

**Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant*.
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press,
1996. 270 pp., 95 black-and-white illus.**

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Volume 23, Number 1-2, 1996

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1073301ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073301ar>

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Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Maginnis, H. B. (1996). Review of [Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1996. 270 pp., 95 black-and-white illus.] *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 23(1-2), 111–113. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073301ar>

overall archival flatness, and of a character typical of official Canadian culture – rather dry, remote and dull; that is to say safely immured in an asbestos mausoleum that keeps any potential historical fuel far away from the heat of the present.

Perhaps I should mention some of the moments that stood out for me. First of all, the already noted final show of 1931. The juxtaposition, on facing pages of the catalogue, of Prudence Heward's *Girl under a Tree* and Anne Savage's *The Plough* dramatically points to the social context in which the Group's heroic vision of Canada was becoming irrelevant. Widespread farm failures coupled with urban unemployment caused by the crash of '29 meant a crisis for the male role of breadwinner that inflected the portrayal of the stereotypically "feminine" land. It is in the light of this historical background that one should discuss the increased participation of women in the Group's shows towards the end, as well as the attempt to save the nationalist enterprise by dissolving the original group into the larger and more diverse Canadian Group of Painters. Here is a perfect example of how a mere account of what happened says nothing about what was really going on. It is not necessary for artists to comment directly and openly on the events of their time; their work does that on its own, and those events have a habit of speaking back. In this case it is as hard not to see Harris's *Mount Lefroy*, from the same show, as an icon of desperate masculinity as it is impossible to miss the sheer unbelievability of the Group's vision of Canada in the new context.

Another very important area opened up by Hill's exhaustive research is the nature of the Group's anti-modernism. The brighter thinkers knew that Canadian art had to become more modern; the question was what kind of modernity to embrace, and our boys aligned themselves with conservatives in the United States who accused French modernism of decadence and excessive conventionalization. In rather adroitly threading a path between the available political and aesthetic positions of the time, the Group had to perform the trick of modernizing Canadian art while bashing the modernists, who represented a pernicious (read French) foreign influence. Yet Hill's research really gets in-

teresting when he looks at Quebec. It was not until the late 1930s and early 1940s that Quebec intellectuals began their own debate over what kind of Parisian modernism to adopt as a counter to the Group's northern nationalism. That material lies outside the scope of the catalogue and show, but my antennae began to twitch at Hill's account of the rabid anti-modernism that drove both Lyman and Jackson out of Montreal in 1913, of the split in Anglophone and Francophone responses to modernist work and, even more interestingly, of Marius Barbeau's vision of a modern Canadian art which was to be based in the folk art of Quebec. This side of Barbeau's thinking raises interesting questions about his later attempts to annex West Coast First Nations art as a primitive, non-western source for Canadian modernism. For a contemporary critic, in the era of the Parizeau referendum, however, the implications of the whole complex of *völkisch* nationalism and anti-modernism ca. 1913 (in both Montreal and Toronto) is potentially explosive. Anyone who seriously believes in the concept of "art for a nation," (the subtitle of the exhibition and catalogue) has to acknowledge that it is precisely these sensitive areas of Quebec culture that *English* Canadian, as well as French Canadian, writers should be investigating in depth. Needless to say, Hill evidently does not agree.

This catalogue is necessary for any serious student of Canadian art, but the question, of course, is what such students will do with it. Outside of Vancouver there are very few art historians in English Canada who escape the historicist fallacy. In Quebec I fear that the alternative to historicism is post-modernist theory, and that means another kind of neglect of the historical in all its vivid *contemporaneity*. Meanwhile, the public who attended the Group of Seven exhibition were asking serious questions of the art on display, questions full of echoes of the traumatic history unfolding outside the gallery walls. It is the curator's role, and the critic's role, to articulate those questions in a way that gives that public a place to stand, if only until they decide to move elsewhere. To do anything less is to let down the nation, and its art.

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ANNE DERBES, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1996. 270 pp., 95 black-and-white illus.

