

# Cicognara's views on fifteenth-century sculpture in light of his art library

Barbara Steindl

The sculpture of the *Quattrocento*, the art of the so-called *Primitivi*, underwent a fundamental revaluation in the great history of European sculpture written by the Ferrarese Count Francesco Leopoldo Cicognara - the *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia sino al secolo XIX: per servire di continuazione alle opere di Winckelmann e di d'Agincourt* (Venice, 1813–18). Cicognara's revaluation found its echo not only in art historiography but also in the art works of his own time – first and foremost in the oeuvre of Antonio Canova (1757–1822).<sup>1</sup> The art historian Lionello Venturi (1885–1961) was the first to make reference in this context to the metopean reliefs in Possagno in which Canova assimilated older Italian art from Giotto to Lorenzo Ghiberti, Donatello, Jacopo della Quercia, Agostino di Duccio, and others.<sup>2</sup> However, the impact of Cicognara's research on the work of the Venetian sculptor is first to be seen in the so-called Italian busts of *Beatrice*, *Laura*, *Eleonora*, and *Lucrezia d'Este*, created between 1817 and 1822 – as a direct response to the publication of the second volume of the *Storia*, which deals, among other things,

*I would like to thank Jeanne-Marie Musto for her precious suggestions and thorough review of this paper. Many thanks also to Eve Borsook, who helped me with the translation, and to Alberta Campitelli for reviewing the text.*

<sup>1</sup> Leopoldo Cicognara, *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia sino al secolo di Napoleone: per servire di continuazione alle opere di Winckelmann e di d'Agincourt*, Venice: Picotti, 1 vol, 1813; the title of the second and third volume were changed to *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia sino al secolo XIX: per servire di continuazione alle opere di Winckelmann e di d'Agincourt* vols II, III, Venice: Picotti, 1816, 1818; the second edition, revised and enlarged by the author, came out in eight volumes (seven text volumes, one volume containing the illustrations); the title is *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia fino al secolo di Canova del conte Leopoldo Cicognara per servire di continuazione all'opere di Winckelmann e di d'Agincourt*, 8 vols, Prato: Frat. Giachetti, 1823–24. Except where otherwise noted, quotations are from the reprint edited by Francesco Leone, Barbara Steindl and Gianni Venturi: Leopoldo Cicognara, *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia fino al secolo di Canova per servire di continuazione alle opere di Winckelmann e di d'Agincourt*, 8 vols, Bassano del Grappa: Istituto di ricerca per gli studi su Canova e il Neoclassicismo, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Lionello Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, Turin: Einaudi, 1972, 225; Nicola Ivanoff, 'Leopoldo Cicognara e il gusto dei primitivi', in *Critica d'arte*, XIX, 1957, 32–46; Matteo Ceriana, Fernando Mazzocca and Elena Catra eds, *Canova, l'ultimo capolavoro. Le metope del Tempio*, exhib. cat., Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2013; for the topic see also Fernando Mazzocca, 'Dalla polvere agli altari. La condanna e la riabilitazione critica di Canova nel Novecento', in *Studi neoclassici. Rivista Internazionale*, V, 2017, 15–20.



Figure 1 Antonio Canova, Testa di Beatrice; engraving by Angelo Bertini, 1819; probably after the bust Cicognara received as a gift from Canova in 1819 (Grazia Pezzini Bernini and Fabio Fiorani, *Canova e l'incisione*, exhib. cat. (Bassano del Grappa: Ghedina & Tassotti, 1993), 241, n. LXXX).

with 15th-century sculpture. In these busts, Canova sought to realise the vivid naturalism which Cicognara had recognized as the decisive feature of *Quattrocento* art.<sup>3</sup> The response to Cicognara's historical work is particularly evident in Canova's bust of *Laura*, which quotes verbatim her supposed portrait, which Cicognara had published in connection with his 'Nota intorno Simone Memmi'.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the bust of *Beatrice* is a variant of his portrait bust of *Juliette Récamier as Beatrice* from 1813, which Canova had intended as a token of friendship and gratitude (*testimone d'amicizia*) for the many years Cicognara had devoted to perpetuating the memory of Canova's achievement in the *Storia della scultura* (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Canova, *Epistolario (1816-1817)*, Hugh Honour and Paolo Mariuz eds., Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2 vols, 2002-2003, II, 1129-31 (Cicognara to Canova, 25 November 1817). A few months later, when he had completed the bust of *Beatrice*, the artist himself pointed out its innovative iconography, describing it in meagre words 'as newer than any other ideal head, not at all similar to the ancient heads, nor to my own' (letter from 18 April 1818, quoted after Giuseppe Pavanello, *L'opera completa del Canova*, Milan: Rizzoli, 1976, 127, n. 289).

<sup>4</sup> On the identification of the sitter as Laura, see Cicognara, *Storia*, I (1st edn, 1813), 403-14 and plate 42. (The painting was correctly identified in the late 19th century as Domenico Ghirlandaio's portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni and is today in the collections of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.) For Canova's bust of *Laura*, see Giuseppe Pavanello, *L'opera completa del Canova*, Milan: Rizzoli, 1976, n. 291; Sergej Androsov, Fernando Mazzocca and Antonio Paolucci eds, *Canova: l'ideale classico tra scultura e pittura*, exhib. cat., Cinisello Balsamo, Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2009, 109.

