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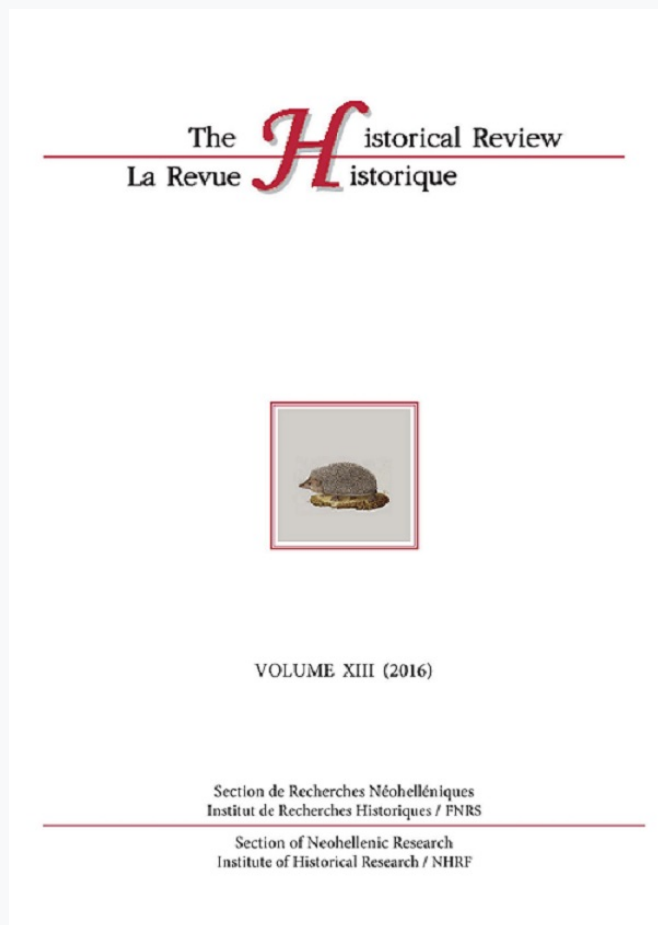
Carol M. Richardson, Kim W. Woods and Michael W. Franklin (eds),
RENAISSANCE ART RECONSIDERED:
AN ANTHOLOGY OF PRIMARY SOURCES,
Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell in association with
the Open University, [10]2015, 449 pages.

The title of this volume refers to the course of the Open University entitled *Renaissance Art Reconsidered* and more particularly to its three course books, which reflect three reference fields in the modern history of art: the method and arduous work of making works of art; the centres of art production, the trade networks and the relations between artists and clients; and the means of viewing art, whether in the context of religious practice, theory or patronage, during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Thus, the first book, entitled *Making Renaissance Art* (Kim W. Woods [ed.], New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 2007), deals with key themes in the making of Renaissance painting, architecture, sculpture and prints; more specifically with techniques and materials in practice and theory and with tradition and innovation in artists' training, workshop organization and collaborative works.[1] The seven

chapters of the second book, *Locating Renaissance Art* (Carol M. Richardson [ed.], New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 2007), are case studies of Rome, Siena and Venice as artistic centres and of the international market for works of art in the Low Countries, whether paintings or tapestries. The chapter about the religious art of Venetian Crete, an important trading centre in the Mediterranean, completes the extent of the connections and networks that lay behind the production of Renaissance art.[2] The third book of the series, *Viewing Renaissance Art* (Kim

[1] Chapter titles: "Drawing and Workshop Practices" by Catherine King; "Constructing Space in Renaissance Painting" by Carol Richardson; "The Illusion of Life in Fifteen-century Sculpture" by Kim Woods; "Architecture: Theory and Practice" by Tim Benton; "Making Renaissance Altarpieces" by Diana Norman; "Making Histories, Publishing Theories" by Catherine King.

