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**THE REDISCOVERY OF FRA ANGELICO IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN**

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CONTENTS

Introduction	- 2 -
Critical dismissal of the early masters	- 5 -
An early collector: William Young Ottley	- 7 -
Growing access to the works of the early masters	- 9 -
Religion and art in the nineteenth century.....	- 11 -
A new interest in religious mysticism in art.....	- 13 -
Alexis-François Rio	- 13 -
Lord Lindsay	- 16 -
Anna Jameson	- 18 -
John Ruskin	- 21 -
The Arundel Society	- 23 -
Rediscovery by the Pre-Raphaelites?.....	- 24 -
Influence on the contemporary arts	- 26 -
Conclusion.....	- 30 -
WORD COUNT:14,885 words.....	- 31 -
FIGURES	- 32 -
Fig. 1.....	- 32 -
Fig. 2.....	- 33 -
Fig. 3.....	- 34 -
Fig. 4.....	- 35 -
Fig. 5.....	- 36 -
Fig. 6.....	- 37 -
Fig. 7.....	- 38 -
Fig. 8.....	- 39 -
Fig. 9.....	- 40 -
Fig. 10.....	- 41 -
Fig. 11.....	- 42 -
Fig. 12.....	- 43 -
Fig. 13.....	- 44 -
BIBLIOGRAPHY	- 45 -
Primary sources.....	- 45 -
Secondary sources	- 46 -

THE REDISCOVERY OF FRA ANGELICO IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

Introduction

The critical reception of an artist or art movement in any one period speaks volumes about the society that is passing judgement. There has recently been a resurgence of interest in artistic taste and fashions in nineteenth-century Britain, with a particular focus on the history of collecting, the revival of interest in the early masters, and the contemporary artistic response to these developments. In this study I intend to focus on the nineteenth-century British response to Fra Angelico (c. 1395-1455), described by Ernst Gombrich as the ‘touchstone’ for gauging Victorian attitudes to the early Italian masters.¹ While the artist was almost ignored by the art world and the general public alike at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by 1896 he was being hailed as having inspired ‘a noble army of painters’² over the preceding decades. How did this remarkable rediscovery of the painter and his work come about?

I will argue that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Fra Angelico was dismissed by critics as a ‘medieval’³ artist who was active during the ‘infancy’ of art and exhibited little technical skill. As a result of this attitude, his work was prized only by a few, scattered collectors who were sometimes more interested in his paintings for their historical significance than for any other reason. However, from the 1830s onwards a new interest in mysticism and religious art developed, coupled with a resurgence of interest in Fra Angelico’s monastic lifestyle. As I will show, this shift was led by Alexis-François Rio and transferred into Britain by writers such as Lord Lindsay, Anna Brownell Jameson and John Ruskin. Each of these critics approached Fra Angelico and his art from a different perspective, and they were therefore each instrumental in bringing the painter to the attention of a wider audience in Britain. I will also discuss the influence of Fra Angelico on contemporary artistic practice from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, arguing that the Pre-Raphaelites were not as instrumental to the painter’s rediscovery as may have been previously thought. Finally, I will touch on the artist’s acceptance into the canon later in the century, which coincided with a backlash against his style and the fashion for imitating him.

¹ E. H. Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive: Episodes in the History of Western Taste and Art*, London 2002, p. 155.

² ‘Minor Exhibitions’, *The Athenaeum*, 18 April 1896, pp. 519–20 (519).

³ As the concept of ‘The Renaissance’ only came into general use in the latter half of the 19th century, to begin with Fra Angelico was perceived very much as belonging to the ‘medieval’ period or to the ‘Middle Ages’. See C. Warr, ‘Anna Jameson (1794-1860): “Primitive” Art and Iconology’, in *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. J. Chance, Wisconsin 2005, pp. 25–36 (29).

Although I will make some use of visual sources, I do not plan to follow a strictly art historical approach to the discussion. Instead, I intend to take a broad overview that will bring together methodologies from fields including art historiography and the history of collecting. As such, the sources used will range from private letters and diaries to published works, including poetry and critical writings. As a genre, such sources often fall at the boundary between art criticism and the then-emerging discipline of art history. In particular, I will make much use of the periodical, an especially important medium for the instruction of the burgeoning middle classes during the nineteenth century.⁴ While I will also look to some extent into the socio-historical reasons behind Fra Angelico's rediscovery, to do so in any great detail would be impossible in the limited space available here; in addition, this area has already been touched upon by other researchers. For example, there has already been much work done on the mechanics of taste in the nineteenth century, as detailed below, while specialist studies into fields such as the economics of the art market during this period are also available.⁵

In terms of secondary sources, the nineteenth-century interest in the early masters was much neglected by academics until the mid to late twentieth century. At this point, the study of Victorian taste and fashion underwent a revival, spearheaded by John Rigby Hale,⁶ John Steegman⁷ and, in particular, Francis Haskell.⁸ The Italian 'primitives' in particular were the focus of an early study by Lionello Venturi⁹ and a later work by Giovanni Previtali, although the latter study does not extend into the nineteenth century.¹⁰ A good general account of the rediscovery of the 'primitives' is also provided by Robyn Cooper's PhD thesis.¹¹ Because of their links to the history of taste, many works that focus on British collecting have also been helpful: in particular, the pioneering sourcebook compiled by Frank Herrmann¹² and the *Aspects of British Collecting* series published in *Apollo* by

⁴ E. Morris, *French Art in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, New Haven, CT and London 2005, p. 206; G. P. Landow, 'There Began to Be a Great Talking About the Fine Arts', in *The Mind and Art of Victorian England*, ed. J. L. Altholz, Minneapolis 1976, pp. 124–45.

⁵ See, for example, T. M. Bayer and J. R. Page, *The Development of the Art Market in England: Money as Muse, 1730-1900*, London 2011.

⁶ J. R. Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance: The Growth of Interest in Its History and Art*, Malden, MA and Oxford 2005.

⁷ J. Steegman, *Victorian Taste: A Study of the Arts and Architecture from 1830-1870*, Cambridge, MA 1971.

⁸ F. Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and Collecting in England and France*, Ithaca, NY 1976.

⁹ L. Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, Bologna 1926. Venturi's discussion of the meanings of the concepts of 'taste' and 'primitives' on pp. 14-16 was particularly useful for this study.

¹⁰ G. Previtali, *La fortuna dei primitivi dal Vasari ai neoclassici*, Turin 1964.

¹¹ R. Cooper, 'British Attitudes towards the Italian Primitives, 1815-1865, with Special Reference to the Mid Nineteenth-Century Fashion', Ph.D. thesis, University of Plymouth 1976.

¹² F. Herrmann, *The English as Collectors: A Documentary Sourcebook*, London 1999.

Denys Sutton between 1981 and 1985.¹³ More recently, a wide-ranging but still pertinent study was made in Ernst Gombrich's *The Preference for the Primitive*,¹⁴ while Susanna Avery-Quash's 2003 essay analyses the growth of interest in the early Italian masters in particular.¹⁵ Few of these works take an in-depth look into the reception of any one artist, though some more recent studies, such as the 2010 PhD thesis on Botticelli by Jeremy Melius, have adopted a similar approach to the present study.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the scholarly literature on Fra Angelico has grown enormously since the quincentenary of his death in 1955. A useful overview of the twentieth and twenty-first century literature on the artist has recently been compiled by Gerardo de Simone, although—as this study will show—his assertion that the artist has never fallen out of fashion since the Cinquecento goes rather too far.¹⁷ In addition, many of the works cited by de Simone make surprisingly little mention of the painter's reception between the Renaissance and the present day, particularly in Britain. Gianni Carlo Sciolla's essay on Fra Angelico's critical fortunes, for example, is a Europe-wide study and does not go into great detail on his British rediscovery.¹⁸ The studies by Carl Brandon Strehlke¹⁹ and Caterina Bon Valsassina,²⁰ meanwhile, both focus largely on the French appropriation of the early Italian masters during the Napoleonic wars, as well as the Italian repatriation of paintings following the end of the conflict. The most comprehensive, recent account of the artist's British reception is probably to be found in Diane Cole Ahl's *Fra Angelico*,²¹ and even this glosses over key players such as Anna Brownell Jameson. One final source worthy of mention is the *Cavallini to Veronese* website compiled by David Savage, which has been invaluable for tracking the provenances of the Fra Angelico

¹³ Particularly useful for this study were D. Sutton, 'Aspects of British Collecting Part II. V: New Trends', *Apollo*, CXVI, 1982, pp. 358–73; D. Sutton, 'Aspects of British Collecting Part III. XII: A Wealth of Pictures', *Apollo*, CXIX, 1984, pp. 346–56; and D. Sutton, 'Aspects of British Collecting Part III. XIV: From Ottley to Eastlake', *Apollo*, CXXII, 1985, pp. 84–95.

¹⁴ Gombrich (as in n. 1). Particularly pertinent here is Chapter IV, 'The Quest for Spirituality'.

¹⁵ S. Avery-Quash, 'The Growth of Interest in Early Italian Painting in Britain', in *The Fifteenth Century. Italian Paintings. Vol. 1*, ed. D. Gordon, London 2003, pp. xxiv–xliv.

¹⁶ J. Melius, 'Art History and the Invention of Botticelli', Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley 2010.

¹⁷ G. de Simone, 'Fra Angelico : perspectives de recherche, passées et futures', *Perspective. La revue de l'INHA*, I, 2013, pp. 25–42.

¹⁸ G. C. Sciolla, "'...Giovanni Angelico pittore, di fama non inferiore a Giotto né a Cimabue". Protagonisti, interpreti e problemi della fortuna critica', in *Beato Angelico: l'alba del Rinascimento*, ed. A. Zuccari, G. Morello and G. de Simone, Milan 2009, pp. 71–91.

¹⁹ C. B. Strehlke, 'Carpentry and Connoisseurship: The Disassembly of Altarpieces and the Rise in Interest in Early Italian Art', in *Rediscovering Fra Angelico: A Fragmentary History* [exhibition catalogue], New Haven 2001, pp. 41–58.

²⁰ C. Bon Valsassina, 'Il Purismo religioso e Beato Angelico', in *Beato Angelico e Benozzo Gozzoli: artisti del Rinascimento a Perugia*, ed. V. Garibaldi, Cinisello Balsamo 1998, pp. 92–101.

²¹ D. Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico*, London 2008, pp. 216–222.

paintings—and those once attributed to the artist—that were either bought or sold in Britain in the nineteenth century.²²

Critical dismissal of the early masters

In order to understand the initial nineteenth-century attitude towards the early Italian masters and Fra Angelico in particular, it is first necessary to sketch a brief outline of the situation as it stood in the eighteenth century. Many of the major arbiters of taste had dismissed the early masters almost entirely, sometimes giving a nod to a few select names for having rescued the art of painting from the abyss into which it was perceived to have fallen following the collapse of the Roman Empire. This was such a commonplace belief that it was no longer thought necessary to mention that it was based on Vasari's writings. Author and Gothic revivalist Horace Walpole wrote in his *Aedes Walpolianae* that 'I shall not enter into the History of either ancient or modern Painting; 'tis sufficient to say that the former expir'd about the year 580, and reviv'd again in the person of Cimabue, who was born in 1240'.²³ Similarly, portrait painter and author Jonathan Richardson the Elder (1667-1745), in his 1719 *Discourse on the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure and Advantage, of the Science of a Connoisseur*, briefly mentioned Cimabue, Giotto, Simone Memmi and Andrea Verrocchio, before honouring Masaccio as 'the Father of the Second Age of Modern Painting'. However, his potted history of painting in Florence then moved directly on to the 'Universal Man' of Leonardo da Vinci, with no mention of other intermediaries.²⁴

Richardson's *Discourses*, which were republished as part of his complete works in 1773 and 1792, were highly influential. Edmond Malone, the author of the introduction to the 1801 edition of Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Works*, wrote that 'what most strongly confirmed [Reynolds] in his love of the art, was Richardson's *Treatise on Painting*'.²⁵ In his turn, famed portrait artist Reynolds (1723-1792), as President of the Royal Academy, also exercised a strong influence on the opinions of his contemporaries and the younger generation. Like Richardson, Reynolds singled out a few Italian painters from the Trecento and Quattrocento, such as Masaccio, 'the first who discovered the path that leads to every excellence to which the Art afterwards arrived'.²⁶ However, for Reynolds, as for

²² D. Savage, 'Cavallini to Veronese - Italian Renaissance Art', http://cavallinitoveronese.co.uk/general/view_artist/25, accessed 16 September 2014.