<sup>5</sup> For the bust of *Beatrice*, see Pavanello, *L'opera completa del Canova*, n. 289; the bust was then in the Giovanelli collection in Venice; traces of it got lost by its sale during the 1930s; see also Fernando Mazzocca in Giuseppe Pavanello, Giandomenico Romanelli eds, *Antonio Canova*, exhib. cat., Venice: Marsilio, 1992, 323-5, n. 146 (*Testa di Juliette Récamier come Beatrice*); further

**Chronology as a method**

When, in 1809, Cicognara embarked on the formidable task of the *Storia* as a continuation of the works of Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Jean Baptiste Louis Georges Séroux d'Agincourt, he also partly took over their methodological approach. Just like his predecessors, he constructed his chronological presentation of the stylistic development of art not only through information gathered from previous art literature, but also on the basis of his own analyses of artworks which he documented through engravings he commissioned for the *Storia*. It should be kept in mind, however, that Cicognara was not familiar with the works of his predecessors in the form we are familiar with today. He knew Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* through Carlo Fea's richly illustrated Italian edition of 1783–84 as well as the illustrated Paris edition of 1802, both of which he acquired for his library. But he did not have the German edition of 1764.<sup>6</sup> The situation was different with Séroux d'Agincourt's *Histoire de l'art par les monumens, depuis sa décadence au IVe siècle jusqu'à son renouvellement au XVIIe*. As is well known, this work had an extremely complicated publishing history that went on in fascicles until 1823. In 1809, when Cicognara conceived his project, not a single one of these fascicles had yet appeared; the illustrations of the sculpture and the corresponding parts of the *Table des planches* only came out sporadically between 1810 and 1812.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Cicognara must have been familiar with the French scholar's project

variants of the *Beatrice* in Pavanello, *L'opera completa del Canova*, n. 249 and 250; Elena Bassi, ed., *La gipsoteca di Possagno: sculture e dipinti di Antonio Canova*, Venice: Neri Pozza, 1957, 214, n. 234 and 235 (*Juliette Récamier*); 215, n. 236 (*Beatrice; Testa ideale*); according to the catalogue this is a cast of the bust made for Cicognara; for the bust of *Eleonora d'Este* see Pavanello, *L'opera completa del Canova*, n. 333; Mazzocca in Pavanello, Romanelli, *Antonio Canova*, 328, n. 148; for *Lucrezia d'Este* see Pavanello, *L'opera completa del Canova*, n. 346.

<sup>6</sup> Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Storia delle arti del disegno presso gli antichi... Tradotta dal tedesco e in questa edizione corretta e aumentata dall'Abate Carlo Fea*, Rome: Stamp. Pagliarini, 3 vols, 1783–84; Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Histoire de l'art chez les anciens: Traduit de l'allemand, avec des notes historiques et critiques de différens*, Paris: Bossange, Masson & Besson, 2 vols, 1802. The two editions are recorded in the catalogue of Cicognara's art library with a note regarding the Italian edition: 'edition with many medals, monuments and vignettes, as well as 48 copper plates at the end of the volumes', and in regard to the French edition, the catalogue notes: 'Seventy-five plates, not counting the number of medals and monuments in the text, adorn this rich edition' (Leopoldo Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato dei libri d'arte e d'antichità posseduti dal Conte Cicognara*, Pisa: Niccolò Capurro coi caratteri di F. Didot, 2 vols, 1821, I, 9, n. 59, 60). For Cicognara's reception of the *Geschichte* see Stefano Ferrari, 'La storia dell'arte tra permanenza e cesura: Cicognara e Winckelmann', in *Studi neoclassici*, 2.2014 (2015), 191–7.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Baptiste Louis Georges Seroux d'Agincourt, *Histoire de l'art par les monumens, depuis sa décadence au IVe siècle jusqu'à son renouvellement au XVIIe: ouvrage enrichi de 325 pl.*, Paris [...]: Treuttel et Würtz, 6 vols, [1810]–23 (Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato*, I, 1, note 1; after the sale of his art library, Cicognara sent the fascicles of Seroux d'Agincourt's *Histoire* which came out after 1820 directly to the Vatican Library). For the publication history see Daniela Mondini, *Mittelalter im Bild: Séroux d'Agincourt und die Kunsthistoriographie um 1800*, Zürich: Zurich InterPublishers, 2005, 147–51.

and his working method as he had been on friendly terms with him since his first trip to Rome in 1788.

Cicognara, however, unlike the two models mentioned in the title of the *Storia*, chose a hybrid concept that combined a chronological sequence of five stylistic epochs (*risorgimento, incremento or progresso, perfezione, corruzione, and stato attuale*) with a geographical sequence of schools. The schools – in the *Storia* basically the Tuscan, the Venetian, the Lombard, and the Neapolitan, as well as some non-Italian examples, are subordinated to the epochs and themselves arranged in strict chronology.<sup>8</sup> It is obvious that Luigi Lanzi's *Storia pittorica della Italia*, the final version of which did not appear until 1809, was the model here. However, while Lanzi chose geography as the organising principle and was concerned with including the painting of all regions and artists as thoroughly as possible in order to provide a comprehensive reconstruction of school connections, Cicognara focused on stylistic developments in sculpture, which he sought to trace as extensively as possible.<sup>9</sup>

During the almost ten years he spent working on the *Storia*, Cicognara, like Lanzi before him, made many journeys to collect his material, which he then thoroughly analysed in order to classify, date, and attribute the works stylistically. Cicognara himself described his method as follows: 'works of sculpture and painting, like writings, have their own physiognomy, and from this, before anything else, one must draw one's conclusions'.<sup>10</sup>

