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**Charles Hope and his critical essay on the literary
sources “for the growth of public interest in painting”.**

A case study

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INTRODUCTION

« [...] if we want to investigate the existence or growth of a wider public for art we have to take a different perspective, looking at a different type of evidence or at the same evidence in a different way, and concentrating on the ways in which information about art and its history was diffused among those without a specialised interest in the topic. »¹

Much research has been done in recent years on the history of art museums and on museology as an academic field, but relatively little has been written about art collections information, usually published in the form of catalogues. Examining the literature relating to collections and museums can tell us much not only about the development of art history as a discipline, but also about how the public's approach to art has changed over time. Public interest in art, and in painting in particular, has grown along with the spread of more or less specific art literature and knowledge, first in art guidebooks and later in museum catalogues.

Charles Hope, art historian and former director of the Warburg Institute, addressed these matters in a critical essay entitled *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, published in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* in 2020.

The aim of this dissertation is to re-evaluate and expand on Hope's article, critically and in as much detail as possible. Focusing on a very specific phenomenon that has been scarcely studied in the field of museology, this research sees the overlap and convergence of historical, literary, artistic and museological studies, making it interdisciplinary and a possible starting point for further reflection in the field.

Following the research and critical methodology of Charles Hope, this thesis aims to provide an overview of the growth of interest in painting as a result of the diffusion of artistic knowledge among the European public - with a particular focus on Italy, France, Germany and Austria - in the historical period between the 15th and 19th

¹ C. Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, «*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*», Vol. 83, 28 (2020), pp. 131-159, 132.

centuries, drawing on both modern critical bibliography and ancient artistic and historiographical literature. The phenomenon of the diffusion of artistic notions in the period under consideration will be illustrated through a detailed study of the literary sources that contributed to increasing the interest of the so-called non-expert public, a public that was neither involved in the production nor in the purchase of works of art, in the artistic disciplines and in painting in particular.

Methodologically, the dissertation is based on in-depth scholarly and theoretical research, with the aim of presenting in a comprehensive manner some of the most important contributions of artistic, historiographical, and critical literature. Specifically, the sources will range from Italian literature, with Dante and Petrarca, to the first pamphlets and pocket guides on art, as will be seen for Francesco Scannelli and Giacomo Barri, to the German inventory catalogues and the French *catalogue raisonné* of the 18th century. The last written sources are the first educational catalogues produced for the public, accompanied by a rigorous and precise art historical arrangement of paintings.

With regard to the structure of the present study, it proved essential to devote the first section of this thesis to the figure of Charles Hope: his research interests, publications and critical research methodology are functional for understanding the article he published and, consequently, for this study, whose research is closely related to that of the previous historian.

The dissertation then presents three main chronologically arranged sections.

In light of Hope's observations, the first chapter is devoted to the historical process that led to the actual birth of public interest in painting. An initial study has been carried out of the first literary sources of an artistic nature in the 15th and 16th centuries, a historical period in which there was no strong public desire to learn about works of art or to see them exhibited. From the pre-Vasarian sources, which only mentioned the names of the most famous artists, we will move on to the study of Giorgio Vasari's *Le Vite*, a masterpiece that influenced the literary production of the following centuries and represented a real turning point in the history of art and museology. Finally, this first section will present the debut of the art guidebook in Renaissance Italy.

The second chapter analyses the widespread circulation and production of guidebooks in Italy and later in Europe. In the 17th century, more and more artistic notions became available to the public, thanks to the increasing number of publications. This section will then examine the first art catalogues of the major European collections and museums of the time, in France, Germany, Austria and, finally, Italy. However, it will be noted that these early catalogues rarely included historical or chronological information on artists or artistic movements, and it was only towards the end of the 18th century that some collections began to be arranged geographically by school of painting or chronologically.

The concluding section of this dissertation examines the emergence of the modern art catalogue and its educational role, thanks to a more didactic and historical approach to the display of paintings and to the drafting of catalogues. This aspect only developed at the beginning of the 19th century thanks to the contribution of Frédéric Villot, curator of paintings at the Louvre, who established a model for a new type of catalogue, intended both as a contribution to art historical knowledge and as a source of information conceived for visitors.

THE FIGURE OF CHARLES HOPE: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION AND RESEARCH WORK

Charles Archibald Hope, born in 1945, is a British art historian. After being awarded Doctor of Philosophy at Oxford University in 1975, he joined the staff of the Warburg Institute in London, a research institute associated with the University of London, which is particularly concerned with artistic, historical, and philological advanced studies².

Charles Hope was the Director of the Warburg Institute from 2001 to 2010, the year of his retirement, and he is currently Emeritus Professor and Honorary Fellow of the Institute³.

As director of the Warburg, Hope succeeded Nicholas Mann, a scholar of early Italian humanism and of Petrarca in particular, who was leaving the position to become director of the School of Advanced Study at the University of London.

Hope contributed to Art History with studies and research specializing in Italian art of the XV and XVI centuries, with a particular focus on Venetian painting. He issued a variety of significant publications, including books, articles, essays, and critical reviews related to those studies which are widely considered and admired today.

I will briefly present Hope's major publications in order of importance and interest to Hope himself, to give an idea of the author's areas of research and the relevance of his scientific work.

Undoubtedly, the Venetian Renaissance and Venetian artists were his main interests: Titian played a dominant role in his research and was the one he focused on most throughout his career, but in addition to Titian, he also published the results of his research on Veronese and Giorgione, to name but a few.

² *The Ashgate Research Companion to Giorgio Vasari*, edited by D.J. Cast, Routledge, New York, 2016, p. xiii.

³ <<https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/people/charles-hope>>

“*Titian*”⁴, published in its first edition in 1980, is an exhaustive study on Titian’s life and artistic production.

There seem to be an apparent scarcity of written sources dedicated to Titian’s life and artworks, despite him being one of the finest painters of art history, probably due to the difficulty of reproducing faithfully colours in black and white illustrations during the 19th and early 20th century.

Before Hope’s publication, the monumental monography composed by Cavalcaselle and Crowe in 1877 was still considered the best literary work on Titian⁵.

Hope focused his research on documentary sources, investigating contracts, letters, and previously unpublished archival evidence. The book he wrote can be considered the first easily readable and informative account on Titian’s life in English published in the last century, accessible to a wider public of both art historians and non-experts⁶. Hope described Titian’s professional career and personal life in five chronologically ordered chapters, often challenging, and contrasting some widely accepted interpretations of his paintings. He analysed the influences of the Renaissance masters in Titian’s artistic production, without making any new attribution to Titian, a work which had already been done by Cavalcaselle and Crowe in their monographic work⁷. However, what is interesting to notice is that, in his work, Hope decided to focus more on the issues generating disagreement among art historians and scholars, instead of concentrating on the larger and more renowned painting and artworks. The relationship between artists, patrons and the society of the time they were working in is of primary importance for the Author and is also one of the reasons why he focused his research on written sources resulting from social interaction, such as treatises, contracts and much more, not only in writing Titian but also in his other productions.