²³ Horace Walpole, *Aedes Walpolianae: Or, a Description of the Collection of Pictures at Houghton-Hall in Norfolk*, London 1767, p. xix.

²⁴ Jonathan Richardson, *Two Discourses, I. An Essay on the Art of Criticism, as It Relates to Painting ... II. An Argument in Behalf of the Science of a Connoisseur, Etc.*, London 1719, pp. 70–71.

²⁵ Joshua Reynolds, *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Knight; Late President of the Royal Academy*, 3 vols, London 1801, I, p. viii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 93.

Vasari before him, the painters of the Cinquecento were seen in an entirely different and more exalted light for having reached the pinnacle of artistic achievement. Michelangelo was described by Reynolds in a discourse delivered at the Royal Academy in 1790 as the 'Founder and Father of Modern Art', which 'he carried at once to its highest point of possible perfection'.²⁷ The early artists were therefore seen as important for paving the way for the development of painting, but not necessarily as valuable in their own right. The only mention of Fra Angelico in the *Works* was his inclusion in the 'Chronological List of Modern Painters'.²⁸ Tellingly, however, the column that should have been used for the fields in which he 'Excelled' was left blank.

Although the next generation of Royal Academicians may have clashed with Reynolds on other issues, for example criticising his championing of Michelangelo over Raphael, the artistic establishment was largely in agreement over the position of the early painters. Artist William Opie, in a lecture delivered at the Royal Academy in 1807 and published in 1809, dismissed the period until around 150 years after the death of Cimabue as 'the stammering and babbling of art in its infant state', which it 'would be as tedious as useless to recount'.²⁹ Similarly, many of the early nineteenth-century works produced outside elite artistic circles—such as art dictionaries or works arranged chronologically by school—continued to ignore or belittle the painters before Raphael. *The Gentleman's and Connoisseur's Dictionary of Painters*, first published by erstwhile satirist Matthew Pilkington in 1770, was the first work of its kind to appear in English. Extremely popular, it was republished as *A Dictionary of Painters*, edited by painter Henry Fuseli, in 1805, and appeared in various editions until 1857.³⁰ The entry on Fra Angelico, which is identical in both the 1770 and 1805 editions, is a single paragraph largely based on Vasari.³¹ It does not repeat Vasari's praise of the artist, however, stating with a certain disdain that he was

as much (if not more) respected for his piety, as for his painting [...] Indeed, even in his best pictures there were faults, and some of them very gross; which lessen the praise that otherwise they might have deserved: yet, he had skill to direct younger artists, and his obliging temper procured him many disciples.³²

Although some European critics were starting to write more favourably of the early masters at this point, even those British writers who took foreign works as their sources continued to interpret Fra

²⁷ Ibid., p. 196.

²⁸ Ibid., III, p. 294.

²⁹ J. Opie, *Lectures on Painting, Delivered at the Royal Academy of Arts*, London 1809, p. 37.

³⁰ A. C. Elias Jr., 'Pilkington, Matthew (1701–1774)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.urls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/22276>, accessed 16 September 2014.

³¹ See, for comparison, Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite dé più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori: nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. R. Bettarini and P. Barocchi, 6 vols in 9, Florence 1966-, Testo III, pp. 268–281.

³² Matthew Pilkington, *The Gentleman's and Connoisseur's Dictionary of Painters*, London 1770, p. 10.

Angelico in an unfavourable light. The Rev. John Thomas James claimed to have based his 1820 book *The Italian Schools of Painting* on the *Storia pittorica della Italia* by Italian academic Luigi Lanzi.³³ This was published in Florence in 1795-96, but did not appear in an English translation until 1828. The Italian edition—which must therefore have been used by James—praised Fra Angelico as the ‘Guido [Reni] of his age’, both for the ‘sweetness of his colours’ and for the ‘beauty that adorns the faces of his Saints and Angels’.³⁴ In contrast, the only mention of Angelico in James’ work is as part of a list of the ‘Imitators of Masaccio’,³⁵ although James did admit that the Quattrocento artists

by no means deserve to lie in that oblivion to which they have generally been consigned by posterity. If they fail in the just graduations of aerial perspective, in variety of composition, in freedom of touch, in fulness [*sic*] of design, we must yet observe in them a feeling of simple and natural elegance, and a degree of life and truth such as strikes us with surprise at the present day.³⁶

This reflects the early growth of interest—albeit relatively grudging and highly qualified—in the early Italian masters. Despite the critical dismissal of such painters in most quarters until at least the 1820s, however, artists like Fra Angelico did have some early champions in the form of dedicated collectors.

An early collector: William Young Ottley

There are only a handful of British collectors known to have been interested in the Italian ‘primitives’ in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, with William Young Ottley one of the best known. Ottley was one of the first British collectors to own a Fra Angelico, the *Dormition of the Virgin* currently in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (fig. 1). He also purchased at least two other panels then attributed to the painter but now ascribed to Francesco di Vannuccio.³⁷ Ottley had wide-ranging interests and did not confine himself to collecting the early masters; however, although two sales of parts of his collection were held in 1811 and 1824, he never offered the majority of his early Italian paintings for sale. Ellis Waterhouse, who compiled a thorough overview of Ottley’s collection of ‘primitives’ from the catalogues of the 1847 and 1850 sales held after his death, has speculated that this was because Ottley knew that there would not be a market for what were then still regarded as novelties.³⁸ However, it is also possible that Ottley was reluctant to sell his early masters simply

³³ J. T. James, *The Italian Schools of Painting, with Observations on the Present State of the Art*, London 1820, pp. iv–v.

³⁴ ‘Suo singolar vanto è la bellezza, onde adorna i volti de’ Santi e degli Angeli; vero Guido per quella età, anche nella soavità de’ colori’. L. Lanzi, *Storia pittorica della Italia*, 3 vols, Bassano 1818, I, p. 60.

³⁵ James (as in n. 33), p. 39.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁷ E. K. Waterhouse, ‘Some Notes on William Young Ottley’s Collection of Italian Primitives’, in *Italian Studies Presented to E. R. Vincent*, ed. C. P. Brand, K. Foster and U. Limentani, Cambridge 1962, pp. 272–80 (pp. 269 and 276).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

because he was particularly attached to them, given that his interest in early Italian painting was not confined to collecting.

As an assistant copyist to French medieval historian Jean Baptiste Séroux d'Agincourt, Ottley had been exposed to the early paintings featured in the extensively illustrated *Histoire de l'Art par les monuments* long before the work was published in English in 1847.³⁹ Like Séroux d'Agincourt, Ottley also wanted to influence taste and to open the eyes of others to the merits of previously unappreciated artists. The book of engravings that he published in 1826, which includes copies of two Fra Angelico frescoes (fig. 2), was described in his introduction as 'intended to illustrate the history of the revival and gradual advancement of the arts of design in Italy, during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries'.⁴⁰ Ottley has been criticised for focusing on the 'historical and didactic' significance of the early masters, rather than concentrating on their individual merits as painters.⁴¹ However, the true picture is more complicated than this. In fact, his earnest entreaties for his contemporaries to study and learn from these early works were highly unusual at the time:

The fault of these old artists was, that, labouring to render their picture perfect in all its parts, they lost the effect of the whole [...] But whatever may be the defects of their works, they are more than compensated by positive beauties, and those of a very high kind. In respect of the three great requisites of *invention*, *composition*, and *expression*, and for the *foldings of the draperies*, the best productions of these periods may even now be studied with profit.⁴²

Despite his clear intentions, it seems unlikely that Ottley's works had a major impact on popular taste because of their cost and limited print run. They were specifically singled out for criticism by James, who wrote of Ottley's *Italian School of Design* project that it was 'on so extensive and costly a scale, that while it could not but be regarded as a valuable and highly ornamental addition to our stock of literature yet it was in a great degree ill calculated for convenience'.⁴³ However, given that *A Series of Plates* was distributed by art dealers P. & D. Colnaghi, it may well have had more of an impact on elite collectors and connoisseurs than on the general public.

³⁹ Hale (as in n. 6), pp. 80–81.

⁴⁰ W. Y. Ottley, *A Series of Plates Engraved after the Paintings and Sculptures of the Most Eminent Masters of the Early Florentine School: Intended to Illustrate the History of the Restoration of the Arts of Design in Italy*, London 1826, p. 1.

⁴¹ J. Stourton and C. Sebag-Montefiore, *The British as Art Collectors: From the Tudors to the Present*, London 2012, p. 208.

⁴² Ottley (as in n. 40), p. 2.

⁴³ James (as in n. 33), p. iii.

Growing access to the works of the early masters

So what exactly lay behind the switch from Fra Angelico as a marginal figure, collected only by outsiders,⁴⁴ to his rediscovery by the mainstream? In purely practical terms, many studies have highlighted the importance of the exhibition and sale of the Orléans collection in bringing Italian works in general to the attention of a wider public.⁴⁵ This large collection of paintings had been painstakingly built up by Philippe, Duc d'Orléans (1674-1723) and maintained by his descendants until financial obligations forced a sale in the 1790s. As part of the process, and against the backdrop of the French Revolution, some 259 pictures were exhibited in Pall Mall in April 1793, while the French and Italian paintings from the collection were also exhibited in London for six months in 1798-99 before being delivered to their purchasers. Despite an entrance fee for the exhibitions of half a crown, the paintings still proved a popular attraction.⁴⁶ The impact of these exhibitions in generating a new interest in Italian art was even noted by contemporary commentators. Art dealer William Buchanan described how 'from that time, a new turn was given to the taste for collecting in this country'. Indeed, to this fresh interest was added the new opportunity to acquire such works, as 'subsequent importations of the works of the Italian masters, gave an opportunity of improving that taste'.⁴⁷

In particular, the political upheaval and religious suppression engendered in Italy by the Napoleonic Wars meant that many more paintings, especially altarpieces or sections of altarpieces, were brought to Britain to be placed on show for sale and to be bought on the open market.⁴⁸ Many of the Fra Angelico paintings and those attributed to him that were to find their way into British collections were transported out of Italy during this turbulent period: for example, the Zanobi Strozzi *Annunciation* in the National Gallery (fig. 3), previously attributed to Fra Angelico, was exported from Rome in 1818 by art dealer Samuel Woodburn.⁴⁹ Dealers were at first cautious, as the market for earlier works was perceived to be limited: Buchanan wrote in a private letter in 1803 of the necessity of 'humouring the taste of purchasers' in England, as '*names*, which are not fashionable and well known here go for nothing; of course Fra Bartolomeo's and Perino del Vaga's will never

⁴⁴ Haskell (as in n. 8), pp. 29–30.

⁴⁵ S. Avery-Quash, 'The Bridgewater Collection: Its Impact on Collecting and Display in Britain', http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/buying-collecting-and-display/bridgewater-collection-lecture/*/viewPage/4, accessed 16 September 2014.

⁴⁶ N. Penny, *The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, 2 vols, London 2004, II, pp. 461–70.

⁴⁷ W. Buchanan, *Memoirs of Painting, with a Chronological History of the Importation of Pictures by the Great Masters into England since the French Revolution*, 2 vols, London 1824, I, pp. 19–22.

⁴⁸ Strehlke (as in n. 19).

