

Books of Special Interest

Egyptian Art

THE ART OF EGYPT THROUGH THE AGES. Edited by Sir E. DENISON ROSS. New York: William Edwin Rudge. 1931. \$15.

Reviewed by ASHTON SANBORN
Boston Museum of Fine Arts

BETTER than most of its kind, this book fulfils the intention of its editor in giving a comprehensive survey of art in Egypt from primitive beginnings in the fifth millennium B. C. through the great eras of splendor and completely developed native culture during the Old Kingdom or Pyramid Age, the Middle Kingdom or Feudal Period, the New Empire, when Egypt extended her dominion eastward into Asia as far as the Euphrates river, and onward into Mohammedan times. The dissolution of Egyptian art is seen during the later centuries of foreign invasions when the vigor of native social and political life declined under the usurpation of power by Ethiopians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans to disappear entirely during the Coptic period and to be superseded by the alien Mesopotamian culture of the conquering Arabs in the seventh century A. D., which imposed not only a new language upon the indigenous inhabitants of the Nile Valley, but also, for a second time in their history, a new religion.

These changes are definitely, even dramatically, expressed by Muslim monuments of art in Egypt. How completely the old culture of more than four thousand years duration had vanished is forcefully indicated by a comparison of the mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut built in the fifteenth century B.C. at Deir el Bahari and the mausoleum of Qayt-Bay at Cairo built in the fifteenth century A.D., both distinguished for their fine architectural proportions and for the exquisite details of their decoration; or by the further comparison of the massive, unadorned magnificence of the Great Pyramid with the impressively great and simple, though unhappily less enduring, mosque of Sultan Hasan.

The plan of the book is a series of short chapters on the different periods written by

competent specialists, supplemented by an abundance of illustrations. Out of over 350 pages, only eighty are text. Inasmuch as the survey covers about six thousand years of artistic activity in the various fields of architecture, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, and metal work, the reader obviously cannot expect more than enough information to enable him to examine the illustrations intelligently. Although drastically restricted, a number of the essays are admirable examples of *multum in parvo*, and there are few misleading statements. However, Mr. Peet describes the tomb of Menes as "the one great building which has survived" from the First Dynasty. As a matter of fact, scarcely a trace of the superstructure of this tomb now remains in the edge of the desert near Naqada. Mr. Hall makes the amazing blunder of assigning to "the chief treasures of Cairo," the famous pair statue of Menkaura (Mycerinus) and his Queen, having apparently mistaken the plaster cast on exhibition in the Cairo Museum for the original, which is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Vigorous exception must be taken to Mr. Hall's opinion that Egyptian art is "absurd" in its convention of drawing, which disregards perspective and shows different parts of the same human body now in profile, now in full front view. The conventions of drawing familiar to the modern world are still merely conventions, and not necessarily the best that might be devised. Ancient Egyptian artists used a different idiom of expression, no more illogical than our own. As realists they sought to give both plan and elevation in one and the same drawing, "to see around" the figure represented. When we understand their aim and have taught our eyes to apprehend their unfamiliar vocabulary, we shall unhesitatingly accord to the great artists of ancient Egypt the supreme credit which is their due as masters of line, of composition and design, and of surpassing technique in the manipulation of materials.

The examples chosen for illustration are for the most part good, although many poor views of Old Kingdom sculpture have been unfortunately admitted. The half-

tone cuts are consistently excellent; the colotype plates consistently bad. Indeed the latter are of such amazingly inferior quality, not only in the printing which is so heavy and dark as entirely to obliterate details, but, in most instances, in the fantastic photography with its bizarre lighting and ugly shadows, that a person unfamiliar with the subjects shown would be actually prejudiced against objects which rank among the greatest artistic achievements of mankind.

D'Annunzio

GABRIEL THE ARCHANGEL. By FEDERICO NARDELLI. New York: HARCOURT, BRACE & CO. 1931. \$3.50.

Reviewed by GIUSEPPE PREZZOLINI
Columbia University

STRONGLY object to the easy way the author of this book, Federico Nardelli, has treated intimate relations of living persons. The fact that one is a famous man should not allow others to peer into the family and personal affairs, and, even less, to intrude in the families and in the affairs of those men or women who were related to the famous man. Indiscretion is permitted only after a lapse of time, when the man and relatives and their sons have disappeared.

The rights of history are incontestable, but history needs time to consider the facts and must possess a human viewpoint. Common sense has always distinguished history from gossip. History can use a certain amount of gossip, which is then taken up in a superior atmosphere. When gossip uses facts of history it becomes debased. Hegel said that if one cannot be a great man to his valet, the fault is not with the great man but with the valet.