The publication from 1980 was recently followed by “*Titian: Sources and Documents*”⁸, a six-volumes monographic work published in English in October 2022:

⁴ C. Hope, *Titian*, London, Jupiter Press 1st edition, 1980.

⁵ W. Tresidder, *Review of Titian by Charles Hope*, «Canadian Art Review», Vol. 8, No. 2, 3 (1981), pp. 170-172.

⁶ Thomas Puttfarcken, *Titian’s Mythologies*, «London Review of Books», Vol. 3, No. 6, 4 (1981), pp. 1-4.

⁷ Tresidder, *Review of Titian by Charles Hope*, cit., p. 170.

⁸ C. Hope, *Titian: Sources and Documents*, London, Ad Ilissum-Paul Holberton Publishing, 2022.

it is a comprehensive six-volumes work of scholarship providing all the surviving historical evidence about Titian, a more detailed and complete work if compared to the above mentioned.

It is an ambitious work, which took more than ten years to be completed: it collects all the known documents and written sources on Titian, both contemporary to Titian's lifetime and more recent ones. Secondary sources, previously unknown documents and some supposedly fake documents related to the painter and his family are taken into consideration here for the first time.

The relevant texts are reported in the volumes, accompanied by extensive commentaries and annotations by the Author.

It is therefore evident that the archival and documentary research constitutes an integral, if not necessary, part of the critical methodology of Charles Hope.

Remaining in the field of Venetian painting, Hope also published, in collaboration with Jane Martineau, a catalogue entitled *The Genius of Venice 1500-1600*⁹, based on the exhibition of the same name held in London in 1983-1984 at the Royal Academy of Arts, and revised to accompany the major exhibition on Venetian artistic production of the Renaissance.

Still on the subject of Venetian Renaissance artists, and linking this period of art history with another subject of particular interest to Charles Hope, that of allegory, it is worth mentioning in Hope's bibliographical production the volume *Veronese and the Venetian tradition of allegory*¹⁰, published in 1986, together with other articles the author has published on this painter: he was particularly interested in Veronese's religious altarpieces, magnificent for their architectural elements as well as for their peculiar use of colour, which Hope often attributed to the painter's inability to create a harmonious composition while at the same time highlighting the main protagonists of the scene. Hope also focused on the non-religious and allegorical paintings of the Venetian painter, albeit to a lesser extent.

⁹ J. Martineau, C. Hope, *The Genius of Venice 1500-1600*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson in association with Royal Academy of Arts, 1983.

¹⁰ C. Hope, *Veronese and the Venetian tradition of allegory*, London, British Academy London, 1986.

Other important publications by Hope on allegory include his reflections and studies on Bronzino, in particular on Bronzino's *Allegory* and the various interpretations attributed to it by scholars. In this study, too, Hope starts his analysis from the written sources available to him, and here he begins precisely with Vasari's *Le Vite*, commenting on what has been noticed and what is missing in Vasari's work¹¹.

Indeed, Vasari himself, and what might be called the Vasarian legacy, was another pivotal research interest for Hope. He devoted a consistent part of his research to Vasari and the biographies of the artists in the *Vite*, clearly with a particular focus on Venetian artists. In fact, Hope was interested in Mantegna, Giorgione and of course Titian, and in their portrayal by Vasari: Hope published an essay entitled *The lives of the Trecento artists in Vasari's first edition*, in which he commented on the biographies of his interest¹².

Hope was a regular contributor for the *Burlington Magazine*, publishing periodically: it is an academic journal of fine and decorative arts, founded in 1903, and it still today the longest-running English art magazine¹³.

Hope's articles covered his usual subjects of Renaissance art: to mention a few he wrote on Titian, on Italian and Venetian art, on the patronage of the arts of the Este family, on architects such as Leon Battista Alberti and his works, and much more.

In addition to that, Hope published a variety of essays and articles for the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, produced in-house at the Warburg Institute of which Hope has been the director: the Journal is intended as an interdisciplinary monthly publication, ranging from philosophical to artistic to literary and social topics, both from the antiquity and from contemporary modern times¹⁴.

¹¹ C. Hope, *Bronzino's Allegory in the National Gallery*, «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 1982, Vol. 45, 5 (1982), pp. 239- 243.

¹² C. Hope, *The lives of the Trecento artists in Vasari's first edition*, in *Le Vite del Vasari: genesi, topoi, ricezione*, curated by K. Burzer, Venezia, Marsilio, 2010, pp. 33-39.

¹³ *The Burlington Magazine*: <<https://www.burlington.org.uk/>>

¹⁴ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*:

< <https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/publications/journal-warburg-courtauld-institutes> >

In the publications of the *Journal*, significant consideration is given to the relationship between cultural history, social history and art history, all fundamentals in Hope's research methodology as will be highlighted throughout this thesis.

The Warburg Institute

The Warburg Institute is a research institution associated with the University of London in central London, England.

A member of the School of Advanced Study, its focus is the study of cultural history and the role of images in culture – cross-disciplinary and global. It is concerned with the histories of art and science, and their relationship with superstition, magic, and popular beliefs.

The Warburg Institute takes his name from Aby Warburg¹⁵, one of the most significant and expert Art Historians of modern times.

It was first found around 1900 by Warburg in Hamburg, Germany, where he was living and studying, and it was initially named Warburg Library as it was composed of his book collection.

In 1926 it was opened also to research and became the Warburg Institute, later associated with the University of Hamburg.

Due to war reasons, the collection of books was moved in 1930 to London, and in 1944 the Institute became affiliated with the University of London, as it is still today¹⁶.

Nowadays, the Warburg Institute is primarily an academic research library, with a vast collection of textbooks, volumes, and photographs, counting roughly 350000 pieces. The Warburg Institute's research focuses not only on art history, but also on purely historical, philological, and anthropological subjects. Its scholars and professors are devoted to the study of the survival and transmission of cultural forms – whether in literature, art, music, or science – across borders and from the earliest times to the

¹⁵ Aby Moritz Warburg (Hamburg, 13/07/1866 – Hamburg, 26/10/1929) was a German Art Historian and Art Critic.

¹⁶ *The Warburg Institute*: < <https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/> >

present, including especially the study of the influence of classical antiquity on all aspects of European civilisation.

Some of the students who attended and graduated at the Warburg Institute throughout the 20th century became later among the most famous and renowned art historians, art experts, philosophers and historians of antiquity and classical cultures, who after their studies decided to continue the academic career becoming professors. Worth mentioning are Otto Kurz, Ernst Gombrich, Erwin Panofsky, Michael Baxandall and, of course, Charles Hope.