As soon as he had taken the decision to embark on the great project of the *Storia della Scultura* in 1809, Cicognara left for a long research trip which was to be followed by many others. In 1812, he spent six weeks in Florence, and also visited Pistoia and Lucca in order to select representative works for the second volume of the *Storia*. Further trips to Rome, Naples, Lombardy, the Marches, Veneto, and, in 1813, Paris, are documented. As a surrogate for the originals, he provided his readers with illustrations; he mostly employed young artists who made small-format drawings for this purpose. These served him both as a mnemonic aid when writing the texts, allowing him to arrive at precisely those 'comparisons and conclusions' (*comparazioni e induzioni*) that characterise his work, and as models for the *Storia's* engravings. The artists followed Cicognara's precise instructions: he insisted on a largely uniform format as well as standardised views, which were taken at eye level as far as possible. These instructions were probably to facilitate the organisation of the *Storia's* plates but might also have provided the material with a

<sup>8</sup> Only seldom are the regional schools further differentiated; an example is to be found in the third book of the *Storia – Stato della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia sino a Donatello* – with an exhaustive chapter on Siennese sculpture. Here Cicognara relied on Guglielmo Della Valle, *Lettere senesi sopra le belle arti di un socio dell'Accademia di Fossano*, Venice: Pasquali, Rome: Salomoni, Zempel, 3 vols, 1782–89.

<sup>9</sup> Luigi Antonio Lanzi, *Storia pittorica della Italia: dal risorgimento delle belle arti fin presso al fine del XVIII secolo ... 3. ed., corretta ed accresciuta dall'autore*, Bassano: Remondini, 1809 (Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato*, n. 40).

<sup>10</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 159 ('le opere di scultura e di pittura, come gli scritti, hanno la loro fisionomia, e da questa debbono prima che da ogni altra cosa trarsi le induzioni').

certain objectivity.<sup>11</sup> The importance of the illustrations for his work and for his readers is a recurring theme in his correspondence: 'I don't know how to do my writing without the material in front of me. It's true that if I hadn't seen everything before, drawings would be of little help to me: but with them, a glance is enough to remember every detail' he wrote to Canova's brother Giambattista Sartori.<sup>12</sup> To Canova himself he wrote: 'with a few even shapeless signs of the works I have seen, a very clear image comes back to my mind, and if the imperfect drawings are just as helpful to those who will read the *Storia*, they will find themselves in some way rewarded'.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to critical analysis based on his connoisseurship, Cicognara's work relied heavily on the older literature on art that he collected in his unique, highly specialised library. He made a point of cross-checking every reference he found in the books. Where the library could give him no information, or the information was insufficient, he sought the help of local scholars. This research method was common in Cicognara's time and earlier, and was used by Lanzi extensively.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the research for his *Storia* led him to archives and manuscript departments of libraries.

In the *Storia*, citations are usually given in the running text and rarely in footnotes; the criteria for one or the other form of reference do not always seem to be clearly defined. In the fourth book, which will be discussed in more detail below, the most important sources for the epoch of the *incremento* are Giorgio Vasari (who is explicitly cited more than 80 times) and Filippo Baldinucci (who is mentioned more than 20 times). However, the reader only learns in passing that Cicognara consulted Vasari primarily in Gaetano Bottari's highly praised edition (1759–60) but only when the text specifically refers to one of Bottari's commentaries.<sup>15</sup> Heavily

<sup>11</sup> For the illustrations in the *Storia* see: Ilaria Miarelli Mariani, 'Seroux d'Agincourt e Cicognara: la storia dell'arte per immagini', in Daniela Caracciolo, ed., *Enciclopedia e storiografia artistica tra Sette e Ottocento*, [Galatina (Lecce)]: Congedo, 2008, 129–50; Barbara Steindl, 'Le illustrazioni della "Storia della scultura"', in *Studi neoclassici*, 2. 2014 (2015), 163–80; Ilaria Miarelli Mariani, 'I disegni per la Storia della scultura di Leopoldo Cicognara: riproduzione e sperimentazione artistica', in Maria Elisa Micheli, Giovanna Perini Folesani and Anna Santucci eds, *Luigi Lanzi archeologo e storico dell'arte*, Camerano: Empatiabooks, 2012, 285–328; Elisabetta G. Rizzoli, *L'officina di Leopoldo Cicognara: la creazione delle immagini per la 'Storia della scultura'*, Rovereto: Edizioni Osiride, [2016].

<sup>12</sup> Canova, *Epistolario*, II, 634; letter of 15 January 1817 to Sartori Canova ('Io non so come fare a scrivere senza materiali sott'occhio. È vero che se non avessi prima già tutto veduto, poco mi servirebbero i disegni: ma avendo veduto basta un cenno per ricordar tutto').

<sup>13</sup> Canova, *Epistolario*, II, 723; letter to Canova of 8 March 1817 ('con pochi segni anche informi delle cose però da me vedute, me ne torna alla mente una chiarissima idea, e se di altrettanto sussidio saranno gli imperfetti disegni a quelli che leggeranno la *Storia*, si troveranno in qualche modo appagati').

<sup>14</sup> On Lanzi's involvement with the local scholars, see Chiara Gauna, *La storia pittorica di Luigi Lanzi: arti, storia e musei nel Settecento*, [Florence]: Olschki, 2003, 177–84.