Mr. Nardelli has been a loyal follower of d'Annunzio. By the will and under the direction of the man whom he humorously calls Archangel, he was Minister of Public Instruction in Fiume, the most important position he was ever able to attain in the affairs of Italy. And I seem to feel, throughout this book, the envy and rage of the literary failure against the successful man.

Why are we interested in d'Annunzio? He is a poet; he was a dominant personality in a period of Italian life, and one of the foremost personalities in European literature. His loves, his tricks, his egotism, his treasuries have no interest in themselves. There are many like him, more or less successful in love, fortunate in life, and employing methods without morals. We relegate their biographies to corners of salons, or, if a scandal arises, to the chronicle of tabloids.

I am not a follower of d'Annunzio. I might even add that I have always been in the opposite literary field. I think that only four or five of his poems will remain in Italian literature. I detest his padded, ornamental, superficial style. I believe that his influence has been pernicious to Italian youth. But I do not feel called upon to publish his love letters, the list of his debts, the names and portraits of the women who lived with him, nor his too close relations with chambermaids. I refuse to consider the laundry list of a poet a literary document.

Much more destructive of d'Annunzio than this book was the essay of Croce. He qualified d'Annunzio as a "poet of sensuality." In this way he pierced his conceited, patriotic poetry. Thus he abolished his morality of superman. And he left d'Annunzio in his own field, king of a limited kingdom. True, equitable criticism contained in the boundaries of literature is more effective than personal attacks.

Now that I have spoken as a man of today, let me speak as a man of tomorrow. The victims of this book have gone. They are only names and symbols. Sons also have gone and the memoirs of their mothers and fathers hurt no one. I say, then, that this book is very, very interesting. There is a vein of humor throughout. It is a fine piece of reverential irreverence. D'Annunzio is called the Archangel, but the tone of *maestoso* generally ends in *comico*. The superman is often an underman. His style has been imitated in a humorous fashion.

I find it difficult to give a suitable quotation, so full is the book of stinging episodes, of keen anecdotes, of humor, and of jokes. Which shall I choose? The one of the Marquise of Rudini, whose conquest was made while she was in a bath? The adulterous wife, whom d'Annunzio makes appear insane in the eyes of the husband? The figure of the vulgar millionaire from Argentina who came to buy d'Annunzio's villa and the poet himself, had not d'Annunzio gotten the best of him? Or shall I take the episode of Tchitcherine who was invited to partake of a supper at Gardone and then in

very exquisite terms informed that he would be decapitated? One should really cite the entire book! On the whole, however, the general impression is not so bad as the author would have wished it to be.

From the moment he first saw light at Pescara to these last days he is spending in Gardone, the hours of adventure in the life of d'Annunzio are revealed. His retirement after so much adventure is, after all, only a custom of Abruzzo, his native land. Even today, gentlemen who feel that they have lived sufficiently, go behind closed doors. They are never seen by anyone, and are cared for by some faithful, secretive servant. Thus their life, surrounded only by the memory of their past, is closed. And in the case of d'Annunzio, what memories! The women who loved him, from the princess to the actress, from the woman of the fields to the waitress, the friends who surrounded him and the crowds which acclaimed him, the soldiers who saw him as a glorious hero on land, sea, and air, the people of two nations, Italy and France, who heard him speak and who read his works in their own language!

The general tone of the book is somewhat ironical. The exploits of the poet are not always the most beautiful, nor are they at all times delicate or in good taste.

However, I cannot refrain from making two observations. Notwithstanding his treasons and his abandonments, the women whom the poet loved never became his enemies. Both his wife and mistresses remember him without rancor. It is true that he has known how to transform his every word into gold, and he has unpitifully taken from Government as well as from private citizens fantastic sums which he has, with princely fantasy, scattered throughout the world. Has he not been the yindicator of the poets of the whole world, from Homer to Leopardi, who lived in poverty and to whom even charity was denied?

These are the reasons why, when I finished reading this book, I did not feel inflamed with indignation against d'Annunzio. To confess the truth, I did feel disdain for his biographer, Nardelli. As for the translator, Arthur Livingston, I hasten to say that in his translation he has greatly tempered the more scandalous points of the original, and of his own has added that pleasant, refined irony that gives spice to the book. Let us say, then, that if the book has any merit, it is due to Livingston.

Charles A. Dana

WHEN DANA WAS THE SUN. A Study of Personal Journalism. By CHARLES J. ROSEBAULT. New York: Robert M. McBride. 1931. \$3.75.

