand have been published and yet these form no part of Salomon's biographical survey. This oversight is lamentable, since the letters reveal Paolo's own voice, in a private context that is quite different from the politically charged tribunal. Indeed the letters document his sociability and business acumen, and offer insights about his relationship with patrons, including the Vendramin, Barbaro, and Gandino families. Salomon's chapter would be richer had he taken account of them.

The subsequent chapters "Living Antiquity" and "Under a More Favourable Sky" emphasize the *romanità* of the artist's coming of age in Verona and subsequent relocation to Venice. Antonio Badile's altarpieces and the architectural motifs of Giovanni Battista Caroto appear formative. Following David Rosand's recent research, the National Gallery's *Conversion of Mary Magdalene* (NG 931) is correctly identified, not interpreted as the arcane *Christ Healing a Woman with an Issue of Blood*. In considering another early work, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony Abbot* (Caen), Salomon thoughtfully analyzes the changes from the preliminary Louvre drawing to the altarpiece. In this comparison, one might also

have raised the larger question of androgynous beauty in female depictions, for the drawing's "attractive woman" (61) is remarkably masculinized in comparison to the woman in the finished altarpiece, which would seem to provoke many worthwhile questions.

The portraits in the catalogue are among the artist's best and they undercut the author's apology that such works "are not nearly as engaging as Titian's or Tintoretto's" (91). The *Portrait of a Gentleman* (J. Paul Getty Museum), for example, is innovative in conception and painterly effect. Yet here, and elsewhere in the catalogue, dates sometimes differ from scholarly consensus and are generally offered without argument. The catalogue's date of about 1560 contrasts with some scholars' agreement on a date in the mid-1570s. This later date seems more credible considering the wide, soft execution of drapery, bold color modeling, and confident brushwork that characterize the sitter's face, as well as the looser execution of the marble reliefs. As Salomon notes, dates for Veronese's paintings are notoriously difficult to determine, but the date of 1562 is documented for the Chrysler Museum's *The Virgin and Child with Saints Anthony Abbot and Paul the Hermit* and the National Gallery's *The Consecration of Saint Nicholas* (Cat. 18 and 19). These works offer a useful contrast, particularly their stiffer draperies, delineated foliage (much like the villa frescoes at Maser), smooth and flattened flesh tints, and more linear execution of stone relief (at least in *The Consecration of Saint Nicholas*).

Ensuing chapters examine the artist's mastery of luxurious settings, devotional imagery, and mythological scenes. "The Mirror of the World" chapter combines historic quotations and Salomon's own sensitive prose to create a rich literary experience appropriate to the multi-figure feasts and historic scenes that are its subjects. Salomon is persuasive in arguing that the *Martyrdom of Saint George* reflects a change from depicting doubtful legends about the slaying of a dragon to the Reformation-minded exaltation of George's martyrdom.

The final chapter "Nightfall" sketches a portrait of Veronese's marked decline in his fifties—delegating much to workshop assistants and painting less until his death in 1588 at the age of sixty. This account of the artist's late years is familiar and not of Salomon's manufacture, but is it accurate? Veronese died unexpectedly of "violent fever" (37), suggesting no prolonged physical decline. Returning to the vexed chronology of Veronese's largely undated oeuvre, very few works are securely dated to the 1580s. Should the majority of workshop pictures be dated to the 1580s, as is now the case, or should they be scattered throughout preceding decades when his studio was also large and presumably well-staffed? Veronese's painterly dexterity, color harmonies, and architectural sets changed only slightly over his career, as evidenced by this exhibition. There is autumnal foreboding in his documented 1587 *Conversion of Saint Pantalon* altarpiece, but there is also radiant exuberance and a fanciful crowd in his 1579–82 *Apotheosis of Venice* for the ceiling of the *Sala del Maggior Consiglio*. The latter dated commission suggests the waning of the great artist may be more biographical trope than truth.

Salomon's focus on chronology and patronage offers a sound foundation for further research. Moreover, his catalogue aptly synthesizes much that has occurred in Veronese studies in recent decades. It warrants purchase by libraries and all who seek greater clarity concerning this talented artist.

