

as other depictions of the male body tied down with ropes, in scenes from mythology or the Inquisition. Another drawing that is also catalogued as Neapolitan in the present catalogue, but was previously among the few dated to the artist's Roman period, depicts the head of a warrior in profile (c.1625–30; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid; no.59).⁶ It invites viewers to reflect on the more classicising, 'virtuoso' elements of Ribera's style. Whether it was drawn in the Eternal City or in Naples, the warrior of the drawing speaks the language of Rome and the school of Guido Reni, just as the *St Thomas* (c.1607–09; Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest; no.1) recalls works by the Carracci. This catalogue and the exhibition it accompanied open the door to new questions. Both also give rise to a more profound and complex understanding of Ribera and his achievement.

1 G. Porzio and D.A. D'Alessandro: 'Ribera between Rome and Naples: new documentary evidence', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 157 (2015), pp.682–83.

2 G. Papi: 'Jusepe de Ribera a Roma e il Maestro del giudizio di Salomone', *Paragone* 53 (2002), pp.21–43.

3 See F. Cappelletti: 'Cadere al romore, cogliere le occasioni: Note sui collezionisti romani di Caravaggio', in *idem*, T.C. Salomon and C. Terzaghi, eds: exh. cat. *Caravaggio 2025*, Rome (Palazzo Barberini) 2025, pp.49–59; to be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of this Magazine.

4 M. Maccherini: 'Una traccia sul topos dell'artista sregolato: Vasari, Mancini e Bellori su lacone, Ribera e Caravaggio', *Horti Esperidum* 12 (2022), pp.399–411.

5 G. Finaldi, ed.: exh. cat. *José de Ribera. The Drawings: Catalogue raisonné*, Madrid (Museo Nacional del Prado), Seville (Fundación Focus) and Dallas (Meadows Museum) 2016–17; reviewed by Mark McDonald in this Magazine, 159 (2017), pp.423–25.

6 *Ibid.*, no.1.

The Mystery of Master Fortezza: The Šibenik Engraver's European Legacy

Edited by Marina Lambaša and Flora Turner-Vučetić. 232 pp. incl. numerous col. + b. & w. ill. (Šibenik Municipal Museum and Klovičevi dvori Gallery, Zagreb), €20. ISBN 978-953-6844-89-0.

by JOSIP BELAMARIĆ

An exhibition held last autumn at Klovičevi dvori Gallery, Zagreb (closed November 2024) brought together the entire known oeuvre of Orazio

Fortezza (1530/35–1596). A lasting outcome is this scholarly catalogue, which presents new ideas about this Renaissance engraver, goldsmith, painter and miniaturist – and, perhaps, cartographer – whose works are dispersed among museums in Florence, Venice and London as well as his native Šibenik. The catalogue is published in Croatian and, except two of the four essays, which are provided in Italian, all the texts are translated into English. The exhibition focused on the brass ewers, plates and washbasins that Fortezza made for the patrician families of Venice – including the Foscari, Grimani, Dolfin, Michiel, Tagliapietra, Cicogna and Gauro. They are among the most precious artefacts to have been created in sixteenth-century Dalmatia. Probably intended for display, the plates measure almost 50 centimetres in diameter, weigh over 2.5 kilograms

and are decorated with ambitious narrative compositions. With only one or two exceptions, Fortezza signed and dated the works, which was unusual for engraved brass vessels at this date.

The catalogue begins with introductory remarks by Željko Krnčević, the director of the Šibenik Municipal Museum, and Angus Patterson, Senior Curator of Metalwork at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A), followed by chapters written by a number of foreign and local experts. Marina Lambaša, who has curated the exhibition with Flora Turner-Vučetić, provides both a review of Fortezza's life and career in the context of humanist scholarship and Renaissance art in Šibenik in the sixteenth century, and an up-to-date synopsis of scholarship on the problems presented by his clients, style and iconography. Turner-

4. Display plate with Foscari arms, engraved by Orazio Fortezza. c.1560. Brass, engraved and inlaid with pitch, diameter 47.5 cm. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).



5. Detail of Fig.4.

Vučetić, the exhibition's lead scholar, sums up the series of new ideas that she developed in a recent article in this Magazine.¹ This published a spectacular plate that she found in store at the V&A and identified as a work by Fortezza, made in about 1560 for a member of the Foscari family (cat. no.31; Fig.4). It incorporates three portrait medallions, one a self-portrait with the initials OF (Fig.5): this depicts Fortezza looking self-confident with unruly hair, a well-trimmed short beard and wearing a shirt with an embroidered lace collar underneath a studio smock. The portrait is consistent with his age – he was probably in his late twenties – at that time. The three medallions are analysed in the catalogue by Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo, who provides additional confirmation for Turner-Vučetić's attribution. He discusses in particular the medallion with the initials AM, which Turner-Vučetić argued depicted the Croatian-born artist Andrea Meldola (1522–63), known in Italy as Andrea Schiavone ('the Slav'). On the basis of

sixteenth-century descriptions as well as paintings and drawings of him, Dal Pozzolo concludes that the identification is reliable. He also points out that the depictions of the battles on the plate are connected with prints by Schiavone and suggests that he might have been commissioned to design it.

