Chapter 6

Tombs and Epitaphs

The examples of altarpieces discussed above have demonstrated how acceptance of a particular artistic offer by rulers or high-ranking dignitaries helped to popularise it throughout their circle, and hence also among clients lower down the social hierarchy. A similar mechanism may be traced through the category of sepulchral monuments – tombs and epitaphs into which alabaster works imported from the Low Countries were incorporated in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Freiberg

Once again it was the Saxon court that set the trend, approaching the Southern Netherlandish workshops with commissions that played an important role in the propaganda of the Albertine Wettins. The prime example of such a commission is the tomb of Elector Maurice in Freiberg Cathedral, undoubtedly one of the grandest Early Modern funerary monuments north of the Alps (Fig. 150). Although this work eludes the categorisation applied in the selection of the other Southern Netherlandish sculptural imports examined in this book owing to its collective authorship by Italian, German and Netherlandish artists, it would be inconceivable not to include it as its significance goes far beyond its undeniable artistic merits. Moreover, as a case study it offers immense insight into the way Netherlandish artists contributed to such collective undertakings.

The history of Elector Maurice’s tomb is superbly documented in a number of sources and is a constant object of scholarly interest. In the first place I shall therefore restrict myself to recalling the most significant facts and interpretations. Secondly, I shall propose a hypothesis that could throw new light on the source of the unusual iconography of this work. I shall also attempt a more detailed profile of its Netherlandish author than has hitherto been offered.

Following his death from a fatal shot wound at the Battle of Sievershausen, Maurice was buried in the choir of Freiberg Cathedral, a new necropolis of the Wettins, where four members of the Albertine line had been laid to rest since 1541. In 1555 his brother and successor, Augustus, sent the counsellor Hans von Dehn-Rothfelser and the court painters Benedetto and Gabriele Tola
to Freiberg to make preliminary sketches for the planned monu-
ment. Three years passed before any further steps were taken; then,
using a design by the Italians, the court woodcarver Georg Fleischer
made a wooden model of the monument, and the painter Hans
Krell supplied a portrait of Maurice to be used as the model for the
sculpted likeness of the duke. In 1559 Elector Augustus commis-
sioned a Lübeck goldsmith, Hans Wessel, with the execution of the
project. Wessel, in line with his specialisation, only cast the bronze
griﬀins on which the upper marble slab of the tomb rests, and sub-
contracted the stonework to the Antwerpian Anthonis van Seron
(Zerroen).3 The contract between the two artists was signed on
22 July 1559 in Lübeck.4

The ﬁgural elements of the monument, made in Antwerp, were
the ﬁrst to arrive in Saxony, via Hamburg. The master himself arrived
with his assistants to assemble the monument in December 1562.
As the elector demanded the addition of a cruciﬁx, Seron made a
Cruciﬁed Christ ﬁgure (Fig. 151), and Wolf Hilger cast a bronze cross.
The inscriptions on the marble slabs were carved by Hans Florian

FIGURE 150
The tombstone of Elector
Maurice of Sachsen,
Anthonis van Seron, Hans
Wessel, Wolf Hilger, Hans
Florian, Hans Hausmann
after the design by Gabriele
and Benedetto Tola,
1555–1563, Freiberg cathedral
(Phot o Landesamt für
Denkmalpflege Sachsen)