Charles Hope's critical methodology

Hope's critical methodology is based on extensive research into documents, archives and written sources of various kinds, which he considers to be of fundamental importance in the artistic and historical field, as will become clear later in this dissertation.

His interest in primary sources emerges also from the relevance he gives to the opinions of the contemporary people, living in the same period of the artist he is studying. Hope does not only consider the written sources of the time which, as we will discover later, we not so frequent, but also what was said about that person from his contemporaries, which he considers equally interesting and relevant to capture the true essence of an artist: it can be interpreted as an attempt by the Author to remove the so-called *period eye*¹⁷ from his research work and from his critical judgement.

Moreover, Hope takes into account also secondary sources, transcriptions, documents deemed as false or of uncertain provenance: his attempt is to analyse everything critically and to try to include as much relevant information as possible, through a

¹⁷ *Period eye* is a concept devised by Michael Baxandall, which he used to explain how Renaissance art was seen and studied by modern people in a different and culturally determined way. The term Period Eye can be used more in general to refer to a social and cultural lens, originating from the time one lives in, which modifies how we see and interpret a visual object.

Cfr. M. Baxandall, *Painting and experience in fifteenth century Italy: a primer in the social history of pictorial style*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 29-108.

careful investigation of what is trustworthy and reliable, and what is not worth considering, in the attempt to be adherent to facts and report them faithfully, before critically examining them.

One of the preeminent aims of the Warburg Institute is focusing on the relationship between art, culture, and society.

In his critical research, Hope always mentions and highlights the importance of considering cultural history as relevant as art history, because the two proceed together and are closely intertwined.

The relationship between artists and the society will have a central role in his studies, and in this dissertation as well.

CHAPTER 1

The birth of public interest in painting and the debut of the art guidebook in Renaissance Italy

Public interest in painting, and in modern painting in particular, had a slow and complex development process, certainly not linear, and not uniform in all European countries. Italy, Germany and France played a central role in the diffusion of artistic knowledge from the 16th century onwards and contributed greatly to the increase in the number of people who wanted to see, understand and even own works of art.

The analysis of pre-Vasarian literary sources of art history and museology, with particular focus on the target for which those sources were written, will be the subject of this first chapter of the dissertation, first of all to frame the documentary sources in their proper historical artistic context, and in second place to emphasize how the process of growth of public interest was a gradual one, which developed over many centuries.

Before museums existed and before artistic knowledge had become easily accessible, only a limited number of people in Europe were knowledgeable of the aspects described by Hope in the article *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*¹⁸ as the three levels of artistic knowledge.

A first level consists in knowing the names of the most renowned contemporary and past artists: without a comprehensive artistic literature of the topic and with no art exhibitions open to the public, this kind of knowledge relied only on oral transmission and word of mouth.

A second level relates to the ability to recognise the aforementioned artists by looking at their works, thus by their artistic style and for the characteristics of an artist in the way they paint: this aspect was limited to those who had the opportunity to see a large

¹⁸ C. Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute», Vol. 83, 28 (2020), pp. 131-159.

number of artworks, either because they were artists themselves or because they were wealthy enough to patronise painters.

Finally, the third level of knowledge corresponds to the ability to place paintings in their proper historical context, and thus to identify the correct artistic school and historical period, which was impossible to determine without a complete and detailed art historical literature such as that available today.

According to the Author, to enjoy an artwork and an artistic experience properly and fully, such as an art exhibition or the visit to a modern art museum, it is essential to possess the above-mentioned artistic competences declined in the three levels described here. Hence it is understandable the scarcity of public¹⁹ in painting, and more broadly in the arts, in the centuries up to the 16th.

A central figure in the growth of the artistic public is that of art historians, who contributed very significantly with their studies to providing the non-expert public with the means to understand and appreciate works of art. This applies both to art historians of that time and to contemporary historians as well, who re-analysed and reconstructed the phenomenon *a posteriori* in much greater detail, being able to draw on increasingly certain and certifiable sources.

Hope highlighted that art historians have always tried to spread knowledge and to teach people about artistic differences and schools, and even about the evolutions and changes throughout the centuries²⁰.

However, during the Renaissance period, they rightly so focused particularly on the following categories of people in their attempt to spread artistic knowledge: artists, patrons, art dealers, art writers and other art historians. They were those with a close involvement in the arts field, and they were required to have specific knowledge on the subject to work properly.

By not including those not directly involved in the artistic world, namely the non-expert public, a growth in public interest was obviously difficult, not only because there was no broad circulation of information related neither to artists nor artworks,

¹⁹ With the term *public*, Charles Hope refers to people who do not have a direct involvement in the arts world nor in the artistic market.

²⁰ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 131.

but also because initially the public had no guidance in their visit to exhibitions and in the understanding of the paintings, an aspect that was only diminishing their willingness to know more on the topic.

Schlosser's work *Die Kunstliterature*²¹, widely known in the Italian translation *La Letteratura Artistica*²², constitutes the example of a renowned art historian who focused his literary work on the texts he believed would be more relevant and useful specifically for art historians.

His book, divided into nine extensive chapters, is considered an essential and comprehensive manual of all artistic and literary sources from ancient times to the end of the 19th century. However, it is a work accessible only to those who already possess at least a minimal knowledge in the artistic field, both for the specific technical language used by the author and for the internal references to other literary works or paintings, knowledge that is necessary to possess in order to grasp the meaning of Schlosser's words.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to highlight that the value and importance of Schlosser's *La Letteratura Artistica* is incommensurable. Its rigorously chronological reconstruction of the most important historical-artistic works written since the Middle Ages, both of art criticism and of a more theoretical nature, therefore containing pictorial and sculptural principles and theories, allows us to verify and compare today's research with the archival and documentary research done by Schlosser over a century ago.

His work also allows us to focus on the historians and artists who contributed most to increasing artistic interest in the public of the time, the focal point of this research.

Particularly relevant in this context is therefore the section that Schlosser devotes to pre-Vasarian historiographical sources, treated in detail in the *Libro Terzo* entitled *La Storiografia dell'Arte prima del Vasari*²³, whose authors were also highlighted by Hope himself in his study and will be explored in depth here afterwards.

²¹ J. Schlosser, *Die Kunstliterature: Ein Handbuch zur Quellenkunde der neueren Kunstgeschichte*, Wien, Kunstverlag Anton & Co, 1924.

²² J. Schlosser Magnino, O. Kurz, *La letteratura artistica: manuale delle fonti della storia dell'arte moderna*, Firenze, "La Nuova Italia" Editrice, and Wien, Kunstverlag Anton & Co, 1964. Translated by Filippo Rossi.

²³ Schlosser, *La letteratura artistica, Libro Terzo*, pp. 187-223.

In the *Libro Terzo*, Schlosser devotes the first two subchapters²⁴ to the historical reconstruction and geographical mapping of how and where artistic literature actually began, both in Italy and more generally in Europe, exactly as Hope did at the beginning of his article.

