
ARTS & LETTERS

tion, says Calamandrei, a writer for *L'Espresso*, a Rome-based newspaper, has revealed that these frescoes were richly detailed, bright, and luminous. "For the first time," he says, "we see blue skies enlivened by racing white clouds and the crisp wintry shadows cast by people and stones."

The history of these frescoes begins in 1423. In that year, Florentine merchant Felice Brancacci hired a local artist, Masolino da Panicale, and his student, Tommaso di Ser Giovanni (better known as "Masaccio," meaning "Sloppy Tom"), to paint a series of frescoes depicting the life of Saint Peter in the chapel that bore the patron's name. The work was interrupted five years later, when the two artists, apparently fleeing their creditors, departed for Rome. There, the 26-year-old Masaccio, for reasons that remain mysterious, died. Filippino Lippi finished Masaccio's frescoes in 1485.

Masaccio's frescoes were not well preserved. Smoke rising from the chapel's oil lamps covered them with a veil of soot. A fire that broke out in the chapel on January 28, 1771, did not burn the frescoes, but they were smoked, as a contemporary put it, "like a prosciutto ham."

Later efforts to restore Masaccio's work made matters worse. But the latest effort, conducted by Italy's National Institute of Restoration, has made progress. By applying a newly invented chemical paste to the wall over a layer of Japanese paper, workers have managed to peel away centuries of accumulated grime.

Thus revealed, the frescoes have given scholars a new perspective on Renaissance art. "With such radical changes in the colors, light and the quality of the details in paintings," says Calamandrei, "... we must revise our understanding of ... 15th- and 16th-century Italian painting."

OTHER NATIONS

Divided Israel

"Israeli Political Reality and the Search for Middle East Peace" by Samuel W. Lewis, in *SAIS Review* (Winter/Spring 1987), 1740 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The Arab-Israeli conflict centers on the future of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. But peace will not be achieved in the Middle East, says Lewis, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel, until the Israelis themselves agree on who should control these territories.

Israelis have bickered over territorial issues ever since their nation's 1948 War of Independence against Arab states. In 1949, Menachem Begin, the future Likud Party leader, attacked Prime Minister David Ben Gurion for accepting an armistice that left the West Bank areas that Jews call Judea and Samaria—"the heartland of the biblical Jewish kingdom"—outside of the new nation's borders.

Israel's annexation of the West Bank and Gaza in the June 1967 Six Day War did little to reconcile Labor-Likud disputes. Since then, the Labor Party, which reigned from 1968 to 1977, has considered the possibility of

 OTHER NATIONS

conceding the occupied territories to Jordan and Egypt, in exchange for Arab recognition that Israel has a right to exist in peace. Menachem Begin rejected the Land-for-Peace policy, however, during his tenure as prime minister (1977–84), and pushed for the creation of new Jewish settlements on the West Bank.

In the 1984 election, both major parties failed to win a decisive victory. The resulting “National Unity Government”—under which Shimon Peres (Labor) and Yitzhak Shamir (Likud) each agreed to serve as prime minister for two years—has only institutionalized Israeli differences on the Land-for-Peace policy.

Nevertheless, Shimon Peres, who served as Labor prime minister from September 1984 to October 1986, made some headway in foreign affairs. Peres persuaded Morocco’s King Hassan to reject the position of hard-line Arab states and help seek a peaceful, negotiated settlement with Israel. He also convinced the Spanish government to establish, for the first time, diplomatic relations with Jerusalem. Moreover, the prime minister’s “personality, eloquence, moderation, and energy,” as Lewis puts it, have “refurbished” Israel’s image abroad.

Despite his diplomatic skills, Peres failed to launch peace negotiations, largely because Israelis themselves could not reach a consensus on what to do with the occupied territories. Even if the premier had managed to reach a peace agreement with Jordan’s King Hussein, the Labor-Likud coalition would surely have quashed it. The political standoff, moreover, reflects the sentiments among ordinary Israelis, about half of whom, according to polls, oppose a Land-for-Peace bargain. Such opinions are unlikely to change as long as some 50,000 Jews live in 100 towns and villages on the West Bank.

The current Labor-Likud government may serve the interests of Israeli politicians. But Jerusalem’s “Government of National Impasse,” as Lewis calls it, can do little to promote peace in the Middle East.

The New China

“China’s Confident Nationalism” by Michel Oksenberg, in *Foreign Affairs* (Special Issue 1986), 58 East 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

During the 1970s, the Nixon and Ford administrations “played the China card” against the Soviet Union. In other words, by establishing friendly relations with Beijing, Washington kept the Kremlin on the defensive. China was happy to help.

But China’s new generation of leaders, says Oksenberg, a University of Michigan political scientist, do not want to play that game anymore. China’s “confident nationalists” now want to deal with both superpowers. They believe, as Oksenberg puts it, that “China can regain its former greatness. . . . [by using] foreign technology and ideas.”

That approach represents a sharp break from the past.

Under Chairman Mao Zedong (1949–76), the Chinese regime distrusted all powerful foreigners, even their postwar Soviet allies. Embittered by the struggles against Japan (1937–45), against Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist regime, and against the United States in Korea, Mao and his subordinates, Oksenberg says, sought mostly to end “national hu-