

ABSTRACT
of
'Pienza's Missing Statues: Insight from a Renaissance Puzzle into a Pope's World'
by Andrew Johnson

This is the short story of an exploration into the renaissance world of Pienza, an historic town in Tuscany, and the world of the fifteenth century pope who rebuilt the town, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Pope Pius II -- a world we can still see there and appreciate.

Contemplating the cathedral facade, a renowned early renaissance masterpiece, a puzzle comes into focus: is the facade 'missing statues'? A conjecture is formed and explored, looking at the cathedral and its piazza together for insight into the pope's renaissance world - with surprising twists in the tale.

Visible evidence -- of the carved facade aedicules with their empty niches, and of Pope Piccolomini's testimony in his own words and in his authoritative artistic and liturgical legacies -- convinces me that Pope Pius (with his architect Bernardo 'il Rossellino') intended intent observers to imagine into his cathedral facade an Annunciation: to visualize or perhaps even literally to see a presence of Gabriel and Mary at the moment of the Incarnation of Christ, human and divine at once, all the better to understand the larger meanings implicit in his cathedral and piazza, and his own renaissance mind's eye. Surprisingly, actual candidates for the 'missing statues' of Mary and Gabriel may survive, though never installed, and are identified.

Through pursuing this puzzle, we can see in Pienza not only 'noble buildings' of 'beauty and dignity' (in Pope Pius's words), but also a renaissance city of man and of God, material and spiritual. To some extent we see Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini himself -- with his renaissance humanist love of learning and literature and classical allusions alongside or enmeshed with Christian religious convictions and tenets, and with his renaissance wit in wordplay or puns, multiple meanings verbal and visual, sacred and secular.

Details:

- 76 pages, with 67 colour illustrations integrated with the text, and fonts inspired by Italian renaissance type; 10 x 7.5 in/25.3 x 19 cm
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