Moreover, Schlosser devotes the following subchapter, *La Topografia artistica. Inizio della Letteratura delle Guide Artistiche*²⁵, to analysing how the concept of guidebooks devoted to the arts developed and spread, wrote intentionally aiming at the public and at those who intended to visit churches, art cities and their landmarks. The creation and publication of various types of guidebooks through the 16th and 17th centuries contributed to the birth of what we define today as artistic tourism.

A contested aspect of Schlosser's monumental text is the «anachronistic use of *Kunsttheorie* to cover virtually all texts on art»²⁶, as stressed by Charles Hope.

This stimulates a reflection on what was included in the definition of *theory* in the Renaissance era. The term *theory* was referred to those writings that gave technical, almost scientific, indications at a pictorial, sculptural or architectural level, and this kind of information was beneficial to those who produced works in the field, namely artists and architects. The so-called theoretical texts at the time were of no use to non-experts, as they did not possess the needed expertise.

An example is found in Vasari, who wrote a technical introduction to the three arts of drawing in the second edition of *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*²⁷ published in 1568: the section was titled *Le Teoriche*²⁸, and was devoted to architecture, sculpture, and painting in this precise order. Vasari delved into the practical aspects of applied artistic disciplines, giving precisely theoretical indications on the tools needed to paint or to engrave, rather than on which are the main architectural orders.

²⁴ Ivi, *I precursori del Vasari*, pp. 189-201, and *Primi Passi della Storiografia dell'Arte fuori dall'Italia*, pp. 203-208.

²⁵ Ivi, *La Topografia artistica. Inizio della Letteratura delle Guide Artistiche*, cit., pp. 209-223.

²⁶ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 132.

²⁷ G. Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (second edition), Firenze, Giunti Editore, 1568. See Fig. 12.

²⁸ Vasari, *Le Teoriche*, in *Le Vite*, cit., pp. 19-118.

It is therefore possible to deduce that the modern conception of theory is dissimilar to how theory was intended in the 16th and 17th centuries. In Schlosser, his use of *Kunsttheorie*²⁹ does not make this discrimination, which is however necessary for a correct and rigorous analysis of the artistic literature. In fact, what was defined as theory in the Renaissance could be of no help to any profane public simply interested in learning more about artworks, and it is evident that it could not contribute in any meaningful way to increase public interest and public awareness about art and paintings.

The *theory* comprised into art catalogues and guidebooks, both ancient and modern ones, is an historical-artistic explanation of the works, of the artists and of the related artistic schools or workshops. It is never a series of technical information similar to the one Vasari provided, addressed only and exclusively to professionals and experts. Nowadays, some books are redacted specifically for painters or sculptors but are usually not spread outside academies or technical schools.

Relevant to this dissertation and for this topic of research is artistic theory in the modern sense of the term, thus accessible and understandable to all without distinction of prior knowledge.

To comprehend the phenomenon of growth of public interest in the artistic field, it is necessary to investigate a different genre of artistic literature and art historiography, focusing on the first means of communication used to spread artistic knowledge, particularly guidebooks, and on the demand, or scarcity of it, from the population from the 16th century.

1.1 Pre-Vasarian sources: the lack of information on artists and artworks, and the scarcity of demand in Italy

The centuries from the 15th to the 18th were characterized by a lack of widespread information on artworks and artists.

²⁹ Schlosser, *La letteratura artistica. Kunsttheorie*: German word translated in English as artistic theory, is the term used by the Author to define the subject of his work, namely of the *Kunsthliterature*, artistic literature.

According to Hope's analysis, in Italy, mainly noble and illustrious families had an interest in the artistic field, as they were those who could afford an education, but only few people were aware of the names of now famous artists, sculptors or architects contemporary to their historical period. The complexity in disseminating information on arts were manifold, linked both to the difficulty in finding available books and manuscripts that provided any kind of artistic knowledge, and also to the fact that there was not a proper art literature that analysed artworks and their stylistic elements. Before Vasari, there was not even a single author who listed in a sufficiently comprehensive way the names of the more renowned artists, not to mention their biographies or their major artistic products.

This explains the scarcity of demand for artistic literature and the related scarcity, almost an absence, of interest in paintings and in the figurative arts from the public. Starting from the 16th century, in Italy visitors were showing more interest for the antiques and ancient sculptures³⁰, more popular and appreciated at the time with respect to modern paintings of then unknown artists.

The exiguous written evidence available about Italian artists, dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries, comes precisely from Italian writers and poets³¹.

Among the first literary sources in which mention was made of artists is Dante Alighieri, who in the *Purgatorio* of *La Divina Commedia* mentioned two artists, Cimabue and Giotto, within the *Cornice dei Superbi, Canto XI*:

Credette Cimabue ne la pittura
tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido,
sì che la fama di lui è scura³².

Dante frames the two Florentine painters in a metaphor Oderisi da Gubbio pronounced on the ephemerality of earthly fame: Cimabue's popularity was overshadowed by Giotto's fame, as he was able to outclass him in terms of skills and technique in painting. In this case, the two artists are only mentioned as examples of vices or virtues, together with many other historical figures of Florence that Dante mentions in *La*

³⁰ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 153.

³¹ Ivi, p. 132.

³² Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio, Canto XI*, verses 94-95-96, in *La Divina Commedia*, Foligno, 1472, first edition, edited by Johann Numeister in collaboration with Evangelista Angelini.

Divina Commedia. No mention is made of their most famous artworks nor of any of their biographical information: Dante has no intention of promulgating artistic knowledge, and consequently this mention made of the two painters remains only a quotation in itself, useful only to divulgate their names but lacking the related historical and artistic context.

Another Italian poet who referred to Giotto was Giovanni Boccaccio - again reported by Schlosser³³ - who not only mentioned him but wrote an entire novella for the *Decameron* in which Giotto was the protagonist, along with a certain Messer Forese da Rabatta, a Florentine politician who was a contemporary of Giotto. Boccaccio praised Giotto's extraordinary artistic talent and described how people were astonished at how closely his works resembled reality:

«[...] l'altro, il cui nome fu Giotto, ebbe uno ingegno di tanta eccellenza, che niuna cosa dá la natura, madre di tutte le cose ed operatrice col continuo girar de' cieli, che egli con lo stile e con la penna o col pennello non dipignesse sí simile a quella, che non simile, anzi piú tosto dessa paresse, intanto che molte volte nelle cose da lui fatte si truova che il visivo senso degli uomini vi prese errore, quello credendo esser vero che era dipinto»³⁴.