<sup>15</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti corrette da molti errori e illustrate con note*, Giovanni Bottari, ed., Rome: Niccolò e Marco Pagliarini, 3 vols, 1759–60 (Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato*, II, n. 2392).

abbreviated references to literature, such as Bottari's *Raccolta di lettere*, ancient texts, or one or the other of Lodovico Antonio Muratori's works, are usually placed in footnotes.<sup>16</sup> The footnotes also contain extended digressions and minor disputes about dating or attribution, references to unpublished inscriptions and sources, and explanations and additions that would have swollen the main text.

#### The fourth book of the *Storia*

The sculpture of the *epoca dell'incremento* or *progresso* is the theme of the fourth book of the *Storia*. The study focuses on Donatello (c. 1386–1466) and his influence on the art of the entire fifteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Two chapters (*Donatello e suoi predecessori*, *Stato delle arti per opera di Donatello e suoi allievi e imitatori*) are entirely focused on him and the work of his predecessors, pupils, and successors. Lorenzo Ghiberti, whose sculpture was very congenial to Cicognara's classicist taste, is discussed in a separate chapter.<sup>18</sup> A detailed section follows on various Tuscan artists, many of whom were active beyond the region's borders, including Giuliano and Benedetto da Maiano, Luca della Robbia and family, Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo, Andrea Ferrucci, Mino da Fiesole and other 'Fiesolani', and Andrea del Verrocchio.<sup>19</sup> Cicognara devotes the last two chapters to the Venetian, Neapolitan, and Lombard schools of sculpture. He concludes with a discussion of non-Italian sculpture, explaining:

Sculpture made little progress outside Italy in this epoch, and the works to be found in France, Germany, and Spain from the middle of the 15th century onwards are not up to the level of those made in Italy during the 14th century.<sup>20</sup>

The first edition of the *Storia* was therefore extremely thin on non-Italian sculpture. This subject was considerably expanded for the second edition of 1823–24, where Cicognara responded to Emeric David's criticism of the Italo-centric presentation of the *Storia* by providing the reader with some, albeit limited, data on developments in Spain, Flanders, and England.<sup>21</sup> He also provided an overview of German

<sup>16</sup> Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, ed., *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura*, Rome: Barbiellini, 7 vols, 1754–73 (Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato*, I, n. 1202).

<sup>17</sup> Cicognara divided the history of sculpture from 1300 to the present into five epochs, each of which he identified with its most important representative: the *epoca del risorgimento* with Nicola Pisano, the *incremento* with Donatello, the *perfezione* with Michelangelo Buonarroti, the *corruzione* with Gianlorenzo Bernini, and his own present with Canova.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Steindl, 'Cicognara's Ghiberti', in Fabian Jonietz, Wolf-Dietrich Löhr, and Alessandro Nova, eds, *Ghiberti teorico: natura, arte e coscienza storica nel Quattrocento*, Milan: Officina libraria, 2019, 221–30.

<sup>19</sup> 'I Majani, i Della Robbia, i Pollajoli, i Fiesolani, il Verrocchio, ed altri scultori della Toscana'. Cicognara, *Storia*, II (1816), 109–30.

<sup>20</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 417 ('In tutta quest' epoca poco progresso fece la scultura fuori d'Italia, e le opere che incontransi fino oltre la metà del secolo XV in Francia, in Germania, in Spagna non pareggiano quelle che in Italia si erano già fatte nel secolo XIV').

<sup>21</sup> Daniela Gallo, 'La "Storia della scultura" de Cicognara: une polémique franco-italienne sous l'Empire et la Restauration', in Olivier Bonfait, ed., *Curiosité: études d'histoire de l'art en l'honneur d'Antoine Schnapper*, Paris: Flammarion, 1998, 229–37.

sculpture in the 15th century in which Peter Vischer the Elder – Cicognara calls him the *Ghiberti dell'Alemagna* – serves as its most important exponent.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, Cicognara relied mainly on his own observations gathered during a trip through Europe from 1818–19, though he also mentioned the most recent publications by Sulpiz Boisserée and Carl Friedrich von Rumohr.

On the basis of a careful analysis of older authors, first and foremost Giorgio Vasari, Filippo Baldinucci, and Raffaello Borghini, whom Cicognara often refers to collectively simply as *gli autori* or *biografi*, he worked out a chronological sequence of artists and works, and then expanded, corrected, or clarified this sequence using information from local publications, guides, inscriptions, and other sources.

In one of his countless letters to Cicognara, the Piacenza scholar Pietro Giordani (1774–1848) recommended a procedure that the latter perfected in the course of his work. Giordani had encouraged the project of the *Storia* and he actively supported it in all the phases of its creation. He intended an initial collection of materials as follows:

I would begin by reviewing in my mind all the countries of Italy, Sicily, and France already seen, and in many columns I would note all the sculptures seen first-hand, noting the subject, author, and epoch. Then I would add up these particular lists and make a general one for all the sculptures (including bronzes and low reliefs) arranged by epoch.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, Cicognara drew up several such lists under ever new aspects in order to finally weld them together in his texts.<sup>24</sup> They formed the chronological grid upon which the affiliation of the artists to one or another stylistic epoch, school, or works would become clear. This vast material is preserved in the Biblioteca Ariostea in Ferrara and it offers insight into the count's working method. Some of these lists are briefly presented here: a fairly early stage of the work is probably reflected in a concise enumeration of sculptors belonging to the 'Tuscan school from 1400 to 1500' that is apparently based on Vasari's *Lives*, in which Cicognara only notes here and there the artists' years of birth or death or reference to a teacher-pupil relationship.<sup>25</sup> This is followed by a chronologically ordered list of artists and works of art from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Venice and the Veneto complete with dates. It is

<sup>22</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 440–47: 447; for Cicognara's journey of 1818–19 see Barbara Steindl, 'Il viaggio di Leopoldo Cicognara in Germania' in *Studi neoclassici*, 2. 2014 (2015), 49–53.