[2] Chapter titles: "The Allure of Rome" by Carol Richardson; "Netherlandish Networks" by Kim Woods; "Tapestries as a Transnational Artistic Commodity" by Elizabeth Cleland; "Siena and its Renaissance" by Diana Norman; "The Painter Angelos and Post-Byzantine Art" by Angeliki Lymberopoulou; "Art in Fifteenth-century Venice: 'An Aesthetic of Diversity'" by Paul Wood; "Bramante and the Sources of the Roman High Renaissance" by Tim Benton.

W. Woods, Carol M. Richardson and Angeliki Lymberopoulou [eds], New Haven and London: Yale University in association with Open University, 2007), focusses on patronage and the consumption of Renaissance art. The range of patrons and audiences included extends from the Florentine confraternities to the rulers of France and from the Alps to Crete.[3]

The *Anthology of Primary Sources*, the book under discussion, as with the above-mentioned volumes, was created and implemented as an Open University educational project. However, the contributors' intention is clear: "We hope its usefulness will extend to the wider community of academics and students as well as dedicated art-history enthusiasts engaged in Renaissance studies."[4]

The textual sources undoubtedly connect the works of art with the background at the time of their creation, with their original status and with the way they were viewed and utilized by their contemporaries. For art historians, the written material is not, of course, as important a source as the works of art themselves, but it is a springboard for research and an essential base before formulating and evaluating a theoretical framework.

The structure of the *Anthology* follows that set out in the three above-mentioned

volumes, containing the same essential parts – Making, Locating, Viewing – and chapters, with minor changes. The first part, "Making Renaissance Art" (pp. 6-156), consists of 7 chapters and 48 documents and focusses on the making of drawings, panel paintings, sculptures and buildings, as well as on the methods of linear perspective. The second part, "Locating Renaissance Art" (pp. 160-280), with 7 chapters and 48 documents, deals with artists' private and social lives, portable icons, wall paintings, monuments and tapestries in Italy, the Low Countries and Venetian Crete. The 41 documents of the third part, "Viewing Renaissance Art" (pp. 284-428), are related to a wide range of subjects: the treasures and luxury goods of the rulers and wealthy inhabitants of Burgundy, Siena and Florence; the way in which the Florentines viewed the works of art in their city, from Savonarola's sermons to Sandro Botticelli's and Leonardo's considerations about where to place Michelangelo's *David*. A special chapter in this part is dedicated to Renaissance art in France and another entitled "Market and Icons" to the commissions of Post-Byzantine Cretan portable icons. Documents related to funerary monuments, illuminated manuscripts and the reform of religious images complete the reference fields in this part.

Connecting all these miscellaneous excerpts would be much more helpful for the reader. The correlation made between the rulers of the Venetian Mercers' guild (p. 238) with Dürer's letter mentioning the difficulties he experienced with Venetian guild rulers (p. 255) is obviously useful, and this practice should have been implemented more exhaustively.

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[3] Chapter titles: "Art, Class and Wealth" by Rembrandt Duits; "Florentine Art and the Public" by Jill Burke; "Renaissance Bibliomania" by Alixe Bovey; "Monarchy and Prestige in France"; "Audiences for Cretan Icons" by Angeliki Lymberopoulou; "Art and Death" by Carol Richardson; "Holbein and the Reform of Images" by Kim Woods.

[4] Editors' preface.

For example, Cennini's and Dionysios' technical instructions (pp. 6-7 and 234-236) or the tomb of Louis XI (pp. 340-345) and the funerary monuments described in the chapter "Art and Death" ought to have been connected.

The heart of the book is a collection of 137 primary sources. The range of these original sources and documents is wide and varied: artists' contracts and treatises, letters, inventories, diaries, wills, guild rule books, official reports and decisions. On this point, the documents' categorization would be helpful in order to enable the reader to immediately evaluate their worth as a source. In view of this, it is reasonable, for example, that there is a difference between the Grand Council of Venice's judgement of an artist (pp. 240-241) and an agent's report (p. 168).

