

sehpunkte 23 (2023), Nr. 7/8

Oleg Voskoboynikov: L'éloquence du visage entre Orient et Occident

The volume of *Micrologus* 110 under review presents 16 articles on aspects of the face and its gaze which consist of the lectures held in a conference which took place at St. Petersburg in July 2019 under the same name. 'The Orient' here is neither the Near nor the Far East (with minor exceptions) but rather means the largely Russian Orthodox culture. It enabled the participation of Russian mediaevalists gathered by Oleg Voskoboynikov who acted as an academic bridge between St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Florence. The volume is, to some extent, a showcase for Russian Medieval scholarship, making up 6 out of the 16 authors. 'The Occident' means the culture in Western Europe shaped by the medieval church. Muslim or Jewish thinking about faces is neglected, probably due the erroneous concept that they are anyway iconoclastically inclined and cannot provide evidence for art historians. The articles do not include issues related to defacement targeted by religious zealots. The term "L'éloquence du visage" follows the German "Gesprächsakt des Gesichts" which Hans Belting has coined in his book *Faces - Geschichte des Gesichts*. [1]

In lack of internal structure, the reviewer divided the content in several blocks:

In the first block "Spirituality of the Face" one finds the following contributions: Oleg Voskoboynikov, "Pour une histoire du Moyen Âge au visage découvert: en guise d'introduction" (3- 36); Andrey Vinogradov, "Face in the Apocryphal Tradition" (37-56); Alexey Muraviev, "Facing the Faceless: Eastern Syriac Mystics before the Mystery of Effacing Self" (57-70).

The second block "The Privileged Gaze" consists of: Francesca Galli, "No One Will Spend Eternity Behind Christ's Back" (155-190); Jean Wirth, "Face, trois-quarts et profil dans l'art médiéval" (103-113); Nicholas Weill- Parot, "Puissance des visages célestes et de visages terrestres: Marsile Ficin et l'exploitation du mot vultus" (255-270).

In the third block "Materiality of the Face" one can find: Michele Bacchi, "Beards and the Construction of Facial Appearance in the Middle Ages" (115- 131); Valentino Pace, "Il ritratto con i denti in vista: una nuova attenzione al volto" (85-102); Dominic Olariu, "Le premier visage d'un cadavre dans l'art sépulcral allemand. Le tombeau de Wolhard de Roth à Augsbourg (1302) " (191-211); Francesco Santi, "Lo schiaffo. Storia, rituali, paesaggi sonori" (133-154).

The fourth block "Physiognomy of the Face" includes: Joseph Ziegler, "The place of the Face in Pre-Modern Physiognomy" (213-238); Olga Togoëva, "Le visage (in)visible de la sorcière" (254-239); Danielle Jacquart, "Observation du visage et diagnostic medical à la fin du Moyen Âge" (271-294).

The fifth block "Diversity of culture of portraits" comprises: Anna-Maria Makarova, "Les portraits royaux de l'église de la Nativité de la Vierge à Béthanie dans le cadre de la culture géorgienne" (71-84); Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, "Rabelais et le visage du Pape" (295- 312); Evgeny Steiner, "Faces Without Individualization: The Art of Portraiture in Premodern Japan" (313- 321).

My personal choice of highlighting certain chapters due to constraints of space should not mean other contributions do not deserve closer attention. Galli offers an article in which she edited an unpublished *quaestio* by Bartolomeo of Bologna, the protagonist of her dissertation. The subject matter sounds odd, but the position of Mary and other blessed dwellers of heaven who aspire to reach the optimal angle to share the glory facing Christ, causes Bartolomeo to look for options in accordance with the latest achievements of optical science and Euclidian geometry. Next to the 18 options which Bartolomeo verbally described, Galli displays them graphically. Her article joins recent studies that detect the further application of new optics in artworks such as in the world map of Hereford [2], the depictions of St. Francis' stigmatization [3], and Fra Angelico. [4] Galli's choice of title has a pendant from an unexpected corner. The 11th -century French chronicler Raoul Glaber [5], a northwestern European, claimed that southeastern parts of the world remained

void of Christianity because people could not see the face of Christ on the cross in Jerusalem since they were on his backside.

Bacchi dedicates his article to beards and their manifold meanings in the medieval period. In his comparative approach, Bacchi deals with notions of social marginality, masculinity, secular political and ecclesiastical empowerment, and of the religious practice of penance and submission to God. Nowhere in the reviewed book does the contrast between the Occident (the western European Greek-Roman tradition of shaving faces) and the Orient (Byzantine and Eastern Orthodoxy covering the male face with hair) become so sharp. The reader has not been introduced to the fascinating role of beards during the crusades. Having covered your face with a beard became a mark of collective identity which could endanger your life in an armed conflict.

Ziegler chooses to turn to the medieval face as the playground for learned physiognomic theories. For Ziegler, from the 13th century onwards, the head, and especially the face, has overshadowed any other part of the body in the preparation of a physiognomic profile which could contain up to 33 categories (by della Porta) of facial signs. At the end of his contribution, Ziegler edited chapter 16 of an unpublished manuscript of Rolandus Scriptoris' "Reductorium phisonomie" offering only 20 facial signs.

Wirth writes about the medieval preference of depicting the head in a three-quarter position, especially in narrative sceneries. The en-face view is reserved for Christ or Mary with her infant or alternatively to royals, which is a remote resemblance to the classical depiction of antique rulers. The profile is used less often. Wirth takes the Mass of Gregory to illustrate the use of profile as an intermediary between the crucifixion in front of Gregory and the silent observer behind him.

Olariu removes the death mask from the mortal face of Bishop Wolfhard of Roth (d. 1302) and thus opposes the thesis of Panofsky in his "Tomb Sculpture". According to Olariu, the mortal corpse symbolizes the idea that before resurrection the body must decay. Steiner takes us to Japan giving fascinating insight into the lack of individuality in Japanese portraits. In Japanese mythology, the mirror is a tool for seeing the other but not yourself. Physiognomy serves medical diagnosis only.

The volume provides a plethora of singular observations on the face and gaze in medieval art. As is often the case in such proceedings not all the contributions are equally accomplished. However, readers, and not only art historians, will not fail to find points of interests.

Annotations:

[1] Hans Belting: *Faces - Eine Geschichte des Gesichts*, München ²2014, 156-165.

[2] Marcia Kupfer: *Art and Optics in the Hereford Map. An English Mappa Mundi, c. 1300*, Yale 2016.

[3] Mordechay Lewy: *Did Burning Mirrors Cause Body Marks on St. Francis of Assisi? A Material View on Medieval Stigmata*, in: *Mediaevistik* 34 (2021), 99-127.

[4] Saskia C. Quené: *Goldgrund und Perspektive. Fra Angelico im Glanz des Quattrocento*, Berlin 2023.

[5] Raoul Glaber: *Histoires*, trad. par Mathieu Arnoux, Turnhout 1996, 80.

Rezension über:

Oleg Voskobojnikov: *L'éloquence du visage entre Orient et Occident* (= *Micrologus Library*; 110), Firenze: SISMEL. Edizioni del Galluzzo 2022, VI + 335 S., 18 Farb-Abb., ISBN 978-88-9290-054-7, EUR 82,00

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Empfohlene Zitierweise:

Mordechay Lewy: Rezension von: Oleg Voskoboynikov: L'éloquence du visage entre Orient et Occident, Firenze: SISMELE. Edizioni del Galluzzo 2022, in: sehepunkte 23 (2023), Nr. 7/8 [15.07.2023], URL: <http://www.sehepunkte.de/2023/07/37889.html>

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