In a catalogue essay that compares Fortezza's ewers with ones 'in the Fortezza style', Turner-Vučetić argues that the latter 'were likely cast in one of the foundries of the Venetian Republic, with master engravers subsequently adding decorations to order' (p.210). Fortezza too was almost certainly involved only in the engraving and not the casting of his works, and it can be assumed in addition that he obtained the ewers, plates and basins in ready-made 'smooth' form from Germany (probably Nuremberg) via Venice. This means that he was paid for the *ingegno* displayed in his engraving, with which he made pieces of applied art of the highest quality.

Fortezza's decorative repertoire combines grotesques, scrollwork with ornamental tendrils and Mannerist cartouches and arabesques. In the sixteenth century there was an explosion in the popularity of these motifs. A distinctive characteristic of this innovative and complex decorative phenomenon in Mannerist culture is the grotesques, which aim to arouse not only curiosity and wonder but also the surprise and laughter that were, according to Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1511), an antidote to tedium, together with exhilaration at the ability of the artist to generate such feelings. In Fortezza's hands such ornament had a potency that was unparalleled by anything being created at the time on the shores of Croatia.

His most eloquent compositional invention is surely on the plate that bears the Foscari coat of arms, which depicts the Battle of Pharsalus fought between Caesar and Pompey. He conceived it as a circular *melée* of horsemen – a chaotic battle in a maelstrom, the hand-to-hand fighting



no longer guided by any strategy. It may not be an exaggeration to imagine Fortezza's claustrophobic equestrian clash as a reflection of the artist's experiences in Šibenik, an outpost of Western civilisation that his fellow Croatian Antun Vrančić had compared to Sparta. Fortezza would have seen battles that took place around Šibenik; the town was widely known for the bravery with which it fended off attackers. The composition is unique. Seldom did a Renaissance artist so ingeniously solve the challenge of composing a complex narrative in the circular form of a plate. Fortezza imposed coherence on the plates he decorated in a number of different ways. Sometimes he employed radial symmetry; at other times he used concentric circles and friezes that exploit centrifugal or centripetal forces in the organisation of the scene; or he would create balanced groups that are divided from each other by cartouches, bands and wreaths while filling up the edges with secondary scenes, figures or decorative motifs. The coat of arms of the client always occupies the focal point of the composition, in the centre of the plate.

In the first of their two catalogue essays, Michele Asolati and Cristina Crisafulli provide a detailed analysis of what they call the 'etymology' of Fortezza's engraved *all'antica* medallions, pointing to possible sources in the works of such artists as Battista del Moro (1515–73) and Enea Vico (1523–67). Nonetheless, scholarship has still not established what were the originals on which he might have drawn. Some of the motifs, such as those depicting the twelve emperors of Suetonius on one plate (no.1; Fig.6), suggest a northern European influence. In their second essay, an analysis of the sources of Fortezza's iconographic repertoire and decorative system, Asolati and Crisafulli argue that he 'spent part of the period of his training, if not his career, in Venice and its surrounding area between the 1550s and 1560s, perhaps under the auspices of the Venetian aristocracy' (p.206). Judging from the dates that he engraved on



them, Fortezza produced eight of the ewers, basins and plates that were on show in a relatively short period – between 1555 (the British Museum plate referred to above) and 1562, the date of a plate with the Dolfin family coat of arms (V&A; no.29). But such a short timespan raises a series of questions. Does it imply that his involvement with the Venetian patriciate was suddenly broken off, and, if so, why?

Archival evidence provides no support for the suggestion that Fortezza was absent from Šibenik for any length of time, when he might have been living in Venice. He is first mentioned in Šibenik on 17th August 1555, and his presence there can be regularly tracked from 1563 in documents that refer to him as a witness in court proceedings and as a wealthy businessman trading in land and property and engaging

6. Display plate, engraved by Orazio Fortezza. 1555. Brass, engraved and damascened with silver, diameter 48.3 cm. (British Museum, London).

in financial dealings, alongside his artistic pursuits. A long stay in Venice is unlikely, since in 1558 Fortezza appraised work on Bishop Lučić-Štaflić's tomb in Šibenik Cathedral, which he may have designed. In 1560 he took on Martin Kolunić Rota (c.1550–83) as an apprentice for six years. By 1568 Rota was in Vienna, making prints of prominent figures, and he later became a leading engraver and print publisher in Venice, Graz, Vienna and Prague. These dates raise the possibility that during his apprenticeship Rota may have collaborated to some extent with his master on such works as the Dolfin plate, dated 1562. This is just one of a series of new issues that this elegant exhibition and its catalogue have raised.

1 F. Turner-Vučetić: 'Expanding the oeuvre of the master metalsmith Orazio Fortezza', THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE 166 (2024), pp.570–79.