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**Anderson, Christina M. The Flemish Merchant of Venice: Daniel Nijs and the Sale of the Gonzaga Art Collection**

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audience), more divisions in the text would have been very helpful. Division by chapter and section would encourage more review and clarification of previous points, providing more signposts in the journey.

Aers suggests that any grand narrative that connects the later Middle Ages and the Reformation should consider not only innovations but continuities. For this purpose, Langland's exploration of Constantinian politics, theology, and ecclesiology is ideal. It allows Aers to challenge many oft-repeated interpretations of *Piers Plowman*, including the theory that Piers represents the unbroken succession from St. Peter to the contemporary pope. In contrast, Aers focuses on the significant absence of Piers, his devotional role, and the beautiful figure of the "Holy Church," who represents the pure early faith. This demonstrates Aers's unique point of view, and the inherent value of this fresh examination of an important primary source.

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**Anderson, Christina M.**

***The Flemish Merchant of Venice: Daniel Nijs and the Sale of the Gonzaga Art Collection.***

Yale and London: Yale University Press, 2015. Pp. 264 + 55 ill. ISBN 978-0-300-20968-6 (hardcover) US\$65.

Scholars of art history in Renaissance Mantua are intimately familiar with nineteenth-century archivist Alessandro Luzio's 1913 publication *La galleria dei Gonzaga venduta all'Inghilterra nel 1627–28*, documenting the 1627–28 dispersal of the rich Gonzaga art collections and their sale to Charles I. For Luzio, the villain of this ultimately ill-fated sale was the Flemish merchant Daniel Nijs, whom he characterized as a sort of shady confidence man, bent on engineering the veritable theft of the Mantuan treasures. This lively book about Nijs by Christina Anderson, grounded in solid and unbiased archival research and covering all of Nijs's life, with an emphasis on the Gonzaga sale, does much to illuminate Nijs's mastery of what Donald Trump might call "the art of the deal." While she does not completely rehabilitate Nijs's reputation, her detailed contextualization of the man and his motives does much to correct Luzio's

demonization of him as a kind of Flemish Fagan by examining Nijs against the rich backdrop of the emerging modern European commercial economy.

Ferdinando Gonzaga, who in 1612 gave up his ecclesiastical career to take over as Duke of Mantua, was the first in the family to consider a large-scale sell-off of items collected by previous generations of the ever-acquisitive Gonzaga family. These vast holdings included works by Praxiteles, Mantegna, Michelangelo, Correggio, and Titian, and piles of antiquities and antique fragments. The Italians, however, accustomed to family patrimonies and hereditary entitlements, had not really developed any comprehensive brokerage market to handle this sort of sale. By contrast, agents from northern Europe schooled in the open art markets of Amsterdam and The Hague were poised to exploit the commercial possibilities of the Italian desire to sell off entire patrimonies in the wake of shifting European fortunes. Enter Daniel Nijs, a Flemish art broker, a rather new type of cultural figure operating in the art market of the seventeenth century. Nijs seems to have materialized on the Mantuan scene before 1626, since by then he was advising Ferdinando on the sale, having secured a buyer in the form of Charles I of England. In that same year, when Ferdinando's death led to the accession of Vincenzo II Gonzaga, widely known as a "soft touch" (123), the sale was finalized. Negotiations were carried on by Nijs via the Mantuan chancellor Alessandro Striggi (the Younger) who, in addition to being a librettist and working with Monteverdi, seems to have been a bit of a deal-maker. Nijs compiled a primary list (still lost) and a secondary list (published here by Anderson) of the best of the Gonzaga assets, brokering their sale to the British crown and arranging for their packing and transport. While negotiations for the collection were successful, and most items were shipped to London by 1630, Charles I was slow to pay. This, combined with other failures, led to Nijs's insolvency and declaration of bankruptcy in 1631. And while Nijs did not, like Charles I, lose his head, he never really recovered, spending the remainder of his life unceasingly trying to broker his comeback deal.