The Italian poet Francesco Petrarca mentioned instead the Sienese artist Simone Martini in his literary masterpiece *Canzoniere*³⁵, a collection of sonnets. Petrarca knew Martini personally, and he cited the artist in two different sonnets³⁶: the poet praised the portrait of Laura³⁷ realized by Martini, which Petrarca himself had commissioned from him. No trace remains to this day of the forementioned painting, but the extraordinary pictorial skills of Simone Martini celebrated by Petrarca remained in the following centuries precisely thanks to these poetic compositions³⁸.

³³ Schlosser, *La letteratura artistica medievale*, in *La letteratura artistica, Libro Primo*, pp. 51-52.

³⁴ G. Boccaccio, *Decameron, Giornata Sesta, Novella Quinta*, curated by A. F. Massera, Bari, Laterza, 1927.

³⁵ F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere or Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, 1st edition 1336-1374; editio princeps Venice, Vindelino da Spira, 1470.

³⁶ Ivi, sonnets LXXVII – LXXVIII.

³⁷ Laura is a literary subject, traditionally identified as Laura de Noves of Avignon, and is the beloved woman of the Italian poet Petrarca and the subject of his love sonnets. The name Laura is also a reference to the *lauro* (laurel), symbol of glory and literary triumph for poets.

³⁸ J. Bartuschat, *Il ritratto di Laura*, in *Il Canzoniere. Lettura micro e macrotestuale*, curated by M. Picone, Ravenna, Longo Editore, 2007.

Giorgio Vasari, in Simone Martini's biography, also highlighted how Petrarca contributed to remembering the artist's skill even more than his works did:

«Et invero questi sonetti hanno dato più fama alla povera vita di maestro Simone che quanti pagamenti gli furono mai fatti per le sue opere e per le sue virtù, perché questi si consumano tosto, e quella, mentre gli scritti vivono, vive anch'ella con esso loro»³⁹.

Likewise in Petrarca, as in Dante previously, the mention made to these artists was nothing more than a citation to illustrious historical figures, rather than to painters specifically. In Petrarca's case, there was certainly an appreciation of Martini's prowess in painting, but no reference was present of any other work he had executed. Once again, no information was useful to a reader who wanted to learn more about the artist and his style.

Mention of these figures can be inscribed within the recurrent theme of *exempla virtutis*, from the Latin *exemplum virtutis*⁴⁰, literally translatable as “examples of virtue”. The *exempla virtutis* indicated illustrious personalities deserving of praise because they excelled in their profession, and those figures were consequently taken as models of virtuous behaviours worthy of emulation in literary, poetic and even pictorial works. Indeed, many artists depicted *exempla virtutis* in their paintings with the intention of spreading edifying moral messages to the public who admired their artworks.

The same concept was reposed in literature as well. In literary compositions dating back to the 15th and 16th centuries, several artists, both modern and ancient, were listed and included among other illustrious personalities of the Italian cities of the time: those included politicians, merchants, military commanders and of course artists, to name but a few examples. However, as they were cited as historical figures relevant for their excellent actions and not really for their artistic ability, the texts did not delve into the figures of the artists mentioned, neither biographically nor with regard to their artistic production. As Charles Hope also pointed out, public interest in that era was directed

³⁹ G. Vasari, *Simon Sanese Pittore*, in *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, Firenze, Torrentino Editore, 1550.

⁴⁰ *Exemplum virtutis*: from Latin, the term is used to refer to a person or to a particular situation which can be proposed as an example of virtuous behaviour in art or literature, to be emulated by the public. The origin of the term draws back to the Roman Empire.

towards famous historical figures in a rather broad way and not linked exclusively to the arts world⁴¹.

Noteworthy sources in this respect include the work of Cristoforo Landino: in his commentary on Dante's *Divina Commedia*, entitled *Comento sopra la Comedia*, he drafted a list of notable Florentine citizens, among whom he also included several nowadays renowned artists⁴², precisely as examples of citizens admirable for the work they did for the city of Florence. Landino dedicates a section of his work, titled *Fiorentini Excellenti in Pictura et Sculptura*, to a historical artistic excursus on the most famous Florentine artists, starting with Cimabue and ending with Antonio and Bernardo Rossellino, Landino's contemporaries. Unlike Dante and Petrarca, Cristoforo Landino provided more details on the artists he included in his work, sometimes commenting on the stylistic characteristics that made them stand out more than others, while on other occasions he listed the most frequent subjects of the artist in question. Landino also reiterated the famous dualism between Cimabue and Giotto, and about the latter he reported that for a long time the painters who followed Giotto tried to surpass him in expertise for a long time. Of Masaccio, the author highlighted his ability to portray nature, and to imitate reality and human figures. Of Fra Filippo Lippi he praised the compositions for the variety of colours used, for the good rendering of depth in the foreshortenings and poses of the subjects. Brunelleschi was praised as an architect for his excellent knowledge of perspective, of which some reported he was «o ritrovatore o inventore»⁴³.

It is possible to infer that Landino provided more details than his forenamed predecessors regarding the artists he chose to mention. However, even he did not give any data of particular paintings or works by those artists, which again points to the scarcity of information on works of art circulating at the time.

Jacobus Philippus Foresti, an erudite Christian monk with a lifelong interest in literature and history, published in the 15th century a book in fifteen volumes entitled

⁴¹ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 132.

⁴² C. Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, Rome, ed. P. Procaccioli, 2001, Vol. I, pp. 240-242. (The first edition of the *Comento* was published in 1481)

⁴³ Ivi, cit., p. 242: «either the discoverer or the inventor» (of architecture), referred to Brunelleschi.

Supplementum Supplementi de le Chroniche Vulgare, a chronology ordered by years of remarkable historical facts. This monumental work was published in several editions, starting with the first edition in 1483, up to the most extensive edition, to which we shall refer here, which dates to 1520⁴⁴.

The *Supplementum* includes several references to prominent historical figures, including artists such as Giotto and Gentile Bellini: Foresti dedicated a brief paragraph to each of them, in which he justified the decision to include them among the notable characters of history, coherently with the literary *topos* of *exempla virtutis*.

Concerning Giotto, or *Zoto Fiorentino*⁴⁵, as the author named him, Foresti described the exceptional quality of his paintings, and recounted that he was called by the then Pope Benedict XII, who had become aware of his skills, to Avignon to paint the stories of the Christian martyrs. The work unfortunately remained unfinished due to the painter's death.

Foresti then mentioned Gentile Bellini, a painter of great prestige, active in the 15th century primarily in the Veneto region but later throughout all Italy. Foresti chose to recount of the occasion when Bellini was summoned to Constantinople, where he executed a portrait of the Sultan and many other splendid works. Upon his return home, the Venetian Senate celebrated Bellini for his praiseworthy deeds, and gave him gifts and privileges in thanks. Bellini then went on to devote himself to painting the Palazzo della Signoria in Venice⁴⁶.