<sup>23</sup> Pietro Giordani, *Opere*, Milan: Borroni & Scotti, 14 vols, 1854–62, II (*Epistolario*), 54–5 (letter of 22 December 1809: 'Io comincerei dal rivedere colla mia mente tutti i paesi d'Italia, di Sicilia, di Francia, già veduti, e in tante colonne noterei tutte le sculture ivi vedute, notandone il soggetto, l'autore, l'epoca. Poi sommerei questi elenchi particolari, e ne farei uno generale di tutte le sculture (s'intende anche bronzi e bassi rilievi) distribuite per epoche'.

<sup>24</sup> Several of these lists have been preserved in the Cicognara archive in the Biblioteca Ariostea in Ferrara: Ferrara, Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea (hereafter BCAFe) Ms. Classe I 515 and 521.

<sup>25</sup> 'Scuola Toscana dal 1400 al 1500', BCAFe, Ms Classe I, 515, *carta* [unbound sheet] 32; Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori* (Florence, 1550; 2nd edn, Florence, 1568).

already evident from the appearance of the handwriting that each entry on this list was individually researched.<sup>26</sup> In an extensive excerpt from Baldinucci's *Notizie*, organised chronologically and covering the period from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, Cicognara seems to have primarily followed school and workshop connections.<sup>27</sup> A further step in the work appears to be documented by a list of artists and works in the period between 1040 and 1680 which is already organised according to epochs. The information from the *biografi* that flowed into this list had been partially checked by Cicognara on the basis of local publications and guidebooks.<sup>28</sup>

Here and there, these strictly chronological series revealed incongruities, facilitating the correction of hitherto traditionally accepted data. A prominent example is the story of Donatello's supposed participation in the competition for the bronze doors of the Florentine Baptistery in 1401. This story had been passed down since Vasari's time even though simple arithmetic showed that the artist, who was born in 1383 (according to Vasari and Baldinucci), would have been only 17 years old at that time and thus too young for the competition. Cicognara's calculations were finally confirmed in Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Commentarii*, which does not list Donatello among the participants in the competition. Cicognara rediscovered this important, long-lost manuscript in the Florentine Biblioteca Magliabechiana and published it for the first time in his *Storia*.<sup>29</sup>

Again and again in the *Storia*, Cicognara refers to chronology as a principle of arrangement. This is the case at the very beginning of the first Donatello chapter, 'Donatello and his predecessors'.<sup>30</sup> Here he criticises Séroux d'Agincourt's *Histoire*, which places Donatello and Ghiberti in different epochs - the former together with the Pisan sculptors Nicola, Giovanni, and Andrea in the first epoch of 'Renewal', the second in the epoch of the 'Progress of renewal'.<sup>31</sup> For Cicognara, the two belong to the same epoch within which they brought art forward along different paths - Donatello through his 'unique moving expression' (*maniera commovente ed originale*), Ghiberti through the 'nobility and grace' (*nobiltà ed eleganza*) of his works - yet recognizing that their lives belonged to the same political, social, and cultural context.<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note in this respect that Cicognara himself abandons the 'correct' sequence of Ghiberti and Donatello based on the dates of their lives in favour of a hierarchy of meaning and influence, for

[Donatello] was the glory of the century. He travelled all over Italy and disseminated so much knowledge there that many of the best sculptors

<sup>26</sup> BCAFe, Ms Classe I, 515, *carte* 36-40.

<sup>27</sup> Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, 6 vols. Florence: Santi Franchi, 1681-1728; BCAFe, Ms Classe I, 515, *carte* 66-75.

<sup>28</sup> This list is designated as 'Elenchi d'artisti'. BCAFe, Ms Classe I, 521, *carte* 160-82; the note 'Vasari Baldinucci Borghini' on *carta* 161 seems to suggest that this long list is a compilation from the works of these authors.

<sup>29</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 174-5; Steindl, 'Cicognaras Ghiberti', 222.

<sup>30</sup> 'Donatello e suoi predecessori', Cicognara, *Storia*, II (1st edn, 1816), 36-61.

<sup>31</sup> Séroux d'Agincourt, *Histoire*, II (1823), 74-80.

<sup>32</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 72-127 and 226-74.



began to imitate him as a veritable model, in particular for the skill, the taste, and the care, particularly in bas-reliefs, in Rome, Naples, Padua, Venice, in many Tuscan cities where we see his work, that of his pupils, and that of his pupils and his imitators, and it can virtually be said that he formed his own school.<sup>33</sup>

Elsewhere he emphasised that for him chronology is not an end in itself:

If we were to seek in our book the chronology of these artists rather than that of the progress of art, we would make an effort to take into account the small differences even in placing the works of one sculptor ahead of another: but besides the fact that the years of birth and death are often uncertain, it also happens that by itself a lifespan is not enough to eliminate the minor differences in these chronologies.<sup>34</sup>

For this reason, Andrea Riccio is included among the artists of the *Quattrocento*, although his life dates (1470-1532) place him equally in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to Cicognara, Riccio's work is to be seen, above all, in the tradition of Donatello's Paduan works.

