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The Fascination of the Unfinished Work: 'The Battle of Anghiari' By Leonardo Da Vinci

Margherita Melani

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Leonardo's fame is bound up in great works whose background is obscure. There is the Mona Lisa, for which we do not know the exact year of commencement, The Last Supper, whose state of conservation has always given rise to particular concern, and the Battle of Anghiari, whose renown goes well beyond the actual existence of the work, for which researchers are still hunting today. It is this ongoing research that motivated the publication of our volume, which aims to record the known facts about the Battle of Anghiari. The vanished work is so famous as to be known to academics and the general public alike, despite - still - being considered as lost. Here we have a case of fame without equal and which appears even more evident if we consider that Leonardo's painting remained visible for just over fifty years, while his preparatory sketch was available to artists for almost two centuries. The destiny of the Battle of Anghiari was already clear to Paolo Giovio writing in the 1530s: "our sorrow for the unforeseen damage seems only to have wondrously increased the fascination of the unfinished work". Based on descriptions and eyewitness accounts, this study will present a variety of documents, such as literary sources that describe the painting and figurative evidence, such as Leonardo's own preparatory drawings or copies by later artists. Nor should we fail to consider manuscript sources relating to the commissioning and execution of the first part of the work, often traceable through payments registered in archive sources. Equally essential is an overview of the historical context in which the Battle of Anghiari was painted and of the significance of this event. English Language Edition.

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