There was thus an intention in Foresti to provide some biographical information about the artists he counted among the prominent historical figures, but these anecdotes can not be considered as aiming at an audience interested in painting. The fact that Foresti used the same narrative structure for the other characters in the *Supplementum* clarifies that, once again, the interest is not artistic but rather historical and encyclopaedic.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the only publications in Italy that provided an ordered and more or less systematic list of monuments and works of art were two works by Francesco Albertini.

⁴⁴ Jacobus Philippus Foresti, *Supplementum Supplementi de le Chroniche Vulgare*, Venice, 1520. See Fig. 1.

⁴⁵ Ivi, cit., p. 258^v. See Fig. 2.

⁴⁶ Ivi, cit., p. 329^r. See Fig. 3.

Albertini was a Florentine humanist, who lived in Rome for a long time, and wrote a short pamphlet titled *Memoriale di Molte Statue et Picture sono nella Inclyta Cipta di Florentia*⁴⁷ in 1510, dedicated to the sculptor Baccio di Montelupo⁴⁸.

This publication, although limited in content and not particularly successful at the time of its publication, is the first rough artistic guide to a city ever produced. The pamphlet is of considerable importance as a source of artistic information for the city of Florence: Albertini typographically listed the major works of art, sculptures and public buildings in the city with the specific intention of publicising the artistic beauties of his native city, something that had never been done before by any other author. The fact that this work was written in the Florentine vernacular language of the time made it accessible to a much wider audience, including experts and non-experts alike.

In the same year, Francesco Albertini produced another work of a similar but more detailed character about Rome, which he entitled *Opusculum de Mirabilibus Novae & Veteris Urbis Romae*⁴⁹, and which was written entirely in Latin. The *Opusculum* has more than a hundred pages and is dedicated to Pope Julius II. Unlike the *Memoriale*, this book presents the main buildings and palaces of ancient Rome, and there are few references to modern palaces from the Renaissance period. It also contains limited information on paintings executed in the immediately preceding centuries, except for some frescoes commissioned by the Pope himself for the churches and basilicas in Rome. The intent of this writing was therefore to describe and praise the city of Rome, and less to guide visitors through the beauty of the city. For this reason, it cannot be regarded as the first artistic guidebook published in Italy.

There is, however, a change with respect to the previously analysed literary sources: the focus has shifted to the artistic sphere, although the information provided by Albertini is not detailed, either regarding the artists or to the details of particular artworks mentioned.

Nonetheless, it was his merit to be one of the first to systematically collect and illustrate the ancient monuments and inscriptions of Florence and Rome. His writings

⁴⁷ F. Albertini, *Memoriale di Molte Statue et Picture sono nella Inclyta Cipta di Florentia*, Florence, 1510. See Fig. 4.

⁴⁸ Baccio da Montelupo, or Bartolomeo di Giovanni d'Astore dei Sinibaldi (Montelupo Fiorentino, 1469 – Lucca, 1523) was an Italian sculptor and architect.

⁴⁹ F. Albertini, *Opusculum de Mirabilibus Novae & Veteris Urbis Romae*, Rome, 1510. See Fig. 5.

are still useful for a study of the forming and changing topography of these two cities, and for the development of art history as well. In fact, writers and art scholars, including Vasari himself for his work *Le Vite*, will later refer to Albertini's publications.

In the middle of the 16th century, only a year before the first edition of Vasari's *Le Vite*, two writers entered the art-historical narrative with their publications: in 1549, Anton Francesco Doni and Michelangelo Biondo published the first literary works that provided useful notions about individual modern art paintings and sculptures in a systematic and detailed manner, with information about the respective artists and also about where these artworks could be admired⁵⁰. Although their writings did not enjoy the same notoriety as Vasari's one, nor were they equally extended and detailed, it is worth emphasising their importance for the dissemination of useful knowledge to the public interested in painting in the Renaissance era.

Anton Francesco Doni, a Florentine intellectual, writer and editor, published a work entitled *Disegno*⁵¹ (transl. drawing): it was a treatise, divided into sections, in which the author reasoned and analysed numerous aspects of painting and sculpture, two arts that at the time were at the centre of a debate among artists and literary scholars as to which of the two had the primacy. What is interesting to note is that, at the beginning of his writing, Doni included a two-page index of all the painters and sculptors that he would later mention and analyse⁵². The artists included were both ancient and modern ones, contemporary with him: in fact, they ranged from Phidias to Raphael to Praxiteles.

In the *Disegno*, the author seemed to focus on a palpable comparison with the aesthetic and artistic reality of the major cities visited by the author – mainly Rome, Florence and Venice - with his writing oscillating from descriptive artistic literature, both of present and ancient times, to a pragmatic consideration of the artistic production of

⁵⁰ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 132.

⁵¹ A. F. Doni, *Disegno (del Doni, partito in piv ragionamenti, ne quali si tratta della scoltvra et pittvra; de colori, de getti, de modegli, con molte cose appartenenti a quest' arti: si termina la nobiltà dell'una et dell'altra professione. Con historie, essempi, et sentenze. Nel fine alcune lettere che trattano della medesima materia)*, Venice, published by Gabriel Giolito di Ferrari, 1549. See Fig. 6.

⁵² Ivi, cit., p. 4 ^{r-v}. See Fig. 7-8.

contemporary artists of that precise historical moment, many of whom he knew personally⁵³.

However, this work cannot be included in the committed treatise literature, as it lacks any theoretical claim on the author's part: his intention was to compose an informative, descriptive work, and consequently useful as a guide to the artistic heritage of the cities he mentioned. It is also necessary to observe, as Hope did in his analysis⁵⁴, that at times the data provided by Doni was not precise or accurate: in the case of Rome, the locations of several statues and paintings he cited were missing; on other occasions, Doni made incorrect attributions of some works, or did not attribute important artworks to the proper artist, whom he mentioned in the treatise.

Nevertheless, Doni's publication of his was very beneficial to the field of art history, and it is pioneering as well, considering that it anticipated the guidebooks to Italian cities, which appeared after a few more years.

The problem of mistaken attributions is also found in Michelangelo Biondo's work *Della Nobilissima Pittura*⁵⁵.

Biondo, a Venetian physician and scholar of the arts, also issued his publication in 1549. Rather than a treatise on art, this was intended to be a guide to teach the art of painting. The composition therefore stands outside of theoretical treatises, just like the work by Doni previously discussed, and can rather be regarded as a book of immediate utility, intended for experts and non-experts alike, and for anyone who was interested in approaching painting. After listing and analysing the diverse parts constituting the art of painting, Michelangelo Biondo celebrated the renowned artists of his time together with their artworks, without forgetting, however, to also celebrate the beauty of the antiques. Biondo had met and got to know in person the artists he mentioned while he was in Rome⁵⁶. Moreover, he was among the first writers to document

⁵³ C. Volpi, *L'importanza della materia nelle architetture di prima età moderna in Italia e la questione del colore*, in *Lusingare la vista. Il colore e la magnificenza a Roma tra tardo rinascimento e barocco*, edited by A. Amendola, Rome, Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2017.