The volume contains a full list of document sources and acknowledgements (pp. 429-436) and an index (pp. 437-449), which is very important and useful for these kinds of sourcebooks. Unfortunately, it is difficult to understand the method behind the making of this index; for example, why Milan or Crete are not listed as geographical locations, given that they are mentioned in the texts, or why the special entry "archaeological investigations in Rome" is not also included in the entry "Rome", as is the case for the entry "tourists' view of cultural sites".

The volume is the outcome of an expert team of 12 people, including the editors, most of whom are members of the Open University staff.[5] Their contributions consist of a short introductory text, commentaries and bibliography, where required. On this point, attention must be drawn to the rather obvious inequality among contributors' presentations and commentaries. There are texts which are sufficiently commented upon, such as the document describing Ghiberti's admiration for Sienese art (pp. 208-211) or the commissioning of the altarpiece for the Cappella dei Signori in Siena (pp. 211-213), and others without mention of the date of the original document, for example the commission from a Venetian ruler for an altarpiece (pp. 231-234); also, the dimensions, weights and prices, as well as the technical terms, are indicated only in certain sections (e.g. pp. 291, 232-234).

Some of the excerpts (18 documents) are well known through their inclusion in existing anthologies, for example the collection of original sources and documents concerning the lives and works of artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the Netherlands, Germany, France and England by Wolfgang Stechow (*Northern Renaissance Art, 1400-1600: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966); the volume with original sources for Italian patronage by D. S. Chambers (*Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance*, London: Macmillan, 1970); the collection of primary texts by and about fifteenth-century Italian

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[5] Tim Benton, Jill Burke, Elizabeth Cleland,

Rembrandt Duits, Mike Franklin, Catherine King, Angeliki Lymberopoulou, Diana Norman, Carol Richardson, Thomas Tolley, Paul Wood and Kim Woods. Alixe Bovey (University of Kent, now Courtauld Institute) is mentioned erroneously in the preface as a collaborator of the volume.

artists by Creighton Gilbert (*Italian Art, 1400-1500: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, and London: Prentice-Hall, 1992); and the sourcebook for the city-state of Venice by D. S. Chambers, J. Fletcher and B. Pullan (*Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

Although some texts in the anthology under consideration here have already been published, it is important to emphasize the quality of the documents' translations, given that 55 texts are translated from their original language into English for the first time in this volume.[6]

Finally, if we consider this *Anthology* as having primary source documents that provide insight into the Renaissance irrespective of the three above-mentioned course books, I must point out that the breadth reduces the depth. This is to say that the documents cannot tell us much unless we are equipped to see them *in context*. They require a great deal of ancillary material in order to become intelligible. Thus, the contributors' expectation that the anthology may be addressed to the wider academic community will not be easily answered. Regardless of this, however, a book which was first published in 2007 requires updating.

In spite of the imperfections pointed out, this sourcebook has a great virtue: its pan-European focus includes documents connected with Renaissance art from England to Italy and from France to Crete. These documents are not simply springboards for researchers but also bedrocks, and, as is rightly underlined in the book's preface, scholars must continually return to them "to check generalizations and avoid modern misconceptions". Hence, this modern, easy to use anthology is an important contribution not only to the field of art history, but also to social and intellectual history.

Eugenia Drakopoulou
Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

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[6] Translators: Ria de Boodt (from Dutch), Jill Burke (from Italian), Elizabeth Cleland (from Dutch), Isabelle Dolezalek (from French), Rembrandt Duits (from Italian, French and Dutch), Dimitra Kotoula (from Greek), Susanne Meurer (from German), Rahel Nigussie (from Italian), Carol Richardson (from Italian), Gerald Schmidt (from German), Jeremy G. Taylor (from Latin), Dario Tessicini (from Latin and Italian), Thomas Tolley (from French) and David Ward (from Spanish).