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Nagel, Alexander, and Giancarla Periti, eds. Ravenna in the Imagination of Renaissance Art

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Nagel, Alexander, and Giancarla Periti, eds.

Ravenna in the Imagination of Renaissance Art.

Turnhout: Brepols, 2020. Pp. 208 + 100 ill. ISBN 978-2-503-538399-0 (paperback) €95.

Ravenna in the Imagination of Renaissance Art addresses a theme of such interest that it is a wonder something like it had not appeared before. In the context of expanding, globalized histories of the Renaissance, Ravenna's "quasi-extraterritorial status" (10) is topical. Having been capital of the Western Roman Empire (402–76), then of the Ostragothic kingdom (493–553), and centre of the Byzantine Exarchate in Italy (584–751), Ravenna is a nexus of transcultural histories of empire. Yet it is just that reach—its otherness from Rome—that sounded its apparent death knell in the Renaissance; Vasari's condemnation consigned the city's late antique monuments to relative oblivion in histories of Renaissance art and architecture. In re-examining responses to Ravenna in the Renaissance, this volume joins a robust scholarly enterprise redressing the stranglehold Vasari's example has had over the historiography of the Renaissance.

The book consists of a compelling introduction by the editors and seven essays. The collection is eclectic, but less so than most; there is a strong core to the collection and the consistent quality of the contributions makes them satisfyingly cohesive and complementary. Themes, primary sources, and monuments reappear, creating a continuity and allowing for nuancing: Vasari, Traversari, Spreti, San Vitale, the Mausoleum of Theodoric, Sant'Apollinare in Classe. An overarching topos is that of authority. What kind of authority did Ravenna's historical monuments and mosaics convey for the Renaissance individuals who admired them, despoiled them, and imitated them? The essays in this collection ask the question, What did Renaissance artists, architects, scholars, and patrons make of Ravenna's diversely distinguished past?

Giancarla Periti's excellent essay on Vasari occupies the geographical centre of the collection. By looking at the sixth-century mausoleum of Theodoric, singled out by Vasari as worthy of his estimation during the time of his revisions to the *Lives* (presumably on the recommendation of the Cassinese Vincenzo Borghini), Periti is able to nuance the coeval reception of Ravenna's past. Periti points to Vasari's distinctions between good "antique" monuments and debased "old" ones. For Vasari, and for a number of Renaissance observers,

the mausoleum of Theodoric aspires to the first, but problematically falls into the second. How artists, architects, and scholars responded to this clearly impressive yet non-canonical monument reveals the complexity of Renaissance attitudes to Christian late antiquity. Nicholas Herman's piece complements Periti's historiographical focus through the lens of Ravenna's mosaics. It is not surprising to learn that what are considered the treasures of Ravenna today were largely discounted when held up to Renaissance standards grounded in Roman antiquity. Herman's look at local sources provides a different perspective. Local humanists valued the mosaics for their historical testimony, while altarpieces by artist Niccolò Rondinelli quoted them as antiquarian examples of Ravenna's past. Silvia Foschi's chapter turns our gaze to San Vitale, documenting both visual and textual evidence that the church was considered a copy on Italian soil of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. As might be expected, the authority of San Vitale's eastern pedigree carried more weight in regions from the Adriatic coast to Lombardy than it did for central Italian observers.

Essays by Koch, Blake McHam, and Pincus confirm the pull of Ravenna for artists and patrons from along the Adriatic axis. Linda Koch skilfully and persuasively examines Sigismondo Malatesta's exploitation of Ravennate artifacts and references in the design of his Tempio in Rimini. Koch explores the efficacy of Ravenna's imperial imprimatur for Malatesta's iconography of legitimate rulership, in the process telling the story of the transcultural authority of materials and models that move from Rome to Constantinople, from Constantinople to Ravenna, and from Ravenna to Aachen, Rimini, Florence, and beyond in a rhizomatic network of appropriation. Sarah Blake McHam and Debra Pincus open our eyes to the significance of Byzantine Ravenna for the Venetian artists Tullio and Pietro Lombardo. Blake McHam turns her attention to the sculptural style initiated by Tullio Lombardo in his *Saint Mark* now in the Ravenna cathedral, convincingly arguing that the "symmetry, abstraction, and flatness" (40) that characterize the artist's unique classicizing style testify to his admiration for Ravenna's mosaics. Debra Pincus turns to the story of Dante's tomb in Ravenna, evoking its synthesis of Florentine, Venetian, and Ravennate elements. By identifying the hand-to-face gesture of Pietro Lombardo's Dante portrait as a sign of divine inspiration and tracing it from an illustration by Botticelli for Dante's *Paradiso* to Michelangelo's effigy of Lorenzo de Medici in San Lorenzo in Florence, Pincus proposes intriguing new visual tracks of the divine poet's reputation in Renaissance Italy. Finally, Claudio Franzoni

concludes the collection with an essay examining the fluctuating critical fortunes of the San Vitale imperial procession mosaics. Beginning in the Middle Ages, Franzoni's survey ends in the early twentieth century when a loosening of traditional imperatives of artistic naturalism and the positive effects of Riegl's historical relativism created the modern conditions for the mosaics' favourable reassessment.

Ravenna in the Imagination of Renaissance Art offers new scholarship decentring the magnetic poles of Florence, Rome, and Venice and reframing the paradigms of antique exemplarity in the Italian Renaissance. High quality printing and generous colour illustrations make the volume especially attractive and useful. It will be a welcome addition to the library of all scholars of the period.

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Rothman, E. Natalie.

The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. Pp. xxiii, 419. ISBN 978-1-5017-5849-2 (paperback) US\$24.95.

The Dragoman Renaissance will make an important contribution to ongoing debates about early modern Orientalism as a complex, contradictory, dialectical process of both cross-fertilization and the ossification of cultural difference. Whereas most studies of Orientalism lean toward investigating Europeans' views of "the Orient," *The Dragoman Renaissance* demonstrates that cultural brokerage and diplomacy in Ottoman lands operated as a discursive landscape to produce knowledge regarding Ottoman and Muslim culture and history. Focusing on dragomans, "diplomatic translator-interpreters who accompanied ambassadors on their audiences and acted, ritually, as their mouth and ears, mediating the unfolding ceremony" (1), Rothman shows how these individuals, even when operating on behalf of European powers, remained the product of the intellectual and cultural milieu of Ottoman Istanbul. As a result, they were