Through the *Storia* Cicognara discovered and came to appreciate *Quattrocento* sculpture for himself and his readers. The description of Donatello's statue of Saint George – a genuine guide to the enjoyment of works of art – reveals the difficulties a contemporary viewer had to overcome in order to see his way into the 'golden simplicity' of fifteenth-century art.<sup>35</sup> The anti-rhetorical attitude of this figure, whose aim is not to overwhelm the viewer, is emphasised as a decisive feature of the statue and thus implicitly of the entire art of the century:

Put yourself calmly in front of this statue. At first glance, your reaction will not be surprise: perhaps it will be unexpected indifference or disappointment because it does not live up to your expectations. But wait a moment longer and little by little comes admiration of its beauty quietly unveiling. The harmony of the parts, the golden simplicity will be discovered, and step by

<sup>33</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 86 ('[Donatello] fu l'ammirazione del secolo, e ... diffuse i suoi lumi per tutto il mondo. Egli viaggiò l'Italia e vi sparse tanta dottrina, che molti de' migliori scultori presero ad imitarlo come vero modello in particolare per l'artificio, il gusto e la diligenza nei bassi rilievi, a Roma, a Napoli, a Padova, a Venezia, in moltissimi paesi della Toscana veggonsi opere sue, de' suoi scolari, de' suoi imitatori, e può dirsi veramente che egli formasse una scuola').

<sup>34</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, Cicognara, 148–51 ('se più da noi si cercasse nel nostro libro la cronologia di questi artisti che quella dei progressi dell'arte ci faremo uno scrupolo di tener conto delle piccole differenze anche nel collocare le opere di uno scultore piuttosto avanti che dopo quelle d'un altro: ma oltre che gli anni del nascere e del morire mancano spesso di una data sicura e ben dimostrata, accade anche che uno stadio breve di vita posto a fronte della longevità di qualche artista non presenta con bastevole evidenza il modo di togliere le piccole differenze in queste cronologie').

<sup>35</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 94–8. On this specific topic see Christine Tauber, *Jacob Burckhardts 'Cicerone': eine Aufgabe zum Genießen*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000, 111–16.

step the object will acquire an ascendent power over your soul so that your enjoyment increases until it overwhelms you! (fig. 2).<sup>36</sup>



Figure 2 Donatello, *San Giorgio*, engraving in L. Cicognara, *Storia della Scultura* (2nd edn, Prato, 1823), pl. II, 6, detail.

### The sculpture of Venetian artists

While sculpture in Florence and Tuscany was very well documented, the Venetian, Lombard, and Neapolitan schools still had to be studied. For these regions, Cicognara first sought to define the influence of the Tuscan School, to detect the artists active in the region, and, if at all possible, to associate them with specific artworks.<sup>37</sup> In the Venetian sculpture of the fifteenth century, he identified two distinct schools: one in the wake of the Florentine sculptors, the other of more or less autochthonous Venetian sculptors, often known by name only or even unknown. So right at the beginning of the chapter he wrote:

<sup>36</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 97 ('Mettetevi tranquillamente dinanzi a questa statua, il vostro primo movimento non sarà la sorpresa: forse sarete stupido [sic] della vostra indifferenza medesima, poiché vi sembrerà che non rimanga adeguata alla prima vista la molta vostra aspettazione: ma trattenetevi un momento, succederà a poco a poco l'ammirazione e le bellezze si andranno tranquillamente disvelando; quell'armonia delle parti, quell'aurea semplicità vi si andranno scuoprendo, e a grado a grado l'oggetto acquisterà un potentissimo ascendente sull'animo vostro, e vi piacerà sommamente e sempre più, fino a raprirvi').

<sup>37</sup> Where this was not possible, as was the case with the *Certosa di Pavia*, Cicognara limited himself to describing the sculptures represented on the illustration plates, arranging them according to style, and here and there suggesting an attribution (Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 376–86: 377); in the Ferrarese Cicognara archive (BCAFé, I, 521, *carte* 72-6) is an anonymous description of the Certosa, which apparently did not help Cicognara with the identification of the separate sculptures.

While the Florentines spread the fame of their works all over Italy, the Venetians did not fail to create admirable works of sculpture. Some famous artists continued in the footsteps of the Tuscans active in Venice and its territory while others followed the impulses of their own genius, without servility, just as they did in the previous epoch. Thus, two distinct schools working at the same time and in different forms kept their studios active while each group formulated its own characteristic style or mode of emulation.<sup>38</sup>

Cicognara's most important reference work for Venetian art was Marcantonio Michiel's *Notizia d'opere di disegno nella prima metà del secolo XVI* – a 'very useful book for the identification of many works and their makers', as he notes in the catalogue of his book collection. Jacopo Morelli, librarian of the Biblioteca Marciana (without knowing who wrote the manuscript), had published it in 1800 and provided it with an extensive apparatus of notes.<sup>39</sup> Cicognara found further information from the Venetian guidebooks: first and foremost Francesco Sansovino's *Venetia città nobilissima* and Tommaso Temanza's *Vite*.<sup>40</sup> He himself carried out research in various archives in the city and also turned to local scholars in Vicenza, Padua, Verona, Venice, and Murano when he had questions about specific artworks or artists. From the Veronese naturalist Ignazio Bevilacqua Lazise, to name but one example, he got the detailed description of Andrea Riccio's Della Torre tomb from San Fermo Maggiore in Verona; in reiterating Bevilacqua Lazise's description of the tomb in the *Storia*, he corrected his [Bevilacqua Lazise's] iconographic interpretation of the tomb's bronze panels. The panels had been brought to Paris in 1796 where, torn from their context, they remained completely incomprehensible to the new owners, as if confirming Quatremère's theory of the