⁴⁹ D. Gordon, *The Italian Paintings before 1400*, London 2011, p. 417.

do'.⁵⁰ However, dealers soon spotted an opportunity to open up the market and attract buyers to early Italian works by highlighting their rarity. In 1827 picture dealer James Irvine, for example, is said to have agreed with William Thomas Horner Fox-Strangways, an early collector of the 'primitives', that 'Gothic & Greek paintings beginning as high up as you can get them & ending with Giotto, Perugino, Francia, Gianbellino [*sic*] etc.' were 'wanting in England & might be made at no great expense & within small compass as to size & numbers'.⁵¹ This highlights another key attraction of early Italian works: despite the rarity prices were lower, at least initially, making them ideal for collectors on a limited budget.⁵²

As the number of early Italian works in Britain began to grow, so did the interest in travelling abroad to view them, particularly given that the Continent was once more open to visitors following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. The Grand Tour was becoming more accessible, not just to aristocrats but also to the growing middle classes, who for the first time had the funds available both for travel and for art collecting.⁵³ The chance to view works of art *in situ* had a strong impact on many travellers: with regard to Fra Angelico, this was particularly true once the frescoes in San Marco, Florence, were opened up to non-religious visitors as a museum in 1869.⁵⁴ Travellers were also able to benefit from a growing number of guidebooks with a strong focus on art. Earlier guides such as Mariana Starke's 1820 *Travels on the Continent* had tended to skip past the early Italian masters. For example, when discussing San Marco, Starke merely stated as an aside that 'the Cloisters are adorned with frescoes by B. G. Angelico, Poccetti, Fra Bartolommeo, Carlo Dolci, &c.'. These frescoes were not deemed interesting enough to merit a single exclamation mark on her rating system (! to !!!).⁵⁵ In contrast, later guidebooks lavished much more praise on the 'primitives'. John Hale has described the *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy*, first published by Murray in 1842, as the most important work ever to draw public attention to Italian art prior to Raphael.⁵⁶ The *Handbook* devotes several pages to Angelico's works, describing his paintings as 'unquestionably the transcripts of the countenances which appeared to his imagination, nurtured in the trances of mystic

⁵⁰ W. Buchanan, *William Buchanan and the 19th Century Art Trade: 100 Letters to His Agents in London and Italy*, ed. H. Brigstocke, London 1982, p. 77.

⁵¹ C. Lloyd, 'Picture Hunting in Italy: Some Unpublished Letters (1824–1829)', *Italian Studies*, XXX, 1975, pp. 42–68 (59).

⁵² Stourton and Sebag-Montefiore (as in n. 41), p. 208.

⁵³ J. Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918*, Oxford and New York 1993, pp. 91–107.

⁵⁴ A. Benfante and P. Perretti, 'I chiostrì e il Museo di S. Marco', in *La Chiesa e il convento di San Marco a Firenze*, 3 vols, Florence c. 1989-, I, pp. 303–65 (360).

⁵⁵ M. Starke, *Travels on the Continent Written for the Use and Particular Information of Travellers* (London 1820), New York and Cambridge 2013, p. 129.

⁵⁶ Hale (as in n. 6), p. 88.

divinity and asceticism' and citing the San Marco frescoes as 'one of the main reasons' why the traveller should visit Florence.⁵⁷

For those unwilling or unable to travel abroad, however, Fra Angelico's works were still difficult to access in Britain. The majority were held in private collections, which were scattered throughout the country and often lacked proper cataloguing: despite thirteen months of research for his *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, German art historian Gustav Waagen still complained that 'the number of collections—larger and smaller—which I heard of without being able to visit, was very considerable, while at the same time many doubtless exist of which I received no tidings at all'.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, in terms of public collections, the National Gallery did not acquire any works attributed to Fra Angelico until 1857 and 1860.⁵⁹ Given the number of works that were then thought to be by Fra Angelico but are now attributed to other artists, this also meant that the chance of being able to view a genuine painting by the artist was even more remote. As late as 1849, painter Charles Robert Leslie could still lament in a lecture at the Royal Academy that 'I know nothing of the works of Fra Angelico excepting through the medium of a few slight copies, one or two Daguerreotypes, and some small, and perhaps doubtful, specimens of his hand'.⁶⁰ This keenness to view his works does show, however, that by the mid-nineteenth century there was certainly a newly developed interest in Fra Angelico in Britain.

Religion and art in the nineteenth century

One key issue that must be discussed when considering this rediscovery is the link between religion and art.⁶¹ This is particularly pertinent given the fact that the painter's life and art were so indelibly associated with Catholicism and monasticism. A strong link had already been made between Fra Angelico's artistic technique and his strict religious lifestyle within his own lifetime.⁶² For example, Michael Baxandall has noted how Cristoforo Landino, a contemporary of the painter, highlighted the 'devout' nature of Fra Angelico's life and works.⁶³ This attitude was emphasised and widely

⁵⁷ F. Palgrave, *Hand-Book for Travellers in Northern Italy: States of Sardinia, Lombardy and Venice, Parma and Piacenza, Modena, Lucca, Massa-Carrara, and Tuscany, as Far as the Val d'Arno*, London 1842, pp. 532–33.

⁵⁸ G. Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain: Being an Account of the Chief Collections of Paintings, Drawings, Sculptures, Illuminated MSS &c &c*, 3 vols, London 1854, I, p. v.

⁵⁹ NG582 and NG663; the first of these is now attributed to Zanobi Strozzi.

⁶⁰ 'Royal Academy. Professor Leslie's Lectures on Paintings. Lecture II', *The Athenaeum*, 24 February 1849, pp. 198–202 (199).

⁶¹ For a good overview of the religious nature of the Victorian period, see O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols, London 1970.

⁶² Sciolla (as in n. 18), p. 72.

⁶³ M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, Oxford 1988, pp. 147–51.

popularised by Vasari, who said of one of the painter's works that it 'truly seems to have been painted not by a man, but in Paradise'.⁶⁴ Despite the continuing influence of Vasari in the centuries that followed, this particular attitude towards Fra Angelico had been largely superseded by the eighteenth century, as previously shown. However, by the 1830s onwards there emerged a new interest in what was perceived to be the pureness of Fra Angelico as reflected in his art.

This picture of religious devotion and intense spirituality was to become one of the most important aspects of Fra Angelico's image by the mid-nineteenth century. For example, it was used to contrast Fra Angelico with contemporary Fra Filippo Lippi, who had a reputation for licentiousness despite also being a monk. While Fra Angelico was described as standing 'alone in the intense devotional feelings exhibited by his paintings', the 'profligate and dissolute' Lippi was seen as 'sometimes degenerating into coarseness, sometimes approaching to caricature'.⁶⁵ This spiritual separation from other artists was used to elevate Fra Angelico from a position of relative obscurity to being seen as one of the most important painters of his time.⁶⁶ Michael Wheeler has highlighted how critics such as Ruskin were necessarily affected by the 'debates which raged in the mid-nineteenth century — on biblical criticism, Church authority, sacred art, church architecture and Darwin'.⁶⁷ To this list of theological debates must be added the strong anti-Catholic sentiment prevalent in Britain during this period, which prompted commentators such as Charles Dickens and Charles Kingsley to speak out against the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their 'medieval' sources.⁶⁸ Steegman has discussed the confusion of 'religious doctrine with aesthetic criticism' evinced by publications such as the pamphlet *A Letter to Thomas Phillips* by Henry Drummond, an MP and founder of the Catholic Apostolic Church.⁶⁹ This inflammatory work, aimed at an influential member of the Royal Academy, associated the rise of Protestantism with a decline in art:

from the time of the Reformation, well-founded complaints have resounded on every side respecting the decline of the arts. As their advance was commensurate with the faith and zeal of the Church, so their decay has been but the outward and visible sign of that faith and zeal being gone.⁷⁰

This was obviously not an opinion that Protestant commentators shared or wished to repeat.

⁶⁴ Vasari, *Le vite* (as in n. 31), p. 271.

⁶⁵ Palgrave (as in n. 57), pp. 429–30.

⁶⁶ M. T. W. Plampin, 'From Rio to Romola: Morality and Didacticism in the English Appreciation of Early Italian Art 1836-1863', Ph.D. thesis, University of Plymouth 2001, pp. 56–61.

⁶⁷ M. Wheeler, *Ruskin's God*, Cambridge 1999, p. xv.

⁶⁸ D. G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, Stanford, CA 1992, p. 70.

⁶⁹ Steegman (as in n. 7), pp. 25–26.

⁷⁰ H. Drummond, 'Letter to Thomas Phillips, Esq., R.A., on the Connection between the Fine Arts and Religion and the Means of Their Revival', in *Speeches in Parliament and some Miscellaneous Pamphlets of the Late Henry Drummond, Esq.*, ed. Lord Lovaine, 2 vols, London 1860, II, pp. 169–96 (183).

Meanwhile, there were also concerns that Catholic works would tempt their admirers into conversion,⁷¹ as evinced by the writings of Protestant clergyman Michael Hobart Seymour following a pilgrimage to Italy in the 1840s. Hobart Seymour placed Fra Angelico and Pietro Perugino at the head of the religious school of art, writing of the ‘ideal of calm, peaceful, meek, heavenly holiness’ that stood out in their paintings despite their ‘often stiff, awkward and unnatural’ drawing style.⁷² However, he was concerned about

the tendencies of at least this school of painting, to draw and allure the mind by scarcely sensible degrees, toward that tone of feeling that so well consorts with some phases of the religion of Rome. [...] I had previously no idea—I could not conceive how painting could possibly exercise an influence almost magical, in alluring and seducing some persons to the church of Rome.⁷³

Hobart Seymour warned particularly of the example of the Nazarenes⁷⁴ in forsaking Christianity altogether to embrace ‘Mariolatry’.⁷⁵ In response to such anxieties, Protestant writers in Britain were often keen to stress that they did not associate an appreciation for the Catholic early masters with the superiority of Catholicism itself. Scottish art collector James Dennistoun, for example, argued that ‘conversion to pantheism is not a requisite for appreciating the Belvidere Apollo or the Medicean Venus; and a serious Christian may surely appreciate [...] Fra Angelico’s pencil, whilst demurring to the miracles he has so charmingly portrayed’.⁷⁶ Another example of this defence of Protestantism appears below, in the way in which French Catholic writer Alexis-François Rio’s praise for Fra Angelico was interpreted by the Protestant Lord Lindsay.

A new interest in religious mysticism in art

Alexis-François Rio

One of the earliest writers to rediscover Fra Angelico from the point of view of religious mysticism was French art historian Alexis-François Rio (1797-1874). Given his strong influence on many British followers, it is worth exploring his ideas in some detail. The strongly Catholic Rio travelled to Rome in 1830, the first of a series of journeys to Italy, where he was deeply struck by Italian art and began his in-depth study into the subject. In particular, he became inspired by the writings of German art historian Carl Friedrich von Rumohr—described by Gombrich as ‘one of the founding fathers of

⁷¹ T. Ledger, ‘A Study of the Arundel Society 1848-1897’, Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford 1979, p. 41.

⁷² M. Hobart Seymour, *A Pilgrimage to Rome*, London 1848, p. 136.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁷⁴ Although these German artists fall outside the scope of this study, they are nevertheless interesting for their strong associations with Fra Angelico. The most comprehensive recent study is probably H. Schindler, *Nazarener: romantischer Geist und christliche Kunst im 19. Jahrhundert*, Regensburg 1982.

⁷⁵ Hobart Seymour (as in n. 72), p. 142.

