

Colum Hourihane, ed. *Patronage: Power and Agency in Medieval Art*.

The Index of Christian Art Occasional Papers 15. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013. xxiv + 336 pp. \$35. ISBN: 978-0-9837537-4-2.

This volume is the fifteenth in the excellent series of occasional papers published by the Index of Christian Art following the index's annual conference. Offering multifaceted, fresh perspectives on the theme of patronage in medieval art, the book presents fourteen essays by scholars at various stages of their careers. All of the authors deal with theories and assumptions about patronage, but the volume is

structured so that the first and last essays are methodological pieces bookending twelve fascinating case studies. Although most of these concern late medieval works, the volume presents a wide chronological and geographic range of material and a diverse body of media, from Byzantine icons to late Gothic manuscripts and much in between. The essays present much new food for thought, challenging our current assumptions about what patronage means for us, and what it meant for makers and viewers of art in the Middle Ages.

Colum Hourihane's introduction succinctly problematizes the subject of patronage, a theme that is not new, but continues to evolve in fruitful ways. In the medieval period, the word patronage denoted the Church's right to present an ecclesiastical benefice to a member of the clergy. Art historians, however, have appropriated the Renaissance usage indicating the economic sponsoring of a work of art or artist. As both Hourihane and Jill Caskey underscore, this Renaissance model of rich patron sponsoring talented artist does not square with what we know about most medieval commissions. Where we have documentation telling us who paid for a commission, we can't always be certain that the same individual designed or directed the making of the work, and we have even less information about the power of artists. Thus many current patronage studies are broader, seeking to understand what we now like to call *agency*. But as Caskey points out, *agency* can also be a problematic term, implying a decision-making potential that we often cannot discern precisely. In other words, as all of these studies demonstrate, the commissioning of art in medieval Europe is far too complicated to fit our narrow terminology.

The essays approach the topic in diverse and intriguing ways. Several studies, for example those by Julian Luxford, Sheila Bonde and Clark Maines, and Lucy Freeman Sandler, illuminate the involvement of noble families and/or Church authorities in artistic commissions. Strengthened by documentary evidence, these essays take the more traditional notion of wealthy patron as their point of departure, but go deeper to reveal the complicated relationships among donors, advisors, and viewers/users/readers. In other, more common situations where documentary evidence is scant, scholars must rely on visual and contextual evidence. Reminding us that patronage is a historical construct that colors our view of canonical works we think we know well, Elizabeth Carstan Pastan's essay uses contextual evidence to suggest new theories about the origins of the Bayeux Tapestry. Similarly, Anne Derbes suggests a radical new approach to the patronage of the Trecento fresco program in the baptistery in Padua, arguing that the visual evidence attests to the active participation of a female patron in its planning. By contrast, in her analysis of kneeling female portraits in French books of hours, Adelaide Bennett offers a cautionary tale against reading too much into the visual evidence. Further challenging our current assumptions about agency as coming from patrons or artists, Aden Kumler's speculative essay inverts our perspective, considering patrons as effects, rather than agents, of works of art.

The reexamined framework of patronage thus offers a new way of looking at canonical monuments, such as Chartres Cathedral (in an essay by Claudine Lautier)

or Hagia Sophia (in Robin Cormack's study), as well as lesser-known works, like the collegiate foundation at Nordhausen (analyzed by Corine Schleif). The lens of patronage likewise sharpens our perspective on images of patrons (discussed by Nigel Morgan, Stephen Perkinson, and others), as well as iconographic evidence linked to royal commissions (as in Benjamin Zweig's essay). Although very different, the essays hang well together, and the volume will spur further scholarly conversations. In addition, the handsome presentation of the book, with excellent color images, as well as its accessible price, will make it extremely useful for teaching. Once again, the Index is to be congratulated for this successful synthesis of high-quality scholarship.

HOLLY FLORA

Tulane University