Anderson structures her chapters in accordance with Nijs's progress from Flemish exile to merchant, connoisseur, dealer, agent, broker, bankrupt, and speculator, providing invaluable insights into the ways personal economic status increasingly determined identity formation in the early modern world. Her work builds on earlier biographical insights offered by historian Maarte Van Gelder, who examined Nijs's life in the context of European information

brokering, in *Double Agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Marika Kebluek and Badelock Noldus (Brill: 2011). The facts gleaned from Anderson's exhaustive archival research are woven into a rich, reflective biography, contextualized by the author's thorough knowledge of European commerce and the burgeoning art market of the seventeenth century.

One of the most fascinating themes in Anderson's book is her examination of Nijs's own attitude to art and antiquities. He was an assiduous and erudite collector. In his *L'idea dell'architettura universale* (1615), Vincenzo Scamozzi described Nijs's most precious possession as an intricately designed ebony "cabinet" in which he kept "portraits of princes, woodcuts, niello and enamel objects, engravings and all the drawings by Albrecht Dürer, and Lucas van Leyden" (61). This inventory defines Nijs's cultural aspirations and represents the wealth he accumulated during his early years in Venice. By 1625, on the brink of brokering the Mantua deal, Nijs owned property in the southern Netherlands and a house on the island of Murano, and was able to purchase the small lagoon island of Cavallino (near modern-day Jesolo). By contrast, in May 1631, awaiting payment by Charles I, Nijs was compelled to declare bankruptcy. In what seems to have been his typically audacious but shrewd way, Nijs invited his creditors to his house to claim their due. While they don't seem to have found his ebony cabinet (which had thoroughly disappeared), the agents did find a storage room full of the best pieces from the Gonzaga collection, which Nijs had held back from the second shipment of goods sent to the royal court. Nijs claimed complete innocence, professing himself "very amazed" by this discovery (151). Among these were the famous *Sleeping Cupids* by Praxiteles, Michelangelo, and Sansovino, described by Nijs as "the rarest things which the duke possessed" (151). For those of us who have been chasing these sleeping cupids since the Gonzaga sale, the knowledge that they were held back for a period of time in Venice is a fascinating revelation.

It is unlikely, of course, that Nijs was truly unaware of what the creditors would find—he had quite likely held back the best Gonzaga pieces in order to finally elicit payment from the king. This never happened and Nijs never recovered, but he continued to be a speculator until his final years. When he died in London in 1647, he was living in a house owned by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, one of the most famous art collectors of the eighteenth century, although it's still not clear if Nijs was working as Arundel's agent. The Nijs family chronicle of 1647 sums things up this way: "During his lifetime

[Daniel Nijss] climbed to a magnificent peak through good fortune and through adversity slowly descended again until the day of his death” (181). Anderson takes us on this journey with alacrity and insight, exploring the sociological and economic evolution of a self-made man who, in the end, proved to be a hostage to fortune.

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**Armstrong, Lawrin.**

*The Idea of a Moral Economy: Gerard of Siena on Usury, Restitution, and Prescription.*

Toronto Studies in Medieval Law. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. Pp. x, 331. ISBN 978-1-4426-4322-2 (hardcover) \$75.

At least since Odd Inge Langholm’s seminal work on “Economics in the Medieval Schools,” the rich variety of scholastic economic thought has been subject to a continuous stream of research. Many primary sources have nevertheless remained unexplored, which is largely due to the practical circumstance that they are not available in modern editions and translations. The economic thought of theologians belonging to the Augustinian hermit order, in particular, has suffered from scholarly neglect, especially if compared with the attention paid to Dominican and Franciscan strands of economic thought. Lawrin Armstrong’s monograph, containing a modern edition and an English translation of Gerard of Siena’s expositions on usury, restitution, and prescription, is a welcome initiative to fill that gap. Whether Gerard of Siena’s ideas can also provide a counter-narrative to the modern philosophy underlying a capitalistic economy, as the author has the courage to suggest, is another question. Armstrong thinks that today’s financial system is profoundly flawed, and considers Gerard of Siena’s economic thought to be illustrative of a historical counter-model of a “moral economy” that could prevent Western economies from an imminent collapse. That proposition is too general in nature to convince this reviewer. Recent empirical research has shown that faith-based banks, especially in Islamic countries, did not fare better than conventional financial institutions during the 2008 financial crisis (see the