⁷⁶ J. Dennistoun, *Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino, Illustrating the Arms, Arts, and Literature of Italy, from 1440 to 1630*, 3 vols, London 1851, II, pp. 166–67.

art-historical studies⁷⁷—and by the Catholic art of the Nazarenes. This link between religion and art was to form the crux of his work.⁷⁸ Rio's seminal work *De la poésie chrétienne* was first published in Paris in 1836. The book was not particularly well-received in France, selling just twelve copies in the five months following its publication.⁷⁹ It was also not translated into English until 1854, when it appeared under the title *The Poetry of Christian Art*.⁸⁰

However, it is clear from the intellectual responses that it elicited in Britain in the years following its publication in French that the work was still widely read and strongly influential among the British elite even before its translation into English and its transmission to a wider audience. Rio can therefore be seen as an important conduit for the diffusion of contemporary Continental philosophical thinking and art historical research into Britain. In particular, Ronald Lightbown has linked his popularity to the fact that Rio wrote in French rather than German, which was still much less spoken in Britain.⁸¹ Meanwhile, Rio also held a prominent position in London's social circles, particularly Catholic ones: Jonathan Conlin has highlighted how Rio's association with politician Richard Monkton Milnes led to introductions to figures such as Gladstone. These friendships resulted in a glowing, 26-page review of Rio's book in London-based Catholic periodical *The Dublin Review*⁸² and, in April 1837, another enthusiastic review in *The Athenaeum*, written by George Darley.⁸³ Favourable appraisals of his work also began to appear in books. Popular art writer Anna Jameson, for example, refers in the introduction of her *Sacred and Legendary Art*, begun in 1842 but published in 1848, to 'my friend M. Rio (to whose charming and eloquent exposition of Christian Art I refer with ever-new delight)'.⁸⁴ Similarly, collector and art writer Lord Lindsay is known to have read *De la poésie chrétienne* during a tour of Italy in 1839,⁸⁵ while Ruskin's diary shows that he read the work in the winter of 1844-45 and it had a notable influence on the second volume of *Modern*

⁷⁷ Gombrich (as in n. 1), p. 133.

⁷⁸ P. Tucker, 'RIO, Alexis-François', <http://www.inha.fr/fr/ressources/publications/dictionnaire-critique-des-historiens-de-l-art/rio-alexis-francois.html>, accessed 16 September 2014.

⁷⁹ R. W. Lightbown, 'The Inspiration of Christian Art', in *Influences in Victorian Art and Architecture*, ed. S. Macready and F. H. Thompson, London 1985, pp. 3–40 (20).

⁸⁰ A.-F. Rio, *The Poetry of Christian Art*, London 1854.

⁸¹ Lightbown (as in n. 79), p. 8.

⁸² 'Art. VI. De la Poésie chrétienne dans son Principe, dans sa Matière, et dans ses Formes, par A. F. Rio.—Forme de l'Art, seconde partie', *The Dublin Review*, 1, 1836, pp. 435–60.

⁸³ J. Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece: A History of the National Gallery*, London 2006, p. 310. The importance of Darley in bringing writers such as Rio—and, subsequently, an enthusiasm for the Italian 'primitives'—to a wider audience is discussed in detail in R. Cooper, 'The Growth of Interest in Early Italian Painting in Britain: George Darley and the Athenaeum, 1834-1846', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLIII, 1980, pp. 201–20, particularly pp. 203–04.

⁸⁴ A. Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 2 vols, London 1850 [hereafter *Sacred and Legendary Art*], I, p. xxxii.

⁸⁵ H. Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay and the Sketches of the History of Christian Art', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, LXIV, 1981, pp. 27–60 (28).

Painters.⁸⁶ All three of these writers will each be discussed in detail later in this study with regard to their own roles in the rediscovery of Fra Angelico.

So just why was Rio's work so significant? Lightbown has emphasised the ground-breaking nature of *De la poésie chrétienne*,⁸⁷ which focused on the historical, moral and idealistic aspects of art rather than on aesthetics.⁸⁸ Above all, Rio saw painting as one of the forms of Christian poetry, with a strong focus on purity, morality and spiritualism. Unlike predecessors Richardson and Reynolds, who held up the High Renaissance as the pinnacle of art inspired by the antique, Rio believed that 'Christian artists needed to abandon antique art completely, along with its processes and models, in order to be able to develop those concepts—as original as they were sublime—that distinguish the schools of the Middle Ages'.⁸⁹ As such, for him style was a secondary consideration; the mystical and spiritual quality of the painting was far more important than any kind of naturalism. He argued that the trend towards greater representation of perspective and portraiture from the fifteenth century onwards, evident in the work of artists such as Paolo Uccello, was 'a true element of decadence'⁹⁰ and evidence of an increased 'paganism' in art. Instead, the painter's imagination should be 'invigorated by faith',⁹¹ with his works as 'the poetic expression of the profound sentiments of the soul'.⁹²

Given this context—and the artist's highly pious reputation—Fra Angelico seems to have been ideally placed for rediscovery. Accordingly, Rio waxed lyrical over the artist's apparently single-handed redemption of painting: 'In order for the primitive purity [of painting] to be rediscovered, a hitherto unprecedented revolution had to take place in terms of mind, heart and even imagination. This undertaking, apparently beyond human power, was nevertheless attempted by a man: a man who was a simple monk'.⁹³ Fra Angelico is described as 'the most beautiful

⁸⁶ J. Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 vols, London and New York 1903-12 [hereafter *Works*], IV, p. xxiii.

⁸⁷ Lightbown (as in n. 79), p. 12.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸⁹ 'il fallait que l'art antique avec ses procédés et ses types fût entièrement perdu de vue par les artistes chrétiens, pour qu'il leur fût donné d'atteindre à ces conceptions aussi originales que sublimes, qui distinguent les écoles du moyen âge'. A.-F. Rio, *De la poésie chrétienne dans son principe, dans sa matière et dans ses formes*, Paris 1836, p. 25. The translation is my own and from this 1836 edition; this reflects the importance of the French edition before the work's appearance in English in 1854.

⁹⁰ 'un élément réel de décadence'. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁹¹ 'vivifiées par la foi'. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁹² 'l'expression poétique des affections profondes de l'âme'. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁹³ 'Pour lui faire recouvrer [la] pureté primitive [de la peinture], il aurait fallu opérer dans les esprits, dans les cœurs et même dans les imaginations, une révolution jusque-là sans exemple. Cette entreprise, en apparence au dessus des forces humaines, fut cependant tentée par un homme, et cet homme était un simple moine'. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–59.

ornament' of a 'school that was both extremely beautiful and extremely lyrical'.⁹⁴ Perceived faults such as 'stiffness'⁹⁵ and problems with the shading are explained away because of the subjugation of style to mystical interpretation:

One would have to be sincerely impervious to all the most sublime emotions that Christian art can inspire in a suitably willing soul to pick apart laboriously all those technical imperfections in the products of this truly divine brush; imperfections that, in any case, stem far less from any lack of skill on the part of the artist than from his indifference to anything foreign to the transcendental aim that preoccupies his pious imagination.⁹⁶

As will be made clear, however, Rio's British followers did not always embrace this idea of substance over style to such a great extent — or for the same reasons as Rio.

Lord Lindsay

Alexander Lindsay, 25th Earl of Crawford (1812-80), was one of the most willing recipients of Rio's ideas on mystical religious art. As mentioned above, the keen bibliophile and historian read Rio's *De la poésie chrétienne* on an 1839 tour of Italy. The combination of book and journey proved inspiring, and Lord Lindsay began a work on the early Italian painters that was to appear as the three-volume *Sketches of the History of Italian Art* in 1847. In addition to the influence of German writings on the 'primitives',⁹⁷ Lindsay's debt to Rio is palpable: in the letters written to his family in 1839, he cited Rio's name and described how much his tastes had swung towards the early painters. He now admired Fra Angelico to the extent that 'no painter, not excepting Raphael himself, has invested his ideas with so much of heaven'.⁹⁸ Fra Angelico was placed in the highest class of Poetry, namely 'Religion... Man in his intercourse with God'.⁹⁹ In addition to Rio's admiration for the revelation of religious mysticism through art, however, Lindsay's letters also evoked more practical concerns. He feared that not enough was being done to protect the works of the early Italian painters: 'scarcely one Englishman in fifty ever heard their names', and yet their works 'will scarcely be in existence a hundred years hence, they are so fast crumbling away'.¹⁰⁰ It is therefore strongly tempting to see the championing of the protection of early works as a secondary motivator for the penning of *Sketches of the History of Italian Art*.

⁹⁴ 'le plus bel ornement' [d'une] 'école à la fois si mystique et si lyrique'. Ibid., p. 190.

⁹⁵ 'raideur'. Ibid., p. 192.

⁹⁶ 'il faudrait être bien inaccessible à tout ce que l'art chrétien peut faire naître d'émotions plus délicieuses dans une âme convenablement préparée, pour relever minutieusement toutes ces imperfections techniques dans les produits de ce pinceau véritablement divin, imperfections qui d'ailleurs tiennent beaucoup moins à l'impuissance de l'exécution dans l'artiste, qu'à son indifférence pour tout ce qui était étranger au but transcendantal qui occupait sa pieuse imagination'. Ibid.

⁹⁷ *Works*, XII, p. 174.

⁹⁸ Brigstocke (as in n. 85), p. 32.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 36–37.

This work clearly sets out Lindsay's theories on Christian Art. He classes Christian above 'pagan' art, crediting the former with Spirit where the latter can only lay claim to the lower qualities of Sense or Intellect. Like Rio, he again sees mere stylistic considerations as subservient to the spiritual feeling of the painter as evinced through art:

'[Christians] are raised by communion with God to a purer atmosphere, in which we see things in the light of Eternity, not simply as they are, but with their ulterior meanings, as shadows of deeper truths—an atmosphere which invests creation with the glow of love [...] which mere beauty of intellect or feeling, the highest charm attainable by Greece, can never rival. It is not, in a word, symmetry of Form or beauty of Colouring, apart or conjoined, that is required of us and that constitutes our prerogative, but the conception by the artist and expression to the spectator of the highest and holiest spiritual truths and emotions'.¹⁰¹

At one point, Lindsay quotes directly from the French edition of *De la poésie chrétienne*, calling Rio 'eloquent and elegant'.¹⁰² However, Lindsay admitted in private that he felt Rio too dogmatic and 'rather narrow bottomed'.¹⁰³ As discussed above, he was obviously struggling with Protestant concerns over idolatry and the implication that only Catholic artists could produce such spiritual works.

However, Lindsay was happy to agree almost wholeheartedly with Rio on the merits of Fra Angelico. Some fifty pages of the third volume of *Sketches of the History of Italian Art* were dedicated to the discussion of the artist.¹⁰⁴ Angelico was depicted as a pious, gentle innocent who rejected the world in favour of dedicating himself to God and to art. In fact, for Lindsay he was 'the especial voice and exponent in Painting of that religious rapture or ecstasy produced by the action of Spirit, or of the moral principle, on Sense through the medium of the Imagination, and which finds an insufficient expression even in poetry'.¹⁰⁵ Much was made of the supposedly direct link between artist and God: Fra Angelico's works were described as 'mystic', 'unearthly' and a 'flood of radiance and glory',¹⁰⁶ with his angels in particular as 'beings truly of another sphere, creatures not of clay but of light and love'.¹⁰⁷ Although Lindsay did not stray far into the field of art criticism, the painter's choice of subjects and use of colours received particular praise. However, more so than with Rio, Lindsay

¹⁰¹ Lord Lindsay, *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*, 3 vols, London 1847, I, p. xv.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, III, pp. 188–89.

¹⁰³ Brigstocke (as in n. 85), p. 45.