⁵⁴ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 134.

⁵⁵ M. Biondo, *Della Nobilissima Pittura (et della sua arte, del modo; della dottrina, di conseguirla, agevolmente et presto, opera di Michel Angelo Biondo)*, Venice, 1549. See Fig. 9.

⁵⁶ G. Stabile, *Biondo, Michelangelo*, in *Dizionario Biografico*, Vol. 10, Rome, Treccani, 1968.

Raphael's famous frescoes at the Farnesina, along with artworks by Costa and Parmigianino located in Bologna, Mantua, and Parma⁵⁷.

Michelangelo Biondo was harshly criticised for having erroneously attributed Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* to Mantegna, and even for not sufficiently extolling Titian's pictorial prowess.

These errors committed by Biondo, combined with the inaccuracy of much of the information provided by Doni, Albertini and other Renaissance writers, highlight the fundamental problem that inspired this chapter of the dissertation: in Renaissance Italy, the available information about artists and their works was extremely scarce, difficult to find and accessible only to a privileged few. It is highly probable that the writers and art historians had never even seen the works of art they were discussing in person, and knew about them only by word of mouth or indirect sources. This would explain, for example, Biondo's glaring error, and the absence of many collocations of the paintings mentioned in the literary productions of this period.

1.2 The figure of the art connoisseur: Marcantonio Michiel

During the 16th century, the figure of the art connoisseur made its appearance in the world of art history. The connoisseur was generally an expert in art and collecting, able to decipher the authorship, authenticity, and value of an artwork. Although the birth of proper connoisseurship dates back to the 19th century, there were already some remarkable characters of art experts in the Renaissance era, who marked the history of artistic literature and contributed significantly to the dissemination of knowledge in the field of the arts, and more specifically concerning painting, to all those interested in being more acquainted with the discipline.

In the 16th century, there were few people interested in discovering, studying and seeing in person works of art of more recent dating, realized by artists contemporary

⁵⁷ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 134.

to them⁵⁸. It was essential to be passionate about art, but not only that: due to the difficulty of finding written sources dealing with contemporary painting, these scholars were required to make an enormous effort to research and examine those sources, which were often manuscript and, at the time, only published in one original copy. Clearly, all these elements discouraged most non-experts from becoming informed and interested in contemporary painting.

It was under these circumstances that figures such as Giorgio Vasari⁵⁹ and Marcantonio Michiel made their appearance and published works of great historical and artistic value even in our times.

The character of Michiel enters into Charles Hope's analysis⁶⁰ as an emblematic case of Venetian nobleman who, cultivating a personal interest in art and culture, was able to translate his notes into a magnificent work of art-historical significance, in the wake of what was produced only a few decades later by Giorgio Vasari.

Marcantonio Michiel⁶¹, despite being less well known than his coeval Vasari, was an early example of an art connoisseur *sui generis*. Michiel was born in Venice and belonged to a wealthy family of the Venetian doge dynasty, the Michiel family. During his lifetime, Michiel was a humanist, scholar, and art collector, favouring picturesque and sculptural works of the Venetian Renaissance to include in his personal collection. Thanks to his expertise, he managed to gain notoriety as an expert art connoisseur, mostly knowledgeable about paintings and drawings⁶².

What brought him fame, however, was not his collection of artworks, but his composition *Notizia d'opere del disegno*⁶³, published posthumously in the 19th century

⁵⁸ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 135.

⁵⁹ Giorgio Vasari and his work *Le Vite* will be discussed in the following subchapter.

⁶⁰ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 135.

⁶¹ Marcantonio Michiel (Venice, 1484 – Venice, 1552).

G. Benzoni, *Michiel, Marcantonio*, in *Dizionario Biografico*, Vol. 74, Rome, Treccani, 2010.

⁶² N. Penny, *Review of Il Collezionismo d'arte a Venezia. Dalle origini al Cinquecento by Michel Hochmann, Rosella Lauber and Stefania Mason*, «The Burlington Magazine», Vol. 153, 2 (2011), pp. 410-411.

⁶³ M. Michiel (edited and published by Iacopo Morelli), *Notizia d'opere di disegno (nella prima metà del secolo XVI. Esistenti in Padova, Cremona, Milano, Pavia, Bergamo, Crema e Venezia. Scritta da un Anonimo in quel tempo. Pubblicata e illustrata da D. Iacopo Morelli)*, Bassano del Grappa, Remondini, 1800. See Fig. 10.

by Iacopo Morelli, but which Michiel wrote between 1521 and 1543. The work included a census of the figurative artistic heritage, both public and private, and both sculptural and pictorial, of seven city centres in northern Italy that he had visited, and whose artworks he had meticulously analysed and studied, through in-depth research of manuscript sources, documentary sources, contracts and signatures affixed to the works of art. The text composed by Michiel was intended to serve both as a reasoned and annotated list of works, contemporary and otherwise, in the treated area, but also as a tool in which to reconstruct the corpus of important artists such as Giorgione, Titian, Van Eyck and Memling. A topographical publication of this kind had never been produced before, and was only surpassed a few years later by Giorgio Vasari's masterpiece in terms of detail, accuracy and completeness⁶⁴.

It is interesting to observe how the figure of the art connoisseur, in this specific case that of the Venetian Michiel, influenced artistic literature on two different levels.

First and foremost, the information collected, reorganised and recorded by Michiel, albeit published several centuries later, showed how attaining a sufficient level of knowledge of works of art and artists in the Renaissance period required prior knowledge in the field, or it demanded at least an in-depth study of the subject: knowledge of paintings was therefore not accessible to everyone, but only to a privileged elite.

Secondly, Marcantonio Michiel's writing proved that art experts themselves were interested in disseminating and providing a wider audience with the artistic notions they had collected. Michiel's intention on this regard is further confirmed by his bitter diatribe with Vasari, his counterpart on this point, on the possibility that an *amateur* could understand and recognise works of art correctly, and thus behave like a connoisseur in taking an interest in works of art; Vasari, on the contrary, always maintained that it was necessary to be an artist to study and recognise works of art⁶⁵.

It can therefore be deduced that Marcantonio Michiel, as an art connoisseur, contributed to the research and dissemination of knowledge about the artists and

⁶⁴ G. Benzoni, *Michiel, Marcantonio*, in *Dizionario Biografico*.

⁶⁵ Teaching material, course in *Metodologia per la ricerca storico-artistica*, Professor G. Zavatta, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2023.

decorative works he was acquainted with, as far as possible with the limited means available in the historical period under consideration.