THIS brightly written book—books about the *Sun* cannot help being brightly written—fills in its unpretentious way a valuable niche. For one thing, it is a better balanced biography of Dana than the authorized life produced years ago by James Grant Wilson, which stupidly gave most of its space to Dana's Civil War career; for another, it embodies a mass of illuminating office gossip and observation, each item insignificant in itself yet making an illuminating whole. Mr. Rosebault saw Dana at close range from the city room. Indeed, he twice had the felicity of being discharged by Dana, both discharges being taken in a Pickwickian spirit. "Mr. Lord," said Dana to his managing editor when he suddenly noted one day that a man he had ordered dropped had simply been moved to a new desk, "I have come to the conclusion that I am the only man on the *Sun* who can't discharge anybody."

The author has no illusions about Dana's consistency or principles. He indicates a truth that has often been ignored: that much of Dana's seeming perversity and cynicism was simply his editorial instinct for stirring up a rumpus. When he used the Irish agitation to attack England, subtly exploited anti-Semitic prejudices, attacked labor organizations, ferociously beset Cleveland, and gave an occasional hand to Tammany heelers, there was not much use in discussing the question of his sincerity; he was creating news values and keeping his public awake. Mr. Rosebault also indicates how he stamped his personality on the *Sun*, and created the marvelous atmosphere of loyalty and zeal which made the very office boys ready to die in the breach if they could make a single column brighter. His recipe included a frequent and judicious use of praise, with very little blame. When blame came, the office was hushed as for a Judgment Day. All Dana's personality is described by anecdote and quotation—his encyclopedic knowledge, his scintillations, his Mephistophelian vein, his brusqueness. For good measure, a brief sketch of that brilliant Irish-American journalist, W. M. Laffan, is thrown in at the end.



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Foreign Literature

Out of Scandinavia

SKÁLHOLT, JOMFRU RAGNHEIDUR.
By GUDMUNDUR KAMBAN. Copenhagen:
Hasselbach. 1931. 2 vols.

Reviewed by SIGNE TOKSVIG

ONE believes Gudmundur Kamban, when he says in his preface to "Skálholt," that he has taken a thousand big pages of notes from the archives in various countries for this historic novel of the seventeenth century in Iceland. But, far more important for the reader outside Iceland, one believes in the people whom he has recreated. Before the first chapter is over, one feels: I can safely give myself to this book, it isn't going to cheat, it is a piece of new life that I am going to be able to live, piquantly different in setting and psychology from our own, and yet credibly alike in the depths of it. And the promise of the first chapter is kept. The book is real and alive clear through.

You have no choice but to believe in the young heroine, Ragnheidur; you feel her beauty and her strength of character, and you feel the anguish that pierces her, when she learns that Dathi, the man whom she secretly loves, has had to do with another woman. Ragnheidur's father is the Bishop of Iceland, a stern, just, powerful man, and Dathi is his favorite among the many young men who belong to the almost feudal establishment. The bishop has even made Dathi his daughter's tutor, but for her marriage he has definite plans, not including the tutor. Ragnheidur, determined as one of the Fates, soon forces the brave Dathi to explain that his misstep was due to his despair at her unattainability. Whereupon she discloses her feelings for him, and the school hours become hours of love. There is gossip. A jealous rival breathes the gossip to the bishop. Horrified, the father realizes that the gossip has spread so far and so unseizably that there is only one way in which he believes she can clear herself. It is the traditional way of a public oath. She must stand up on the church floor before the whole congregation and swear that she is *virgo intacta*, a virgin free of the touch of man, and six good men and true must stand up and swear with her that they believe her. The oath will be surrounded by the holiest pomp of the church. Will Ragnheidur do this, her father asks.

Ragnheidur blanches. She loves her father and would do anything to save him pain. But she shrinks from this, she begs him not to force her to this public shame. He insists, and she yields.

The pride of Ragnheidur in going through with this, the tense solemnity of the scene, nothing could be better done. And life then goes on as before, only that Ragnheidur and Dathi are not now so careful. Who would suspect them now? The girl's pure strength supports the man, who has had to give in to her, though it means breaking his promise to the bishop about not giving even the shadow of an excuse to gossip. He writhes in spiritual torture when the bishop insists on ordaining him, to give him a living as a pastor. But he dare not refuse.

Then, not long enough after the virgin's oath, a kinswoman of Ragnheidur, Helga Magnúsdóttir, a living saga woman charges her with being pregnant. The girl coolly admits it. This is the high point of the book and one is made to share some of Helga Magnúsdóttir's terror and amazement. How Ragnheidur is able to explain things satisfactorily to her kinswoman, and how Helga takes her home and shields her from all prying eyes, brings to a conclusion the first volume.