¹⁰⁴ Ironically, Lindsay also wrote that 'words really fail me in speaking of these remarkable [paintings]; they are so unlike anything else, and the emotions which inspired them, and which they re-excite in the spectator, are so peculiar and inexpressible by language, that it would be folly to attempt their utterance'. Lindsay (as in n. 101), III, p. 173.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

admitted to perceived faults in Fra Angelico's style: for example, one attempt at landscape is 'little, if at all, superior to the Byzantine'.¹⁰⁸ Lindsay split the painter's life into two chronological periods in order to explain away these defects, which were largely attributed to his early career — despite the explicitly acknowledged problems with dating his works. Other faults were transformed into a merit for the painter, whose lifestyle was seen as being so far from sin that he was unable to depict it:

It was because Fra Angelico's whole life was love, diverted by his vow of celibacy from any specific object, that his imagination thus sought for and found inspiration in heaven [...] his delineations of the worldly, the wicked, the reprobate, are uniformly feeble and inadequate; his success or failure is always proportioned to his moral sympathy or distaste.¹⁰⁹

Ultimately, Fra Angelico's works were so representative of faith that 'amid such grace and beauty, I feel it almost sinful to hint at such defects'.¹¹⁰ As a collector, Lindsay also translated this enthusiasm for Fra Angelico's paintings into the purchase of them: he bought a roundel from the altarpiece of San Domenico di Fiesole (which was bequeathed to the National Gallery in 1912; fig. 4)¹¹¹ and even commissioned a replica of the Louvre's *Coronation of the Virgin* that had so excited his interest in early Italian art as a boy.¹¹²

Anna Jameson

This keenness for collecting was not shared by the next writer under discussion, however. Anna Brownell Jameson (1794-1860) was a much more populist writer than Lindsay;¹¹³ she wrote, as she stated in an *Art-Journal* article of 1849, to educate the general public, particularly into possessing 'a just taste in Art'. For her, the 'purified perception of the Beautiful' should lead 'through the love of Art to the love of Nature, and from Nature up to God'.¹¹⁴ A gifted linguist who had travelled to Italy and spoke French, German and Italian,¹¹⁵ she was a prolific writer on subjects including Shakespeare, women in history and art criticism. The most important works through which she championed the Italian 'primitives' were her articles in *Penny Magazine*, published in 1843-45, which appeared in book form as *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* in 1845; her handbooks to the private and public art collections of London, dating from 1842 and 1844; and the 1848 *Poetry of Sacred and Legendary Art*, which had previously appeared as articles in *The Athenaeum* in 1845-56. Indeed, the circulation

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 193.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 181.

¹¹¹ Savage (as in n. 22).

¹¹² Cole Ahl (as in n. 21), p. 222; Lindsay (as in n. 101), III, p. 162.

¹¹³ C. Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery*, Aldershot and Burlington, VT 2004, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ A. Jameson, 'Some Thoughts on Art. Addressed to the Uninitiated', *Art-Journal*, 1 March 1849, pp. 69–71 (70).

¹¹⁵ J. Johnston, *Anna Jameson: Victorian, Feminist, Woman of Letters*, Aldershot 1997, p. 169.

for *Penny Magazine* hit some 50,000 copies a week in the years in which Jameson's articles appeared,¹¹⁶ while in 1865 a review in *The Athenaeum* stated that

Thanks to the enlightened knowledge of some of the leaders of public opinion in matters of Art, Fra Angelico's name is almost a household word in this country, where he was hardly ever heard of a century since [...] Popularly speaking, *Il Beato* [Angelico] was not known among us until Mrs. Jameson wrote certain sketches of early Italian Art for the *Penny Magazine*.¹¹⁷

Jameson's books also reached a wide readership, with at least six editions of *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* between 1845 and 1891,¹¹⁸ *Poetry of Sacred and Legendary Art* reached ten editions¹¹⁹ and remained in print until 1920.¹²⁰

In terms of content, Jameson's writings were strongly reliant on Vasari, with influences from contemporary critics such as Rio and Franz Kugler (whose *Handbook of the History of Painting* on the Italian schools appeared in English in 1842, edited by Charles Lock Eastlake).¹²¹ As a result, the lives of the artists are perceived as being inextricably linked to their artistic output. Like Rio, Jameson also looked for a Christian influence in the work she admired and made a link between Christian morality and beauty, although this was adapted to her personal faith.¹²² For example, the introduction to *Sacred and Legendary Art* refers to the need for Protestants in particular to trust 'in the progressive spirit of Christianity to furnish us with new impersonations of the good – new combinations of the beautiful'.¹²³ Jameson was not willing to dismiss the early Italian masters as 'Popery', as she felt Reynolds and Richardson had done,¹²⁴ instead, she argued that 'all that God has permitted once to exist in the past should be considered as the possession of the present; sacred for example or warning, and held as the foundation on which to build up what is better and purer'.¹²⁵

Fra Angelico was therefore well-placed for praise from Jameson, although she fell short of Lindsay's effusion, preferring to save her greatest accolades for Raphael. In Jameson's *Penny Magazine* articles, Fra Angelico is directly contrasted with Lippi, who was 'undoubtedly a man of extraordinary

¹¹⁶ Warr (as in n. 3), p. 28.

¹¹⁷ 'Life of Beato Angelico da Fiesole, of the Order of Friar-Preachers', *The Athenaeum*, 29 July 1865, pp. 153–54 (153).

¹¹⁸ Warr (as in n. 3), p. 28.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹²⁰ J. Johnston, 'Jameson, Anna Brownell (1794–1860)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.urls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/14631>, accessed 16 September 2014.

¹²¹ F. Kugler, *A Hand-Book of the History of Painting: From the Age of Constantine the Great to the Present Time. Part I. The Italian Schools of Painting*, ed. by C. L. Eastlake, London 1842.

¹²² Johnston (as in n. 115), pp. 164–65.

¹²³ *Sacred and Legendary Art*, I, p. 4.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

genius, but his talent was degraded by his immorality'. Lippi's work is described as 'always energetic' but 'often inappropriate, and never calm or elevated', while 'in the representation of sacred incidents he was sometimes fantastic and sometimes vulgar'.¹²⁶ Conversely, Fra Angelico was 'a man with whom the practice of a beautiful art was [...] a hymn of praise, and every creation of his pencil an act of piety and charity, and who, in seeking only the glory of God, earned an immortal glory among men'.¹²⁷ His skill stemmed from the way in which he spent his life—'one unbroken tranquil stream of placid contentment and pious labours'—and so 'all the works left by Angelico are in harmony with this gentle, devout, enthusiastic spirit'. Using similar language to Lindsay, Jameson praised the 'humility', 'delicate and vivid' colours, and 'unspeakable serenity and beauty' of Fra Angelico's paintings.¹²⁸ Like Lindsay, Jameson also attributed to Fra Angelico the inability to depict 'bad and angry passions', but argued that

on the other hand, the pathos of suffering, of pity, of divine resignation—the expression of extatic [*sic*] faith and hope, or serene contemplation, have never been placed before us as in his pictures. In the heads of his young angels, in the purity and beatitude of his female saints, he has never been excelled—not even by Raphael.¹²⁹

Jameson's intentions to educate her public also come through clearly: she noted that although Angelico's 'small easel collections are numerous, and to be found in most of the foreign collections [...] unhappily the writer can point out none that are accessible in England'. Instead, she pointed to French outline copies by A. W. Schlegel as offering 'some faint idea of the composition' to 'those who have no opportunity of seeing the original'.¹³⁰ Jameson also encouraged greater public access to Fra Angelico's works: in her *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art*, she stated as a criticism that the National Gallery was at that point 'poor in fine specimens of some of the best of the early Italian masters', including Fra Angelico.¹³¹ Like other early champions of the 'primitives', such as Ottley, Jameson saw the pictures as important not only in their own right—particularly since they suffered from 'a want of that technical skill to which we are now accustomed'¹³²—but also as an illustration of the development of art through the centuries. This simultaneous damning and praising of the style of the 'primitives' can be seen in Jameson's description of a painting of Salome with the head of John the Baptist, owned by poet Samuel Rogers and then attributed to Fra Angelico: 'There is

¹²⁶ A. Jameson, 'Essays on the Lives of Remarkable Painters, No. XII', *Penny Magazine*, XII, 1843, pp. 273–74 (274).

¹²⁷ A. Jameson, 'Essays on the Lives of Remarkable Painters, No. XIII', *Penny Magazine*, XII, 1843, pp. 281–82 (281).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ A. Jameson, *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art in and near London with Critical, Historical, and Biographical Notices of the Painters and Pictures*, London 1845, p. 10.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

much simple elegance and grace in the head and figures of Salome, and much expression in the miniature heads of the old men. The faults of perspective, and the inartificial arrangement, belong to the state of the art at that period'.¹³³ Although she fell short of Lindsay's extensive praise of the painter, Jameson still did much to bring Fra Angelico to the notice of the artistic world and, in particular, the wider public. She must be seen as instrumental in sparking the debate that led to the National Gallery's acquisition of several of what were then thought to be Fra Angelico's works in the 1850s.

John Ruskin

Another critic who did much to promote Fra Angelico was polymath John Ruskin (1819-1900), although his attitude to the painter was more complicated and fluctuated wildly over the course of his long career. Ruskin has been the subject of several biographies,¹³⁴ but for the purposes of this study the most important part of his life is the formative period in his teens and twenties during which he travelled to Italy on multiple occasions.¹³⁵ In particular, there was a notable shift in Ruskin's taste between the first volume of *Modern Painters*, published in 1843, and the second, which appeared in 1846: a move from the 'defence of the moderns' (particularly Turner) to the 'praise of the ancients'.¹³⁶ In his diaries and memoirs, Ruskin recorded a strong debt to both Rio and Lindsay in influencing this new enthusiasm for the early masters.¹³⁷ He wrote that

I must have read also, that winter [1844-45], Rio's *Poésie Chrétienne*, and Lord Lindsay's introduction to his *Christian Art*. And perceiving thus, in some degree, what a blind bat and puppy I had been, all through Italy, determined that at least I must see Pisa and Florence again before writing another word of *Modern Painters*.¹³⁸

During this additional visit to Italy in 1845—his first undertaken without his parents—he wrote to his father with a 'scale of painters', placing Fra Angelico at the head of the category entitled 'Pure Religious Art. The School of Love'. He declared that the painter formed 'a class by himself; he is not an artist properly so-called, but an inspired saint'.¹³⁹ This was a swift and wholesale change of heart – he later wrote that 'till 1845 I had never seen an Angelico'.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ A. Jameson, *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London*, London 1844, p. 391.

¹³⁴ See, for example, T. Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years, 1819-1859*, New Haven and London 1985, and T. Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Later Years [1895-1900]*, New Haven and London 2000.

¹³⁵ A. Bradley, *Ruskin and Italy*, Ann Arbor, MI and London 1987, pp. 7–24.

¹³⁶ *Works*, IV, p. xix.

¹³⁷ Ruskin also published a long and largely positive review of *The Sketches of Christian Art* in 1847. See *Works*, XII, pp. 169-248.

¹³⁸ *Works*, XXXV, p. 340.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, p. xxxiv.

¹⁴⁰ G. S. Weinberg, "'First of All First Beginnings": Ruskin's Studies of Early Italian Paintings at Christ Church', *The Burlington Magazine*, CXXXIV, 1992, pp. 111–20 (115).

The enthusiasm that Ruskin displayed for Fra Angelico in his work directly following this Italian tour is emblematic of the rediscovery of the artist in Britain in the 1840s. Like both Jameson and Lindsay, Ruskin perceived stylistic faults in the work of Fra Angelico, who was 'but too apt to indulge in those points of vitiated feeling which attained their worst development among the Byzantines'.¹⁴¹ However, this apparent naivety was at times praised as desirable, with his method of depicting sacred subjects described as 'always childish, but beautiful in its childishness'.¹⁴² Elsewhere, Ruskin praised the frescoes in the Campo Santo in Pisa as showing 'the entire doctrine of Christianity, painted so that a child could understand it. And what a child cannot understand of Christianity, no one need try to.'¹⁴³ This admiration of the 'childish' style of the early masters,¹⁴⁴ and their consequent closeness to God, comes through more strongly in Ruskin than in Lindsay or Jameson.