<sup>38</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, [275] ('Mentre i fiorentini avevano riempita l'Italia del grido delle opere loro, non venne meno lo spirito e il core de' Veneziani nell'eseguire mirabili lavori di scultura, continuando alcuni celebri artisti sulle orme dei Toscani che avevano operato in Venezia o nelle altre città dello stato, e seguendosi da alcuni altri l'impulso del proprio genio, senza alcun genere di servilità, siccome abbiám visto nell'epoca precedente. Cosicchè due scuole in egual tempo e in diversa forma mantennero vivi questi studj. Quasi senza confondersi tra loro, e serbandosi in qualche modo da ciascuna classe di questi artisti una forma caratteristica di stile, e d'imitazione').

<sup>39</sup> Marcantonio Michiel ed., *Notizia d'opere di disegno nella prima metà del secolo XVI. esistenti in Padova Cremona Milano Pavia Bergamo Crema e Venezia scritta da un anonimo di quel tempo*, Bassano: Remondini, 1800 (Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato*, I, 43: 'Libro utilissimo per la ricognizione di molte opere e di molti autori').

<sup>40</sup> Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare descritta in XIII libri*, Venice: I. Sansovino, 13 vols, 1581 (Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato*, II, n. 4379); Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare descritta in XIV libri. Con aggiunta di tutte le cose notabili della stessa città, fatte, et occorse dall' anno 1580 fino al presente 1663 da Giustiniano Martinioni*, Venice: Curti, 1663 (Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato*, II, n. 4380); Tommaso Temanza, *Vite de' più celebri architetti e scultori veneziani che fiorirono nel secolo XVI*, Venice: nella stamperia Palese, 1778 (Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato*, I, n. 2378).

contextuality of art: 'apart from the fact that their meanings were not recognised, no one was able to identify their author'(fig.3).<sup>41</sup>

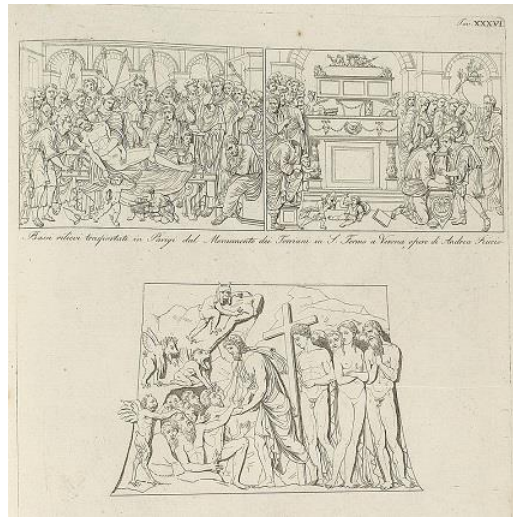


Figure 3 Andrea Riccio, three low reliefs from the *Della Torre Tomb*, engravings in L. Cicognara, *Storia della scultura* (2nd edn, Prato, 1823), pl. II, 36, detail.

Cicognara's research on fifteenth-century Venetian art laid the first foundations for further study of this field. By arranging it chronologically and providing illustrations whenever possible, Cicognara intended this chapter to be a preliminary survey of artists and artworks of fifteenth-century Venice. Beyond an inventory, he hoped to stimulate the rescue of endangered works:

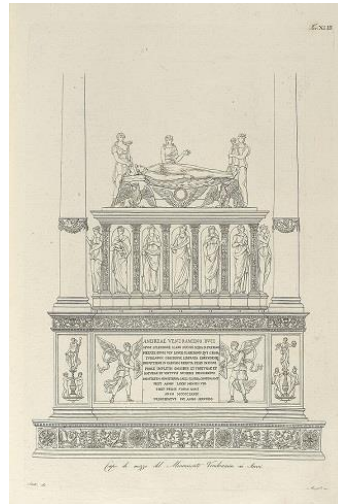
It would be a very useful and interesting thing to do, in order to prevent further neglect of such fragments, to collect and publish what remains of value and what is unknown in Venice, as a very ancient city that is rich in similar monuments and far less illustrated than Florence.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> BCAFe, I, 521, *carte* 155–57; Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 287–99: 293 ('oltre il non intendersi il loro significato, non si seppe da alcuno scorgere qual fosse il loro autore'); for the iconographic meaning, Bevilacqua relied on the official brochure of the Musée Napoléon: *Notice des principaux tableaux recueillis en Italie par les Commissaires du Gouvernement Français, Seconde partie...*, *Comprenant ceux de l'Etat de Venise et de Rome, dont l'Exposition provisoire aura lieu dans le grand Salon du Muséum, les Octidi, Nonidi et Décadi de chaque Décade, à compter du 18 Brumaire, an VII*, [Paris]: Imprimerie des Sciences et Arts, [1798], *Partie 2*, 89; see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5818590t.texteImage#>. For Quatremère's theory of the contextuality of art see Antonio Pinelli, 'Storia dell'arte e cultura della tutela: le "Lettres à Miranda" di Quatremère de Quincy', in *Ricerche di storia dell'arte*, 8.1978/79 (1979), 43–62; on the relationship between Quatremère's *Lettres* and Cicognara's *Storia*, see Barbara Steindl, 'Leopoldo Cicognaras "Storia della Scultura" und die "Lettres à Miranda" von Quatremère de Quincy', in Renate L. Colella [et al.] eds, *Pratum Romanum: Richard Krautheimer zum 100. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1997, 325–39.