The "Jomfru Ragnheidur" part of "Skálholt" is not, however, a first volume in the sense that it cannot be read separately. It can. It is full of other characters besides those mentioned, all vivid. It differs from its nearest fictional relatives, Sigrid Undset's novels, in its clarity, brevity, and dry sense of humor. But the unifying element in it is the story of the beginning of love and its first white-hot flame in strong, pure, passionate natures. Gudmundur Kamban writes this with such feeling, such sureness of touch, such forceful simplicity, and such complete absence of sentimentality, that even had there been no second volume, of Ragnheidur's love tested by life, we should still be deeply grateful to him.

The second volume is the somber aftermath, the long winter after the brief Icelandic summer. Ragnheidur, sheltered during her pregnancy by a woman relative of the same indomitable temper, bears her child, and now her father, the stern, righteous, autocratic Bishop has to be told. The two pastors who bear the news to him ride

as if under a heavy weight; the awful weight of Ragnheidur's apparent perjury. The strength and delicacy with which Kamban describes the fulfilment of their task and its effect on the Bishop are unsurpassed. Ragnheidur's return to her father, for the confronting of those two strong natures, her long intense ordeal of separation from her lover and child, her pathetic death so unsentimentally told—one is forced to the sagas for comparisons. It is the same mastered ardor, the ice-clad volcano, the themes of life and death, love and conflict of wills, treated with terrible simplicity. The tragedy is almost more than one can bear, and yet one must read to the ironic end, where the Bishop, who loved his daughter and killed her, draws a sigh of relief: he has succeeded in getting her reputation cleared by royal decree.

If Ragnheidur's lover does not return except for their passionately tragic parting, and if Icelandic legalism takes up a good deal of space, that is history. Some of the history and some of the characters, vividly drawn though they be, may not seem very relevant to Ragnheidur. They are not supposed to be. Although this second volume closes the life of the Bishop's daughter, the story of her father and son will be told in another volume. But Kamban has given Ragnheidur such appealing life that her fate seems more important than Iceland's. It is a book whose keen freshness and hard, sure mastery are not easily forgotten.

A Note from Athens

By GEORGE PANOU

PRESENT-DAY Greek writers—and these are many—are verily an unhappy lot. They have to put up with a very slowly declining public indifference to reading, with a language not only not definitely stabilized but also read by nearly the smallest single group of people of the entire continent, with the shocking competition of the ubiquitous and superficial newspaper and of the still more superficial French book. But, well, why go on with my lugubrious tale?

Why go on when all these have not daunted that prolific Zantiote who takes such a queer pleasure in putting his address at the end of every novel of his? I mean Gregory Ksenopoulos, the ablest and busiest of the prose writers of contemporary Hellas. Recently he was elected a member of the Literature Section of the Athens Academy, the creation of General Theodore Pangalos, the one-time quasi-Dictator of this land of ours. This Academy is, by the way, a new institution and, at best, a gentlemen's club. What it may become is, of course, quite another story. Another event for him must surely have been the recent turning into a fair film, by a local company, of one of his earlier and better novels, "Stella Violantis," a love story of considerable amusement and modernity. (I hope that my own translation into English of "Laura," another one of Mr. Ksenopoulos's novels, will soon see the light.)

The literary and theatrical circles and, in fact, most reading Greeks, are delighted with the laurels won in the States by Marika Kotopoulis, the fine emotional actress.

No note from Athens should ever end without a word about our politics. The Republic is now seven years old, serene but very, very poor, a little lazy, and last but not least, in the arms of a "nurse" that is not so very wonderful after all in times of peace. I mean Venizelos.

"Rummaging in one's shelves, almost at random," says Allan N. Monkhouse, in the *Manchester Guardian*, "one finds few classics which can be said to begin inappropriately. True to the tradition of the historical novel, 'Romola' starts with a 'proem' which doesn't carry us far into the story, but in 'Middlemarch' we get to Dorothea in the first line; it may be recalled, too, that Jane Austen began her famous novel with 'Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich.' The death of the old bishop and the discomfiture of his son, the archdeacon, mark the opening of 'Barchester Towers'; 'Jane Eyre' begins with Jane and the shocking family Reed. 'Lord Jim' with a description you could hardly forget of Jim and his early experiences. Such beginnings are natural enough, and 'The Brothers Karamazov' is very much in the Russian tradition with its considerable descriptions of characters in the story. 'The Old Wives' Tale' begins with the two sisters and their environment, 'The Man of Property' with the Forsyte family 'in full plumage,' 'Tono-Bungay' with a kind of warning very well in its place in that remarkable novel."

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