For Ruskin, this childish innocence was the key to Fra Angelico's appeal, as it reflected the strength of his spiritual link with God. In the third volume of *Modern Painters*, published in 1856, he described Purism, the Grotesque and Naturalism as the three 'healthy and powerful forms of ideal art'.¹⁴⁵ Purist Idealism was described as resulting

from the unwillingness of men whose dispositions are more than ordinarily tender and holy, to contemplate the various forms of definite evil which necessarily occur in the daily aspects of the world around them. [...] The life of Angelico was almost entirely spent in the endeavour to imagine the beings belonging to another world. By purity of life, habitual elevation of thought, and natural sweetness of disposition, he was enabled to express the sacred affections upon the human countenance as no one ever did before or since. In order to effect clearer distinction between heavenly beings and those of this world, he represents the former as clothed in draperies of the purest colour, crowned with glories of burnished gold, and entirely shadowless. With exquisite choice of gesture, and disposition of folds of drapery, this mode of treatment gives, perhaps, the best idea of spiritual beings which the human mind is capable of forming.¹⁴⁶

The importance of the painter's 'moral meaning' and his ability to depict spiritual beings therefore overrode 'merely aesthetic' considerations of beauty. 'The highest beauty has been attained only once', Ruskin wrote, 'and then by no system-taught painter, but by a most holy Dominican monk of Fiesole: and beneath him all fall lower and lower in proportion to their inferior sanctity'.¹⁴⁷ Ruskin paid Fra Angelico the honour of ending the second volume of *Modern Painters* with a poetic tribute to the painter that cemented the superiority of Christian over pagan art:

¹⁴¹ *Works*, IV, p. 270.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, V, p. 105.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, XXXV, p. 351.

¹⁴⁴ K. Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930*, London 1980, p. 83.

¹⁴⁵ G. P. Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, Princeton, NJ 1971, p. 31.

¹⁴⁶ *Works*, V, pp. 104-05.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 211-12.

It is vain to attempt to pursue the comparison; the two orders of art have in them nothing common, and the field of sacred history, the intent and scope of Christian feeling, are too wide and exalted to admit of the juxtaposition of any other sphere or order of conception; they embrace all other fields like the dome of heaven. With what comparison shall we compare [...] the angel choirs of Angelico, with the flames on their white foreheads waving brighter as they move, and the sparkles streaming from their purple wings like the glitter of many suns upon a sounding sea, listening in the pauses of alternate song, for the prolonging of the trumpet blast, and the answering of psaltery and cymbal, throughout the endless deep, and from all the star shores of heaven?¹⁴⁸

Ruskin's later views on Fra Angelico became more muddled,¹⁴⁹ as indeed did his thoughts on religion.¹⁵⁰ Although he used an engraving of a Fra Angelico annunciation as the frontispiece of the fifth volume of *Modern Painters*, published in 1860 (fig. 5),¹⁵¹ in the same volume he also warned against the dangers of 'overestimating' the purist school of art.¹⁵² Alexander Bradley has highlighted how 'a deeply inbred anti-Catholicism struggled hard within Ruskin with an admiration he could not suppress for works of art created by Catholic artists in a Catholic society'.¹⁵³ Ruskin's artistic tastes also changed, and he appeared to have largely rejected his youthful enthusiasm for the early masters by the time that *Ethics of the Dust* was published in 1865. Here, he criticised the rapturous ending of the second volume of *Modern Painters* (which he excused by saying that he had been 'quite under Angelico's influence'¹⁵⁴ when writing it), arguing that the 'peculiar charm' of the artist's work is undermined by 'the contented indulgence of his own weaknesses, and perseverance in his own ignorances'.¹⁵⁵ However, despite this later change of mind, Ruskin's role in the rediscovery of Fra Angelico should not be underestimated.

The Arundel Society

Of particular importance was the role that Ruskin played in the formation of the Arundel Society for Promoting the Knowledge of Art in 1848, itself a key player in the wider dissemination of the early masters. Initially led by Charles Lock Eastlake, soon to become Director of the National Gallery, the society's members also included Ruskin, Lindsay, Samuel Rogers and Giovanni Aubrey Bezzi, whose English translation of Vasari's life of Fra Angelico was published in 1850.¹⁵⁶ This translation was

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 331-32.

¹⁴⁹ R. Dellamora, 'The Reevaluation of "Christian" Art: Ruskin's Appreciation of Fra Angelico 1845-60', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XLIII, 1974, pp. 143-50.

¹⁵⁰ For more on this subject, particularly on Ruskin's famous and self-professed 'un-conversion', see Wheeler (as in n. 67).

¹⁵¹ *Works*, VII, p. 369.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 370.

¹⁵³ Bradley (as in n. 135), p. 23.

¹⁵⁴ *Works*, XXIII, p. 253.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., XVIII, pp. 307-08.

¹⁵⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *The Life of Giovanni Angelico da Fiesole*, tr. (English) G. A. Bezzi, Chiswick 1850.

particularly significant: although much that had previously been written on Fra Angelico had focused on his life and character, the English-speaking public had not as yet been able to access Vasari's biography of the painter.¹⁵⁷ In particular, Tanya Ledger has attributed the decision of the society to choose Fra Angelico as the subject of its first publication to its members' interests in both early Italian art and in a religious approach to art.¹⁵⁸ The Vasari translation was welcomed by many branches of the press, with *The Athenaeum* remarking approvingly that the biography 'though short, offers varied attractions. In the first place, it is that of one of the purest-minded and most spiritual painters of any age'.¹⁵⁹ Once again, this shows how closely Fra Angelico's religious lifestyle was linked to his artistic output.

As with Ottley above, the Arundel Society also felt that one of the best ways to draw attention to the early masters was through the circulation of prints and reproductions. In addition to the text, therefore, Bezzi's translation of Vasari included a catalogue of Fra Angelico's works and some twenty plates of lithographic reproductions of his paintings and frescoes. The first group of engravings issued by the society was also dedicated to Fra Angelico, this time reproducing the frescoes made for Pope Nicholas V in the Vatican (fig. 6). These engravings appeared in 1849-51, with further prints being produced between 1862 and 1869.¹⁶⁰ Such prints were widely discussed (and sometimes criticised) by periodicals such as *The Athenaeum* and the *Art-Journal*.¹⁶¹ In particular, there were concerns that the engravings would either not be useful enough for contemporary artists, or that—somewhat conversely—they would 'corrupt' artists with Fra Angelico's 'quaint' and 'superstitiously religious' style.¹⁶² Given the growing discussion in the 1840s onwards regarding the influence of Fra Angelico on contemporary artists, it is now worth looking into this issue in greater detail.

Rediscovery by the Pre-Raphaelites?

No study of the reception of Quattrocento art in nineteenth-century Britain would be complete without a discussion of the Pre-Raphaelites. Given their name, it seems reasonable to expect that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) was vital to the rediscovery of Fra Angelico. Indeed, the PRB did at least profess to admire the painter. For example, Fra Angelico appears on the *List of Immortals*

¹⁵⁷ Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari in England, 2: Fra Angelico Translated, 1850*, ed. C. Davis, 2013, <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/2180/>, accessed 16 September 2014. As well as Bezzi's work, pp. 72-82 of Davis's paper also discuss the translation of Fra Angelico's life published by Mrs Foster, again in 1850. The near simultaneous publication of two different translations of the life of the painter reflects the growing public interest in him.

¹⁵⁸ Ledger (as in n. 71), p. 26.

¹⁵⁹ 'The Life of Fra Angelico da Fiesole', *The Athenaeum*, 20 July 1850, pp. 769-71 (770).

¹⁶⁰ Ledger (as in n. 71), p. 35.

¹⁶¹ T. Harrod, 'John Ruskin and the Arundel Society', *Apollo*, CXXVII, 1988, pp. 180-88 (181).

¹⁶² Ledger (as in n. 71), pp. 40-41.

drawn up by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) in 1848. However, the picture is more complicated than it initially appears. Each of the writers, artists and political figures in the list was rated out of four stars. Leonardo da Vinci (notably, not a pre-Raphaelite artist) was, with two stars, the highest-ranked painter in the list. Fra Angelico received one star, alongside—perhaps surprisingly—Raphael himself. This suggests a strong appreciation for Fra Angelico, but it should be noted that the list was at least partly chosen with the intention to shock: Rossetti wrote approvingly that it ‘caused considerable horror among our acquaintance’.¹⁶³ In fact, given that the PRB would have found it difficult to view Fra Angelico’s paintings or even engravings of his works at this point,¹⁶⁴ its members would seem to be much less well-informed about early Italian art than their name would initially suggest.¹⁶⁵

Perhaps a better picture of the true early tastes of the PRB can be seen in an 1849 letter from Rossetti to his brother, dealing with a visit to the Louvre. His breathless list mentions the ‘wonderful’ Fra Angelico there but goes into little detail. While some early masters such as Mantegna and Van Eyck are cited by name, others are dismissed as ‘wonderful early Christians whom nobody ever heard of’. Even more tellingly, Rossetti then admitted that his true tastes lay in a much more contemporary direction. He wrote that French painter Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin (1809-64) has produced ‘the most perfect works, taken in *toto*, that [William Holman Hunt and I] have seen in our lives [...] Wonderful! wonderful!! wonderful!!!’.¹⁶⁶ As Colin Harrison has argued, pointing to the later development of the PRB away from the early masters,¹⁶⁷ the Pre-Raphaelites were in fact only following the fashion for the Italian ‘primitives’ that had already arisen by 1848. Therefore, while the PRB did show a strong interest in the work of the painters before Raphael—or at least dismissed the painters after Raphael¹⁶⁸—it remains unclear whether any of them initially had much knowledge of the early Italian masters at all. By the time that they were starting to claim affection for Fra Angelico, the painter was already undergoing a palpable revival.

¹⁶³ I. Armstrong, ‘The Pre-Raphaelites and Literature’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. E. Pettejohn, Cambridge and New York 2012, pp. 15–31 (15).

¹⁶⁴ H. Roberts, ‘The Medieval Spirit of Pre-Raphaelitism’, in *Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts*, ed. L. de Girolami Cheney, Lewiston, NY and Lampeter 1992, pp. 15–28 (16–17).

¹⁶⁵ See the oft-repeated quip from Haskell: ‘I sometimes feel that before 1848 every painter in England had admired the works of the artists preceding Raphael — except those who were to become the Pre-Raphaelites’. Haskell (as in n. 8), p. 49.

¹⁶⁶ D. G. Rossetti, *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. W. E. Fredeman, 9 vols, Cambridge and Rochester 2002, I, p. 109.

¹⁶⁷ C. Harrison and C. Newall, *The Pre-Raphaelites and Italy* [exhibition catalogue], Oxford, Farnham and Burlington, VT 2010, pp. 9–11.

¹⁶⁸ B. Laurent, ‘An Inventory of the Pre-Raphaelite Mental Museum, October 1849’, in *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism*, ed. T. J. Tobin, Albany, NY 2005, pp. 19–43.

It therefore seems likely that the PRB was not so influenced by Fra Angelico's art but was instead more in thrall to the accounts of Fra Angelico's life and work such as those produced by Jameson.¹⁶⁹ Such romantic, 'medieval' ideas of the painter-monk were reflected in writings such as Rossetti's short story *Hand and Soul*, first published in *The Germ* in 1850,¹⁷⁰ and in the drawing of Fra Angelico at work produced by Rossetti in 1853 (fig. 7). Flavia Dietrich has contextualised this sketch as part of an extensive corpus of nineteenth-century portrayals of the early masters at work.¹⁷¹ This picture of the monk praying before he commits paint to canvas—as Vasari had described—suggests that, like many of his contemporaries, Rossetti was at least as interested in Fra Angelico's life and religious fervour as in his art.