For all Vasari's concern with the *maniera greca* as midwife to the art of the Renaissance, and all our concern with

Vasari, Italianists of the twentieth century have been comparatively neglectful of quattrocento painting and its relation to Byzantine art. But, then, thirteenth-century Italian painting in its entirety has prompted little serious scholarship until very recently. Bernard Berenson had very limited interest in the material; Richard Offner dealt with quattrocento pictures in his *Italian Primitives at Yale*, but the remainder

of his career was devoted largely to the Trecento. Two of Offner's students, Gertrude Coor and James Stubblebine, dealt with Coppo di Marcovaldo and Guido da Siena respectively; Stubblebine also published a bibliography on thirteenth-century Italian painting. E. Sandberg-Vavala produced a monumental study of early painted crosses and a small volume on the iconography of the Madonna and Child in the Dugento. Italian scholars, early in the century, did more. There are many articles containing attributions (not now greatly helpful) and, of course, the catalogue of the great *Mostra Giottesca* of 1937 that contains many dugento works.

Now, individual scholarly interests undoubtedly played a large part in this circumstance, but for the last half-century, the matter is not quite that simple. In 1937, and in response to the *Mostra Giottesca*, Roberto Longhi wrote his "Giudizio sul Duecento," an essay that was published only after the Second World War, in 1947. The burden of his argument was that nearly all dugento painting was nothing but a provincial redaction of the Byzantine, an art that suppressed indigenous Italian genius and was thus rightly to be scorned. Looking back from the end of the century, I find it amazing that the essay was so highly influential. In some ways, of course, it echoed a notion in Vasari, who sought to define an indigenous Italian genius distinct from the *maniera greca*, and thus acquired authority from its pedigree; but Longhi's essay itself all too clearly speaks to the political climate in Italy at the time of its origin. Byzantine art, the foreign art, was to be deplored and dismissed.

Longhi's essay long discouraged many young scholars from taking up dugento problems and often meant that among those who did the "Byzantine Question" was left aside. Even now, in three recent, major studies on dugento painting in central Italy, the matter of Byzantine influence is not addressed. Thus, the question has been largely left to Byzantinists who, approaching the issue from an easterly direction, naturally have stressed the Italian derivations from Byzantine art and culture.

It is against this background that the reader approaches Anne Derbes's *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, a book that sets out to explore a very specific problem, the dugento reformulation of Passion iconography, and comes to conclusions that have wide-ranging implications. This volume is a tightly focused study of dugento depictions of six events from Christ's Passion: the Betrayal, the Trial of Christ, the Mocking of Christ, the Way to Calvary, the Stripping of Christ, and the Ascent of the Cross. Derbes demonstrates that the iconography of all these scenes changed during the thirteenth century and argues that the changes are, remarkably enough, only partially based on the appropriation and adap-

tation of Byzantine sources. In some cases the Byzantine is mixed with influences from northern Europe.

In chapter 1, the author provides a useful account of Franciscan connections with the Levant, reminding us that they were well established in Constantinople by 1220, that they were present in the Byzantine court of Nicaea, that they established several houses in the East, and that they were important emissaries in the pope's attempts to reunite the Latin and Greek churches. Using Cimabue's great crucifix for Santa Croce, Florence, she demonstrates the ways in which Byzantine models, the Franciscan conception of the Passion, and the order's understanding of St Francis could come together in a single work of art. With regard to the episodes of the Passion listed above, Derbes's account is as follows.

Between 1235 and 1240 a new iconography of the Betrayal appeared in Italy that represents a borrowing from Byzantine images. Even when, in the 1270s, another variant appeared, it too was derived from Byzantine precedents. Similarly, a new image of the Trial of Christ that appeared between 1240 and 1245 was heavily indebted to Byzantium. At the same moment, a new image of the Mocking of Christ also appeared in Italy; however, at this point the story becomes more complex and intriguing, for the primary iconography is northern European to which are grafted secondary features that are Byzantine in origin. The new Italian depictions of the Way to Calvary that originated in the mid-thirteenth century also represent a conflation of Byzantine and northern sources. In the 1260s and 1270s two new episodes of the Passion appear in Italian art: the Stripping of Christ and the Ascent of the Cross. Both are partially based on Byzantine images but the compositions are reworked to create distinctly Italian subjects.

Derbes links all these changes to the Franciscans, arguing that the new imagery was formulated partially to emphasize Christ's human suffering and the pathos of his self-sacrifice, and partially to correspond to aspects of Franciscan thought and to the order's conception of St Francis. The selection of sources for Franciscan images, whether Byzantine or Gothic, was determined by their suitability to the Franciscan vision of the faith. Derbes also notes the darker side of dugento and Franciscan culture: anti-Semitism. Thus, the Franciscans replaced the Trial before Pilate, found in earlier cycles of the Passion, with the Trial before Annas and Caiaphas, and the Mocking of Christ in Pilate's court with the Jewish mocking. All said, the arguments for a connection between the new imagery and the Franciscans are convincing. This book amplifies our conception of the Franciscan interest in images, something known from the order's early use of images of St Francis to

promote the cult of the saint and to validate the institutional history of the order. But it is a book that does far more.

