

In Chapter 3, Osnabrugge unscrambles a series of artists close in name and oeuvre, focusing upon Hendrick de Somer. The next chapter is devoted to Matthias Stom. Here, better plates would have helped the reader appreciate this artist's individual approach. The concluding chapter is devoted to the experiences of five Netherlandish immigrant painters in Naples. Like the other sections, this one abounds in documentation, useful bibliography, and a fresh approach. At a time when most students seem to wish to study the art of tomorrow, it is reassuring to come across a publication that maintains such a welcome sense of individual discovery and proportion. One can only congratulate Dr. Osnabrugge for having shed light on a still-difficult area of knowledge, illuminating the gloomy, complex Northern art emanating from cavernous Naples.

In view of its excellence, this book has two regrettable flaws, neither the author's fault. The first lies in the present publication's far-too-small format, which should have been at least twice its present size. Could the Fonds Général de l'Université de Genève or the Amsterdam Studies in the Dutch Golden Age have seen to an appropriate subsidy or found a more suitable publisher? The 265 text pages and the 89 black-and-white illustrations are hard to read. Of the twenty "color plates," the less said the better. Since so many of the visual Rubens references are well known to the general reader, these could have been omitted. A minor concern are the little errors in English, which are no more than mildly irritating or amusing and could all have been caught at a single sitting by any editor brought up in that language. Moreover, the title seems unnecessarily cumbersome.

Colin Eisler, *NYU Institute of Fine Arts*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2020.141

Buontalenti e Le Nôtre: Geometria del giardino da Pratolino a Versailles.

Amelio Fara.

Biblioteca dell'“Archivum Romanicum,” Serie I: Storia, Letteratura, Paleografia 477.
Florence: Olschki, 2017. viii + 144 pp. + 69 color pls. €29.

The first of the two chapters contained in this book addresses the design method of Bernardo Buontalenti, the multitalented military engineer and stage and garden designer responsible for the park of the Medici villa at Pratolino, commissioned by Francesco I and left incomplete at the grand duke's death, in 1587. The second chapter compares the work of Buontalenti in Tuscany to that of André Le Nôtre, a century later, in France and Turin. The purpose of the comparison is to establish a precedent and argue for the direct descent of some of Le Nôtre's geometric schemes from the Florentine designer's work, which he may have seen while visiting Italy in 1679. Fara argues that Buontalenti made use of the accelerated perspective for the design of Pratolino's *stradone degli zampilli* (alley of fountains), rendered in the famous

mid-seventeenth-century etching of Stefano della Bella. Pratolino's layout was irretrievably altered in the nineteenth century, but Buontalenti's method survives in a less-known, late sixteenth-century villa located at Poggiofrancoli. Here, too, Buontalenti's accelerated perspective connects garden and architecture, forcing the supporting walls of the external staircase and access ramp to converge toward the building. This method anticipates Francesco Borromini's gallery of Palazzo Spada, built a few decades later in Rome according to a similar optical illusion.

Pratolino's design would have been known in France thanks to the diffusion of the description by Francesco de' Vieri (1586)—included in the first of the book's six appendixes—and of the etchings of Stefano della Bella. The author speculates that the latter might in fact derive from lost drawings by Buontalenti. He goes on to suggest that the rendering of the alley of the fountains would have been Le Nôtre's inspiration for a detail of the garden at Versailles. The most apparent similarity would be the way in which the outer diameter of the Latona fountain at Versailles forms the base of a triangle whose center is located in the courtyard adjacent to the front facade of the palace, and it is this triangle that also determines the diameter of the intermediate circular water basin. The same technique seems to have been used in the design of the Park of Racconigi in Turin, but neither in Italy nor at Versailles, the author concedes, did Le Nôtre make use of the kind of accelerated perspective still visible at Poggiofrancoli. Also, there is no proof that Le Nôtre actually visited Pratolino. This would make the book's premise less convincing and the indebtedness of Le Nôtre to Buontalenti also a matter of conjecture.

The book's strength lies in its gathering of primary sources, most of these already published—though not recently—with the exception of a newly discovered eighteenth-century plan of Versailles. The book is enriched by a discussion of the watermarks that distinguish the paper produced in Italy from paper produced in France and in the Piedmont region, used by Italian and French draftsmen, respectively, for their drawings. These discussions, contained in two of the appendixes, lead to close-up photographs of paper details, from drawings housed at the Uffizi and from documents in private collections. The main purpose of these sections is to argue that the newly found map of Versailles included in the volume was likely drawn on paper produced in Turin. None of these details, however, are addressed in the main text or are used to corroborate the main argument presented by the author. The high quality of the publication is typical of Olschki's handsome volumes, as is that of the exquisite color images. These, however, are not accompanied by captions; instead, the captions are listed in a separate section sandwiched between the illustrations and the appendixes. This layout makes the to-and-fro between text, images, and captions quite cumbersome for the reader.

The audience is surely an academic one of landscape and architectural historians, as the many designers and contemporaries of the two protagonists appear in the text without introduction. Quotations from original primary sources in French are not translated, and neither is the biography of Le Nôtre included among the appendixes.

Finally, the author's minute investigation of morphological correspondences between a Florentine and a French garden, as well as his insistence on the primacy of the plan and on a static interpretation of the latter at the expense of movement, so paramount at Versailles as at Pratolino, is reminiscent of a landscape historiographic tradition rooted in the first half of the twentieth century and responsible, in part, for the modernist ostracism of history and historical precedents from design education.

Raffaella Fabiani Giannetto, *Harvard University*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2020.142

Cut in Alabaster: A Material of Sculpture and Its European Traditions 1330–1530. Kim W. Woods.

Distinguished Contributions to the Study of the Arts in the Burgundian Netherlands 3. London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2018. ii + 418 pp. €150.

Alabaster sculpture is a highly engaging topic. The sculpted white semi-transparent stone is still as attractive today as it was centuries ago. *Cut in Alabaster: A Material of Sculpture and Its European Traditions 1330–1530* focuses on the main regions where alabaster artworks were made from the fourteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth century in Western Europe. The author's original approach consists in her attention to alabaster sculpture made in England, France, the Low Countries, and Spain. In this way, she sheds a new light both on the influence of these different centers on one another and on their resemblances and differences.

The heavily illustrated book is structured in nine chapters followed by an extensive bibliography. The first chapter deals with the geological aspects and the use of alabaster as a sculptural material. It pays attention to the late medieval confusion between alabaster and white marble, arguing that there was no difference in status between the two materials and that there was an interchangeability between them. Furthermore, the chapter deals with the challenging supply of good-quality blocks in Northern Europe. Some concise attention is dedicated to sculpting and polishing techniques, followed by a more elaborate part on polychromy, stressing the fact that late Gothic alabaster sculptures were as a rule either minimally or partially painted at least until the mid-sixteenth century, with the arrival of Italian Renaissance ideas.

In the second chapter, the author deals with the sculptors working in alabaster and the coinciding trade in their works of art. The court of France was a trendsetter in the taste for lustrous white materials. As the use of alabaster rose at the end of the fourteenth century in France, its application in the Low Countries from 1440 until the first decades of the sixteenth century remained rare. Woods proves, however, by means of various cases, the undeniable pioneering role of sculptors from both the Low Countries and the extreme north of France in using alabaster as a sculpting material in Paris as well as Spain.