Influence on the contemporary arts

The extent to which the rediscovery of Fra Angelico truly affected the contemporary arts is difficult to determine, however. When considering painting, it is almost impossible to tease out the influence of Fra Angelico from that of the other 'primitives' also coming back into vogue over the same period. It is at least clear that many commentators were concerned about the backwards-looking tendencies of nineteenth-century art. This had been lampooned as early as 1848 in a *Punch* cartoon entitled 'High Art and the Royal Academy' (fig. 8). This contrasted an exaggerated example of the puppet-like figures of the 'Medieval-Angelico-Pugin-Gothic, or Flat Style' with the overwrought, muscular 'Fuseli-Michel-Angelesque School'. The satirical letter accompanying the cartoon stated that the artist had submitted both pictures for display at the Royal Academy 'that they might both be accepted, and being in such opposite styles, would gratify the admirers of both periods of Art'.¹⁷² By this point, therefore, the battle lines had been drawn, and there was already conflict between the defenders of the early masters and the supporters of the High Renaissance. While many publications were happy to praise the early masters, they did not want to see the same style reproduced in modern works. In 1855, *The Athenaeum* congratulated itself on directing attention 'to the simple piety of these patriarchs of Art, to the beauty of Fra Angelico's colour' as 'the first pioneers in this now triumphant cause'.¹⁷³ However, it had previously warned against the need to copy the 'quaintness and formal-looking character of Art in the schools of Siena, Pisa, or Florence' that were

¹⁶⁹ Roberts (as in n. 164).

¹⁷⁰ D. G. Rossetti, 'Hand and Soul', in *The Germ: The Literary Magazine of the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. A. Rose and W. M. Rossetti, Oxford 1979, pp. 23–33.

¹⁷¹ F. Dietrich, 'Art History Painted: The Pre-Raphaelite View of Italian Art: Some Works by Rossetti', *The British Art Journal*, II, 2000, pp. 61–69 (66–68).

¹⁷² 'High Art and the Royal Academy', *Punch*, XIV, 1848, 197.

¹⁷³ 'The Poetry of Christian Art', *The Athenaeum*, 10 February 1855, p. 171.

‘the results of a primitive condition of society’.¹⁷⁴ This was particularly pertinent in the case of the Pre-Raphaelites.

There has been much debate over the influence of the ‘primitives’ on the work of the PRB. In particular, the flat shadows, bright colours and religious subject matter used by many of its members, at least in the early years of the movement, were perceived by many critics as a direct nod to the early masters, whether or not this was seen as positive.¹⁷⁵ In 1849, the ‘sincerity and earnestness’ of Rossetti’s *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (fig. 9) was directly and approvingly compared to the work of ‘the renowned Dominican [Fra Angelico] who in his day wrought as much reform in art as in morals’.¹⁷⁶ However, in later years the critical opinion of such ‘primitive’ style soured;¹⁷⁷ a development that has been linked to the rebellious and defiant image of the PRB.¹⁷⁸ *The Times*, for example, wrote that the PRB had ‘unfortunately become notorious by addicting themselves to an antiquated style and an affected simplicity in painting’.¹⁷⁹ Much of the discussion of a potential influence by Fra Angelico is therefore coloured by the attitudes of the writers towards the PRB themselves.

An alternative view is that while the PRB did not necessarily reproduce the techniques of the early masters, their debt to these painters is evident in their realist approach to their paintings. For example, Ruskin is well-known to have had strong links with the PRB, evinced by his famous series of letters to *The Times* in 1851-54.¹⁸⁰ Although there has recently been much discussion as to the extent of his support,¹⁸¹ it seems clear that at least initially Ruskin was attracted to the work of the young artists by its ‘fidelity to a certain order of truth’.¹⁸² Following Ruskin’s lead, it has therefore been argued that the Pre-Raphaelites placed more store on the clarity and honesty that they perceived in the works of the Italian ‘primitives’ than on their style; it was this sincerity that they

¹⁷⁴ ‘Royal Academy’, *The Athenaeum*, 1 June 1850, pp. 590–91 (590).

¹⁷⁵ D. Roe, ‘The Pre-Raphaelites’, <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-pre-raphaelites>, accessed 16 September 2014.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Free Exhibition of Modern Art’, *The Athenaeum*, 7 April 1849, pp. 361–62 (362).

¹⁷⁷ Particularly in the conservative *Art-Journal*: see G. P. Landow, ‘The Art-Journal, 1850-1880: Antiquarians, the Medieval Revival, and The Reception of Pre-Raphaelitism’, *The Pre-Raphaelite Review*, II, 1979, pp. 71-76.

¹⁷⁸ R. Cooper, ‘The Relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Painters before Raphael in English Criticism of the Late 1840s and 1850s’, *Victorian Studies*, XXIV, 1981, pp. 405–38 (413).

¹⁷⁹ *Works*, XII, p. 319.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 319-35.

¹⁸¹ See, for example, F. O’Gorman, ‘Did Ruskin Support the Pre-Raphaelites?’, in *Persistent Ruskin: Studies in Influence, Assimilation and Effect*, ed. B. Maidment and K. Hanley, Aldershot and Burlington, VT 2013, pp. 81–91.

¹⁸² *Works*, XII, p. 319.

chose to reflect in their own art instead of the particular techniques of artists such as Fra Angelico.¹⁸³ Others have argued, following the writings of William Holman Hunt, that the Pre-Raphaelites were realists, focusing on the depiction of contemporary life and faith. Rejecting ‘medieval’ escapism, this suggests that the influence of the Italian ‘primitives’ on the style of the PRB has been unduly exaggerated.¹⁸⁴ Whichever argument comes out on top, the Pre-Raphaelites are certainly important for their links between ‘medieval’ art, contemporary art and poetry. While they did not necessarily help to rediscover Fra Angelico, they did help to disseminate an impression of his artistic style to a wider audience in a way that the critics discussed above did not.

Just as Fra Angelico’s influence can be glimpsed but not necessarily isolated in painting, it can also be seen in other media from the 1840s onwards. In terms of the visual arts, a striking example is the fresco work of Thomas Gambier Parry (1816-88), an English Catholic who became a keen collector of early Italian art following his travels on the Continent in the 1840s.¹⁸⁵ In 1863 he acquired a Fra Angelico predella, now held by the Courtauld Gallery. He transferred this enthusiasm for the early masters into the development of a new fresco technique called spirit fresco, which was demonstrated on his strongly ‘medieval’ designs for the interior of Highnam Church in Gloucestershire (executed 1850-71)¹⁸⁶ and in St Andrew’s Chapel in Gloucester Cathedral (1866-68; fig. 10).¹⁸⁷ This activity can be placed in the wider context of a distinct fresco revival in Victorian Britain, influenced both by the Italian Renaissance and by classical frescoes such as those found in Pompeii. By the 1840s, the technique was being used on projects such as the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament and a garden pavilion at Buckingham Palace. Anna Jameson wrote in 1846 that ‘The introduction, or rather the revival, of Fresco Painting in this country has become, in connexion [*sic*] with a great national monument, a topic of general interest, an affair of national importance, and no longer merely a matter of private or artistic speculation’.¹⁸⁸ In fact, Fra Angelico and his frescoes were understood to be such a strong influence on Gambier Parry’s work that the painter featured in a stained glass window erected as a posthumous tribute in Gloucester Cathedral (fig. 11).

¹⁸³ J. Dixon Hunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination: 1848-1900*, London 1968, p. 37.

¹⁸⁴ J. Murdoch, ‘English Realism: George Eliot and the Pre-Raphaelites’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXVII, 1974, pp. 313–29 (313–315 and 328).

¹⁸⁵ D. Farr, ‘Thomas Gambier Parry as a Collector’, in *Thomas Gambier Parry (1816-1888) as Artist and Collector*, ed. D. Farr, London 1993, pp. 30–45 (36).

¹⁸⁶ A. Quiney, ‘“Altogether a Capital Fellow and a Serious Fellow Too”: A Brief Account of the Life and Work of Henry Woodyer, 1816-1896’, *Architectural History*, XXXVIII, 1995, pp. 192–219 (206).

¹⁸⁷ B. Nicolson, ‘A Great Victorian’, *The Burlington Magazine*, CIX, 1967, pp. 111–12 (111).

¹⁸⁸ A. Jameson, *The Decorations of the Garden-Pavilion in the Grounds of Buckingham Palace*, London 1846, p. 5.

Meanwhile, the fact that the character of Fra Angelico and references to his works were starting to appear in novels and poetry from the 1840s onwards reflects the extent of his rediscovery. The nineteenth-century links between the visual and written arts fall slightly outside the scope of this study. However, they must be briefly discussed because of the importance attached by the Pre-Raphaelites to the close alliance between the arts,¹⁸⁹ and because of the ‘medieval’ revival that also took place in literature in the long nineteenth century.¹⁹⁰ It has been shown how Ruskin employed a poetic style to praise Fra Angelico’s ‘angel choirs’; George Landow has argued that the use of such language reflects Ruskin’s determination to place painting on a similar footing to romantic and expressive poetry in the grand tradition of *ut pictura poesis*.¹⁹¹ Fra Angelico, in the guise of painter-monk and spiritual interpreter, and his work appear explicitly in many written works of the mid-nineteenth century. As with Ruskin’s poetic outburst, the language used makes clear the impact of his artwork. In George Eliot’s novel *Romola*, which appeared in serial format in 1862-63, protagonist Tito glimpses the painter’s frescoes in an upper corridor at San Marco. The episode is lyrically described:

Fra Angelico's frescoes, delicate as the rainbow on the melting cloud, startled the unaccustomed eye here and there, as if they had been sudden reflections cast from an ethereal world, where the Madonna sat crowned in her radiant glory, and the divine Infant looked forth with perpetual promise.¹⁹²

Meanwhile, in poetry itself, the painter was held up as the ideal of Quattrocento art in Robert Browning’s *Fra Lippo Lippi* (1855). Lippi, as narrator of this dramatic monologue, complains that he can never measure up to Fra Angelico, with his critics always telling him “‘You’re not of the true painters, great and old; / Brother Angelico’s the man, you’ll find’”.¹⁹³ David J. Delaura has linked this passage of the poem directly with Rio’s writings on Fra Angelico and Lippi.¹⁹⁴ Thus, what began as the discussion of religious mysticism in Quattrocento art by Rio gradually found its way into almost every corner of the arts in the nineteenth century.

¹⁸⁹ P. Spinozzi, *Sopra il reale: osmosi interartistiche nel Preraffaellismo e nel Simbolismo inglese*, Florence 2005. Particularly relevant to the discussion at hand is Chapter 5, ‘Parole ad immagine. L’ekphrasis e la poesia iconica’.

¹⁹⁰ J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, Oxford and New York, 1994, pp. 14–15.

¹⁹¹ G. P. Landow, ‘Ruskin’s Version of “Ut Pictura Poesis”’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXVI, 1968, pp. 521–28.

¹⁹² G. Eliot, *Romola*, ed. A. Brown, Oxford and New York 1993, p. 529.

¹⁹³ R. Browning, *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, 6 vols, London 1868, V, p. 242.

¹⁹⁴ D. J. Delaura, ‘The Context of Browning’s Painter Poems: Aesthetics, Polemics, Historics’, *PMLA*, XCV, 1980, pp. 367–88 (378–79).

Conclusion

As I have shown, at the beginning of the nineteenth century Fra Angelico was generally regarded as an obscure, technically immature artist. However, interest in his role in the history of art began to grow in the first few decades of the century, supported by the collecting activities of a small number of early enthusiasts. The growing availability of his paintings on the market, coupled with the renewed travel to the Continent following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, now served to bring him into the public consciousness to some extent. But it was the writings of various authors—particularly Lindsay, Jameson, Ruskin and, through them, Rio—and their association of Fra Angelico with religious beauty and mysticism that really fuelled the rediscovery of the artist in the middle of the nineteenth century. In particular, much emphasis was placed on the ‘purity’ of Fra Angelico’s life, and the ways in which this manifested itself through his art. Although the Pre-Raphaelites may not have been at the forefront of this rediscovery, their work helped to make the style of the ‘primitives’ once more acceptable in art, while Fra Angelico was also influential in other media such as poetry and fiction. In fact, in 1863 *The Athenaeum* noted the change in taste regarding the artist: ‘Now-a-days it is hardly needful to say anything in honour of this marvellous and pure painter; but what was the state of public feeling about him sixty years ago may be guessed from a remark of Lanzi’s, that “he was truly the Guido (!) [Reni] of his age”’.¹⁹⁵ It seems by this point that his rediscovery was almost complete.