Firstly, this study significantly modifies the notion that the history of dugento painting was the history of a wholesale and uncritical borrowing of Byzantine sources. Secondly, it adds to our understanding of how Christian culture was radically redefined in the thirteenth century: images and texts speaking to a new emphasis on the Gospels and thus on the humanity of Christ. Thirdly, the tight chronological correspondences that Derbes discerns between developments in Franciscan thought and their reflection in new imagery suggest that, in mid-dugento Italy, imaging had become a high priority indeed. If Franciscan patronage was such that it instructed painters in the selection and sometimes combination of sources, the pictured takes on still greater meaning.

While the book is highly informative and largely convincing, I am left with a problem. According to Derbes (as noted above), the new images appeared between 1235 and the 1270s. How is one to account for this piecemeal reformulation of images that belong to the narrative of Christ's Passion? Some reflection on that question would have been helpful, as the reader, who will often be unfamiliar with the period and material, is unlikely to be able to envisage the circumstances of such a process.

During the thirteenth century, vision and the visible acquired an entirely new prominence in literature and philosophy, and in Italian culture generally. It was the century

of the perspectivists, Roger Bacon, John Pecham and Witelo; it was the century in which Christians increasingly wished to see the host during its elevation in the mass and in which some of the faithful came to want visible proof of miracles. It was the century that saw the invention of eyeglasses and a new emphasis on visualizing the events of sacred history. The role of imaging and of the image as described in this book is much a part of that larger context.

The thirteenth century was also the age of the *maniera greca*, no matter what some recent discussions of the period may say. Those of us working with material from that century know that we shall understand the rebirth of Italian painting only when we have had a thorough investigation of the ways in which Byzantine art did, or did not, condition Italian production. Derbes's book is an important step in that investigation.

Picturing the Passion is founded in a painstaking, meticulous exploration of pictorial compositions and compositional motifs that constitutes a now unfashionable form of art history. But Derbes demonstrates the rewards of such an approach and shows how the resulting material, combined with a much broader consideration of the history of spirituality, can yield remarkable results. And as her book is a study that modifies our ideas about the Western use of Byzantine iconography, it will serve as a caution for future investigations of the *maniera greca*.

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THOMAS DALE, *Relics, Prayer, and Politics in Medieval Venetia: Romanesque Painting in the Crypt of Aquileia Cathedral*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, 170 pp., 8 col. and 160 black-and-white illus., \$79.50 US.

Romanesque wall painting is not a fashionable topic in the modern art historical curriculum. It survives principally in remote sites, off the beaten track for North American visitors; in comparison to the media of architecture and sculpture, it is often in a poor state of preservation; and a lack of accompanying documentation means that precise dates are usually highly elusive. Moreover, because traditional approaches have emphasized questions of style, it is rarely seen as being relevant to those art historians who are more concerned with questions of audience and social function, or with theoretical approaches. Indeed, the number of Canadian universities that offer coverage of Romanesque painting, beyond the level of a basic introductory survey of art history, can probably be counted on the fingers of a single hand. What the subject has badly needed is a monographic

treatment of some important site, in which the author demonstrates how central the Romanesque period can be to art history as practised in the late twentieth century – in other words, a “wake-up call” to those who would otherwise prefer not to have to deal with this topic. Thomas Dale's new book on the painted crypt of Aquileia Cathedral rises magnificently to this challenge.

Located right at the top of the Adriatic Sea, between the Italian cities of Venice and Trieste, Aquileia had a distinguished history in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, before being eclipsed by its Venetian neighbours. Its bishops bore the title of Patriarch, and exercised jurisdiction over much of what is now north-eastern Italy, Slovenia and Croatia. Today the city is a vast archaeological site, with an excellent museum and an imposing medieval cathedral, built in its present form under Patriarch Poppo (1019-1042). Perhaps best known to art historians is the magnificent floor mosaic that belongs to an Early Christian basilica church on the same site: a vast Roman sea-scape into which have been inserted episodes from the story of Jonah. But the crypt