<sup>42</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 337–9 ('Sarebbe singolare e interessantissima cosa, per ovviare a una maggior obliuione di tali frammenti, il raccogliere e pubblicare ciò che rimane di pregevole e

The whole chapter is to be read as a firm indictment of neglect and a call to save the endangered art treasures of the lagoon city and *pars pro toto* of Italy as a whole. Ever since Cicognara took up the position of President of the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice in 1808 he was daily concerned with the pressing questions and problems of monument conservation as a result of secularisation, decay, and demolition of ecclesiastical and secular buildings. The consequences of the art theft sanctioned by Bonaparte's peace treaties, the forced deliveries of Venetian masterpieces to Milan when Milan was capital of the Regno d'Italia, and the selling off of entire collections were a depressing daily reality for him, as was the widespread indifference towards all the – often anonymous – artworks that adorned the palaces, churches, archways, and squares of the lagoon city.

Cicognara's commitment to the preservation of the city's monuments clearly emerges from his choice of works considered. A good number were no longer in their original locations and often only fragments of them had survived. More than the art theft itself, however, Cicognara criticised the fact that Italian scholars were active stooges for the occupying forces. Some of the works he was able to save for the Academy Gallery came from the abandoned churches of Santa Maria dei Servi and Santa Maria della Carità, while the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo became a refuge for tombs and altars from abandoned or demolished churches and monasteries: for example, an altar and the tomb of Andrea Vendramin from Santa Maria dei Servi (fig. 4, 5, ).<sup>43</sup>



Figures 4 and 5 Tomb of Andrea Vendramin from Santa Maria dei Servi, transferred to SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice, engravings in L. Cicognara, *Storia della scultura* (2nd edn, Prato, 1823), pl. II, 42, 43.

inosservato a cagione di esempio in Venezia come città vetustissima e ricca di simili monumenti e molto meno illustrata di Firenze').

<sup>43</sup> Here are just a few more examples: Venice, S. Maria dei Frari, portal of the Corner chapel (Wolfgang Wolters, *La scultura veneziana gotica: (1300 - 1460)*, Venice: Alfieri, 1976, n. 234, fig. 783, 796 and 797; Venice S. Maria dei Miracoli, portal, Madonna with Child, signed Pirgoteles (Giovanni Giorgio Lascaris); Victoria and Albert Museum, London formerly Scuola della Misericordia: Bartolomeo Buon (1445-1450), *Virgin and Child with kneeling Members of the Guild of the Misericordia*.

Cicognara's *J'accuse* – quoted here at length – is an appeal to the new government(s) of Venice to assume responsibility for the treasures that have fallen into their hands and thus save them from indifference, greed, and complete decay:

But the Venetians, who were once able to muster such magnificent and generous efforts, are now weakened by the long course of human affairs. They have no more *patria*, no more independence, and can no longer sustain the fading remains of their glory. Without the support of public funds and the force of a providential liberal government, these relics of old greatness would also perish, as they cannot be sustained by sterile promises or vain lamentations. However, if to the honour of provincial authorities we have seen memorable tombstones erected, by means of which posterity has kept alive the memory of monuments that those authorities preserved or erected ... , what memorial should be dedicated to those under whose regime so many famous temples and palaces were destroyed, monuments dispersed, sepulchres uncovered, tombstones and precious marbles stolen, ashes profaned, libraries and museums exiled from the splendour of the palace, spacious and elegant buildings obstructed, public squares deformed, and in the space of a few years all the fruit of the sweat, genius, and liberality of many noble generations was lost?<sup>44</sup>

**Barbara Steindl** is an academic collaborator at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut. Her publications and current research interests lie in Italian nineteenth-century art, the history of art libraries, art historiography, and Francesco Leopoldo Cicognara's writings and library.

steindl@khi.fi.it



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

<sup>44</sup> Cicognara, *Storia*, IV, 350–1 ('Ma i veneziani che un giorno poterono far sforzi così generosi, affievoliti dal corso troppo lungo delle umane vicende, per cui cessarono dall'aver una patria, e un'indipendenza, non possono più stender la mano a sorreggere gli avanzi cadenti della loro gloria, e senza il sussidio dei pubblici mezzi, e senza la forza di un provido governo liberale che accorra in loro ajuto, perirebbero anche questi resti di antica grandezza nazionale, che non possono sostenersi per sterili voti o inutili querele. Se ad onore però dei presidi e dei governatori delle provincie noi abbiam viste erette lapidi memorabili, medianti le quali la posterità ha mantenuto viva la riconoscenza per quei monumenti che durante il loro ministero si sono conservati od eretti, o a miglior forma ridotti, qual lapide non meriterebbero presso dei posteri coloro, sotto il cui regime si fossero atterrati tanti famosi templi e palagi, i monumenti dispersi, scoperti, i sepolcri, rubate le lapidi e i marmi preziosi, profanate le ceneri, esiliate dallo splendor della regia le biblioteche e i musei, ostrutti gli atrj spaziosi ed eleganti, rese deformi le pubbliche piazze, e nel giro di pochi anni perduto quanto era frutto del sudore, dell'ingegno e della liberalità di molte auguste generazioni').