From around the 1860s onwards, therefore, Fra Angelico seems to have become part of the standard canon of art and of art history. He was included in monumental cycles that paid tribute to the old masters, such as the carved frieze around the base of the Albert Memorial¹⁹⁶ (designed and executed 1862-72; fig. 12) and the mosaic cycle known as the ‘Kensington Valhalla’ in the South Kensington Museum (c. 1864-75; fig. 13).¹⁹⁷ In this way, Fra Angelico was enshrined as part of the development of art from Cimabue and Giotto onwards; while the design for the Albert Memorial frieze was based heavily on Paul Delaroche's *Hémicycle* for the École des Beaux Arts in Paris,¹⁹⁸ the actual choice of which artists to include attracted very little criticism from the press.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ ‘Arundel Society’, *The Athenaeum*, 3 January 1863, pp. 22–23 (23).

¹⁹⁶ Haskell (as in n. 8), pp. 11–13.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Fra Angelico’, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1137963/fra-angelico-mosaic-cope-charles-west>, accessed 16 September 2014.

¹⁹⁸ F. H. W. Sheppard, ‘Albert Memorial: The Memorial’, *Survey of London: South Kensington Museums Area*, XXXVIII, 1975, pp. 159-176. Available at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=47524>, accessed 16 September 2014.

¹⁹⁹ Haskell (as in n. 8), p. 13.

Naturally, this greater public awareness of the artist also led to a certain level of backlash against his style and position in the canon. At first, as has been shown, commentators objected to the adoption of 'primitive' or 'medieval' techniques by contemporary artists. However, far from being too avant-garde, later in the nineteenth century Fra Angelico's work began to be viewed as too sentimental, maudlin and conservative. By 1881 Fra Angelico was being sent up—alongside Botticelli—in the comic operetta *Patience* by W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. 'How Botticellian! How Fra Angelican! Oh Art! I thank thee for this boon!' sighs 'rapturous maiden' Lady Saphir.²⁰⁰ This willingness to mock Fra Angelico shows clearly how he was by then viewed as part of the artistic establishment. By 1902, Langton Douglas bemoaned the 'prevalent misconception' of the painter's angels as 'celestial dolls, flat as paper, stuck fast to their gold frames'.²⁰¹ Douglas's scholarly monograph on Fra Angelico, the first of its kind to appear in English, rejected the Vasarian story of the painter's life as both inaccurate and inadequate, aiming to base his study on 'a scientific examination of the best sources of knowledge of the artist's personality that we have—his own pictures'.²⁰² Thus, at the close of the nineteenth century, with Fra Angelico and his works now under scrutiny using the new scientific methods of the burgeoning field of study of art history, the painter's rediscovery can now be considered complete.

WORD COUNT:14,885 words

²⁰⁰ A. S. Hoch, 'The Art of Alessandro Botticelli through the Eyes of Victorian Aesthetes', in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, ed. J. E. Law and L. Østermark-Johansen, Aldershot 2005, pp. 55–85 (55).

²⁰¹ L. Douglas, *Fra Angelico*, London 1902, p. 7.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

FIGURES

Fig. 1

Dormition of the Virgin, Fra Angelico, c. 1425

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Cat. 15

<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/101887.html>



Fig. 2

FRA. GIOVANNI ANGELICO DA FIESOLE, *Nat. 1387, Ob. 1455* ST. STEPHEN PREACHING.—*Painting in fresco, in a private Chapel of the Vatican, drawn and etched by Tommasi Piroli Plate XL in W. Y. Ottley, A Series of Plates..., London 1826*



Fig. 3

The Annunciation, Zanobi Strozzi, c. 1440-5

The National Gallery, London, NG1406

<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/zanobi-strozzi-the-annunciation>



Fig. 4

Saint Romulus frame panel from the Fiesole San Domenico altarpiece, probably by Fra Angelico,
c. 1423-4

The National Gallery, London, NG2908

<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/probably-by-fra-angelico-saint-romulus-frame-panel>



Fig. 5

Ancilla Domini, 'Painted by Fra Angelico; Drawn by J. Ruskin; Engraved by W. Hall'
Frontispiece to *Works*, VII



Fig. 6

St Laurence giving alms to the poor, print after Fra Angelico by Ludwig Gruner

Engraved for the Arundel Society 1849-50

The British Museum, London, 1850,1109.376

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1520223&partId=1&people=124757&peoA=124757-2-23&page=1



Fig. 7

Fra Angelico painting, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1853
Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, 1904P450

<http://www.prerafaelites.org/the-collection/1904p450/fra-angelico-painting/>



Fig. 8

High Art and the Royal Academy, Punch, XIV, 1848, p. 197

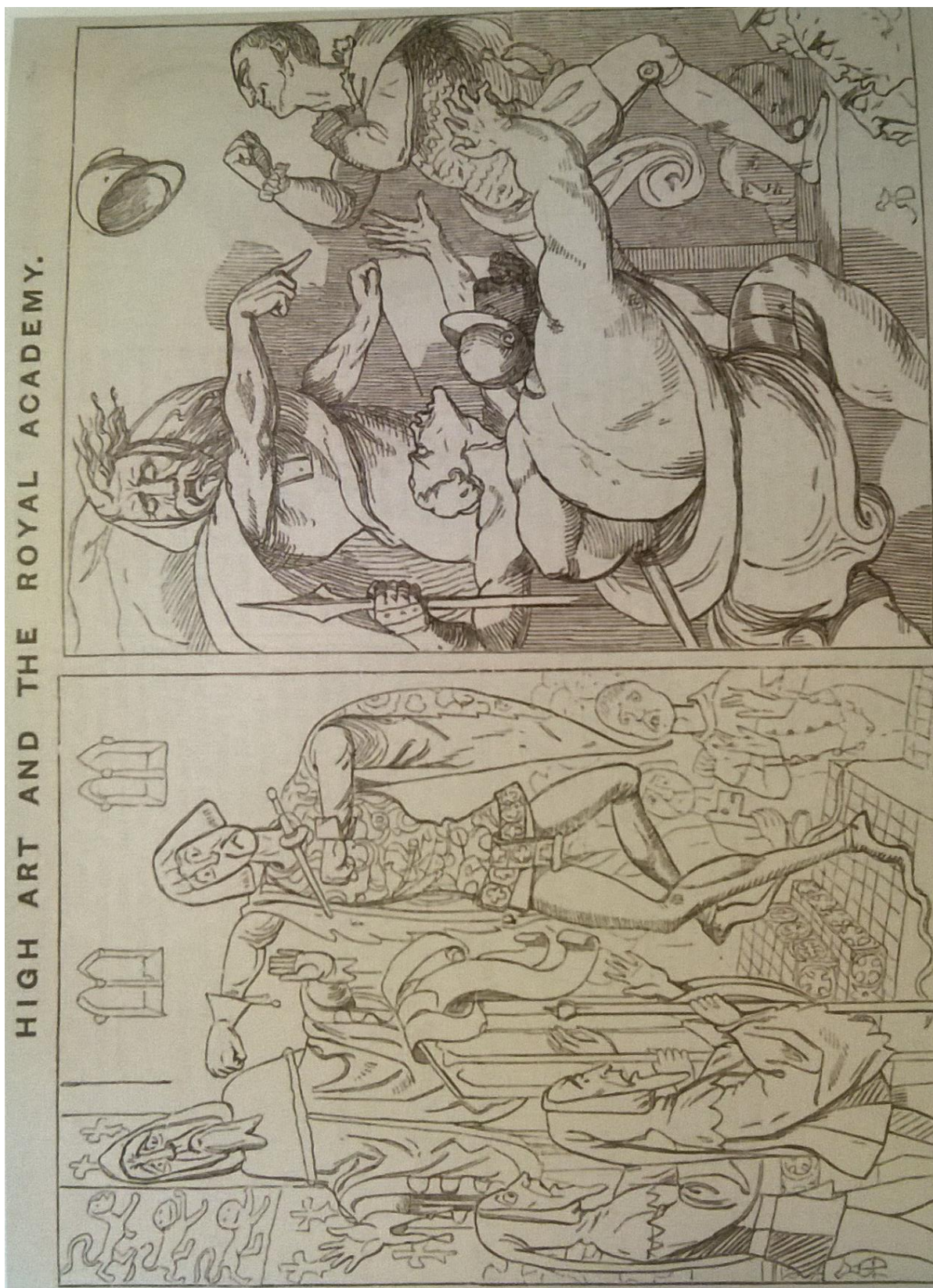


Fig. 9

The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1848-49
Tate Britain, London, N04872

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rossetti-the-girlhood-of-mary-virgin-n04872>



Fig. 10

Fresco detail from St Andrew's Chapel, Gloucester Cathedral
To a design by Thomas Gambier Parry, 1866-68
Author's own photograph



Fig. 11

Stained glass detail from south transept, Gloucester Cathedral, featuring Fra Angelico
Author's own photograph

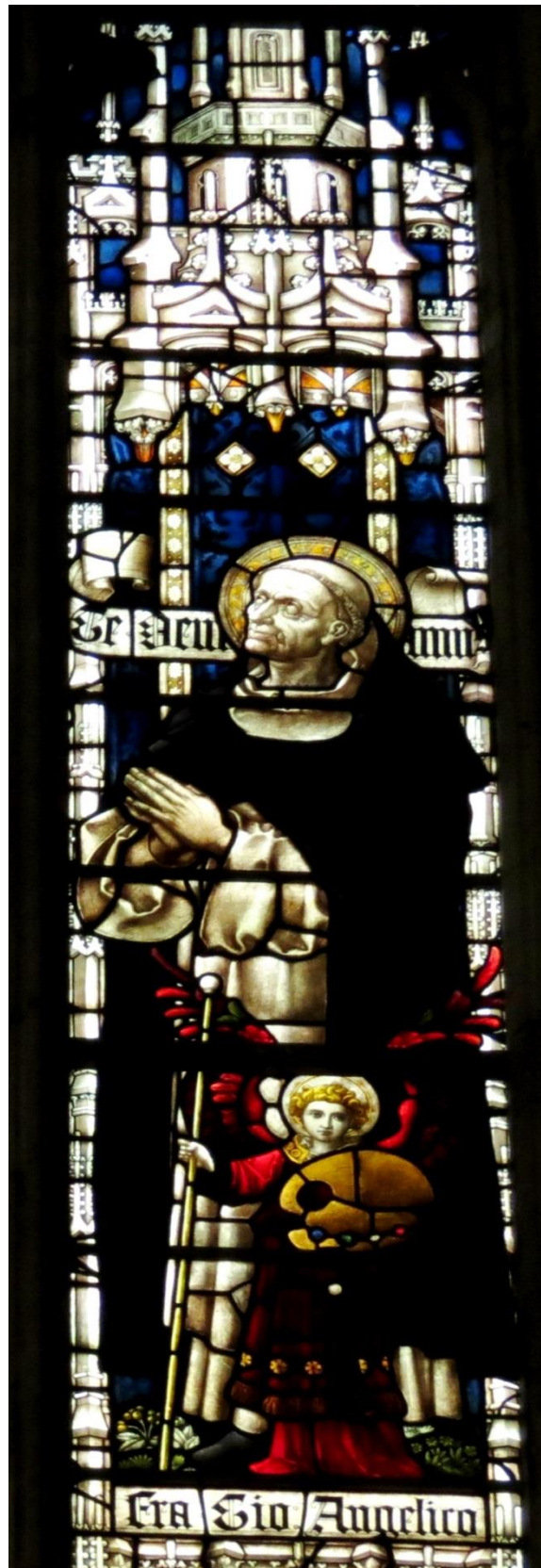


Fig. 12

Detail from the frieze on the Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens, London, featuring Fra Angelico
Designed and executed 1862-72

<http://www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/armstead/bio1.html>



Fig. 13

Fra Angelico (design for a mosaic in the South Kensington Museum), Charles West Cope, c. 1865
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1142-1868

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O131364/fra-angelico-design-for-a-oil-painting-cope-charles-west/>



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