What comes across in this volume is a brilliant figure deeply committed to literary pursuits in the name of the church. But beyond that, the essays collected here also underscore Delbeke’s claim in the introductory essay “that our protagonist’s intellectual work can never be separated from the challenging social and political circumstances of his life” (28). In other words, rather than claiming to be studying a unique genius whose written corpus cannot be reconciled in any meaningful way beyond its brilliance, the authors contributing to this volume present a figure who tells us as much about baroque Rome as he does himself. Moreover, the contradictions, depth, and sophistication of his ideas compel us to rethink much about baroque Rome: the volume is, in some sense, a call to see it as dynamic age of intellectual and artistic culture, neither reacting to the fallout of the Reformation nor providing fodder for the rejection of early modern Catholicism in the Enlightenment. And at the center of this newly resuscitated baroque are figures like Pallavicino and his myriad interlocutors who have been misunderstood for too long.

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Biographical research on Jesuit artists has a fairly rich tradition. Rarely, however, are the achievements of sculptors and carpenters, who could be wrongly considered provincial, the object of historical consideration. As Jesuit temporal coadjutors, they have not always received the attention they deserve, and their biographies are not always possible to reconstruct. The situation is quite different in the case of the Silesian sculptor Johann Riedel (1654–1736), who left behind not only an interesting autobiography, Vocatio, but also many works of Jesuit sacred art. Riedel was characterized by considerable ambition and a desire for self-education. He embarked on an educational journey abroad (1672–82: Prague, Lucerne, Alsace, Lyon, Paris), undertaken on his own initiative as a way to broaden his horizons and develop his skills. He was busied by various jobs during these peregrinations, honed his craft, sought inspiration, tempered by Jesuit vocation and morals, sometimes put to the test by...
the Cistercians of Lucelle. He even had the opportunity to visit the famous Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in Paris, although his stay at this elite academy was rather transient. His life and artistic work were linked to the activities of the Society of Jesus in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Johann entered the novitiate in Brno (1682) and bound his entire professional life to the Bohemian province. Indeed, he drew mainly on the experience of artists working in that province and local workshops, as well as from his older brother Georg (1638/9–80), a Jesuit coadjutor and carpenter.

Paweł Migasiewicz’s book is an interesting biographical sketch of Johann Riedel—a Silesian peasant (born in the village of Wildgrub in the Duchy of Opava-Krnov)—who as a journeyman sculptor and carpenter fulfilled his dreams and met the demands and expectations of sacred art. He became famous as the author of the baroqueization of the church in Świdnica—the largest church in the Bohemian Jesuit province. His opus vitae is essentially a successful theological dispute with Protestantism, which he carried out within the field of art. After all, the area of Silesia in which he worked was strongly linked to Lutheranism, so Jesuit iconography there must have been strongly linked to Catholic evangelization. Riedel developed a rich ideological program in Świdnica, which he skillfully adapted to the local needs. Together with his team of collaborators, he created one of his greatest works in Świdnica—the decorative buildout of the cathedral, including the magnificent main altar and a number of side altars. Riedel created an altarpiece in the form of a baldachin based on the model of those found in St. Peter’s Basilica and the Val-de-Grâce church in Paris, but his work was richer and more extensive. The organ apparatus of Świdnica was also the largest and one of the grandest to have been built in the entire Habsburg empire at that time. The craftsmanship and, above all, the artistic effort that Riedel put into this large and important commission (Jesuit fabrica ecclesiae) earned him the nickname “our most glorious Phidias” (Laudatissimus Phidias noster) among the local Jesuits.

Migasiewicz admits in the introduction (16) that he wrote his work in the spirit of neo-positivism and took a classical approach to the historical sources under study, as expressed by Leopold von Ranke. In context, this is a logical approach, given that a formal biography of Johann Riedel had not been written, and artistic analysis of the works had been left behind. The author has therefore combined his competencies as a historian and art historian and, thanks to his great erudition, has presented a colorful picture of the artistic path taken by the Silesian Phidias and Jesuit coadjutor. He has presented a comprehensive and detailed account of Riedel’s family background, craftsman’s education,
foreign sources of inspiration (mainly French), social situation, and all the works he created in Prague and Świdnica.

Despite the book’s great educational value, the author was not immune to minor errors; inconsistencies in proper names crop up periodically throughout the text. For example, the university founded in Prague in 1654 is Latinized as Universitas Carolo-Ferdinandea, even though its Polish and Czech names are fixed in historiography (Pol: Karol Ferdinand University; CZ: Karlo-Ferdinandova univerzita). As a rule, names are given in their original spellings (Polish, German), although he also uses Latin equivalents, such as Wenceslaus, only to use the same name a few pages later, but in the German form Wenzel. In writing about the prince-bishops of Basel, he states that it was only after the advent of the Reformation in Basel (1529) that they were forced to reside in Porrentruy (75), their temporary seat. In actuality, they had already lived permanently in the palace there much earlier, as evidenced by the fact that Bishop Johann V. von Venningen died there in 1478, and by housing the bishops away from Basel, they were unable to properly fulfill their duties as chancellors of the University of Basel, founded in 1460. Nevertheless, the aforementioned shortcomings are so marginal that they do not in any way detract from the positive reception of this book.

Riedel’s biography provides an aperture for considering Jesuit art in a multi-faith environment; artistic relations between France, Italy, and the countries of the Bohemian Lands; and the academic ambitions and social conditions of artists in the modern era. Indeed, the book finds its place within the current trend of research into Jesuit art of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe and delightfully contains a rich iconography (355 illustrations) and an extensive source appendix (for example, the Vocatio edition). Migasiewicz’s book can also serve as a kind of handbook showing how to reconstruct the biographies of Jesuits (including Jesuit artists) in the Bohemian province, as the author has also provided a thorough overview of the rules of Jesuit archival science in the introduction. This book may therefore be of interest to readers representing various research fields: Jesuit scholars, historians of the Bohemian province, art historians, historians of artistic culture in Silesia, and, above all, researchers who are just beginning their adventures with the study of Jesuit sources. Migasiewicz is to be applauded for presenting a superbly crafted biography of an outstanding Jesuit baroque artist.

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