1.3 Vasari, *Le Vite*: a turning point in art history and museology

Motivated primarily by a personal interest and passion for the arts was also Giorgio Vasari, much like Michiel. However, Vasari's role in art history is significantly more central: it is because of him and his publication *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*⁶⁶ that we have been provided with a vast amount of historical, artistic and biographical knowledge about Italian artists of the medieval and Renaissance centuries.

Hope elaborated on Vasari in the article *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, highlighting the change in Vasari's style of writing, accuracy (or at least about his attempt to be precise), and the amount of notions he provided compared to what had been done previously.

Following the argumentation of the scholar of the Warburg Institute, it will become evident that this publication marked a turning point in the literature of art history and contributed significantly to the publication of guidebooks and books on art in Italy in the following decades.

Considering that Giorgio Vasari was a man of the art world, artist, architect, draughtsman and collector, as he described himself, his interest was also of a professional nature: through in-depth study of artistic and biographical information on famous artists, he too could benefit from the knowledge acquired, as well as contribute to its dissemination, and pride himself on his skills not only in the practical but also in the theoretical field.

Le Vite constituted the first modern work of art historiography: Vasari elaborated the concept of the unfolding and 'rebirth' of art through three ages, marking the

⁶⁶ G. Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori (da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri: descritte in lingua Toscana da Giorgio Vasari pittore Aretino, con una sua utile et necessaria introduzione alle arti loro)*, Firenze, Torrentino Editore, 1550 (first edition). See Fig. 11.

abandonment of the Middle Ages and the entry into the modern age through the recovery of antiquity.

There are primarily two renowned editions of *Le Vite*.

In 1550, the first original edition was published by the editor Torrentino, in Florence, in two large volumes. The treatise contained an initial dedication to Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici⁶⁷; a preface to the entire work; a technical and theoretical section, which included critical essays on the diverse practical techniques⁶⁸ of the three arts, in the order architecture, sculpture and painting. Finally, a massive central part, the real narrative core of the masterpiece: a chronologically ordered biographical section, which presented the biographies of the most illustrious artists - «più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori»⁶⁹ - from the Middle Ages to the middle of the 16th century, the moment in which Vasari himself was alive and composed the book.

As mentioned above, the first edition of the publication was structured in three parts, which can also be defined as three different ages of artistic progress from medieval Byzantine art to Renaissance mannerist art. There were thirty biographies treated by the author in the first part, chronologically ordered from Cimabue to Lorenzo di Bicci, and preceded by a section-specific proem (a model that would be repeated for each part of the work).

The first part featured the masters of the 14th century who were involved in the rediscovery of the beauty of nature; Vasari identified the figure of Giotto as the driver of this revolution in art. In Italian art criticism, those masters were defined as *Primitives*⁷⁰.

The second part presented fifty-four biographies, from Jacopo della Quercia to Luca Signorelli, and the artists included were the protagonists of the art world at the turn of

⁶⁷ Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici of Florence (Florence, 1519 – 1574) was the second and last Duke of Florence and, following the elevation of the Medici State to Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the first Grand Duke of Tuscany, from 1569 until his death. He was able to harness the political power of art, proposing projects that promoted the artistic and architectural splendour of Florence. As an art enthusiast, his court was attended by numerous artists and intellectuals, including Bronzino, Cellini and Vasari himself, who decided to dedicate his masterpiece to his patron.

⁶⁸ Vasari used the term *tecniche artistiche* (transl. artistic techniques) in a philological sense, drawing from the Ancient Greek word *tèchnai*, or *artes* in Latin, meaning to be able to do or produce something manually.

⁶⁹ Vasari, *Le Vite*. Cfr. frontispiece with the title of the work.

⁷⁰ The term *Primitives* refers to artists who were active between the 14th and 15th centuries.

the 14th and 15th centuries: in this specific historical period, the greatest discovery and revolution was that of perspective, in both painting and sculpture, an invention that Vasari attributed to architects Leon Battista Alberti and Filippo Brunelleschi, who were also part of this second age.

The third and last age in *Le Vite* was called the Age of Mannerism⁷¹, or the Modern Age of art: the century under consideration is the 16th, and the eighty biographies treated began with Leonardo da Vinci and ended with Michelangelo Buonarroti, who was still alive when the Torrentiniana edition of the book was published, in 1550. This period saw the overcoming of naturalism through the confrontation with ancient art, rediscovered precisely during the Renaissance. The most relevant character of the Vasarian idea of art history was Michelangelo, the artist with whom the entire work culminated: according to the author, in fact, Michelangelo epitomised the perfect artist, the utmost aspiration of every artist, as he was exceptionally skilled in all artistic disciplines, both figurative and sculptural, and was also able to deal with several kinds of media.

The first edition ended with a conclusion and a personal reflection by the author on the research he had carried out, and on the knowledge he had acquired and put down in writing in this work.

In 1568, a second edition of the book was published by the editor Giunti, also in Florence: this edition is known as the Giuntina. The contents of the publication were expanded and updated by Vasari, and although it maintained the same formal structure as the first one, the volumes increased from two to three and the number of biographies covered also grew. The substantial change was primarily related to some of Vasari's attributions that proved to be erroneous, both because of the uncertain sources he had relied on, which were largely hearsay and oral sources, and partly because of the scarce

⁷¹ Def.: 'Mannerism, (from *maniera*, "manner," or "style"), artistic style that predominated in Italy from the end of the High Renaissance in the 1520s to the beginnings of the Baroque style around 1590. The Mannerist style originated in Florence and Rome and spread to northern Italy and, ultimately, to much of central and northern Europe. The term was first used around the end of the 18th century by the Italian archaeologist Luigi Lanzi to define 16th-century artists who were the followers of major Renaissance masters. Mannerism originated as a reaction to the harmonious classicism and the idealized naturalism of High Renaissance art as practiced by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael in the first two decades of the 16th century.' *The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Available at: < <https://www.britannica.com/art/Mannerism> >

literature existing at the time and the difficulty in finding information, as has been amply revealed by the studies outlined in the previous sections of this dissertation.

In addition to the question of eyewitnesses and *auctoritas*⁷², on which Vasari relied for gaining his knowledge, the question of signatures on some of the works of art mentioned by the author in his writings - signatures which he used to confirm attributions - had proved equally problematic⁷³.

It was not customary for Renaissance artists to sign their work after it had been completed, so those signatures could hardly be considered trustworthy: they could easily have been the work of forgers, or the artwork could have been painted by an entire workshop (intended here as in the Italian 'bottega') but signed by the workshop master.

Besides the reattributions of artworks, a particular historical event contributed to changing the structure of the writing: the death of Michelangelo Buonarroti⁷⁴. The artist was in fact still alive when the first edition was published: in this second edition Vasari was thus able to look back at the whole life and professional career of Michelangelo and to write the complete history of his contribution to the evolution of the arts, a process that reached the very perfection precisely with him.

Vasari expanded the third age, the last part of the work, by also dealing with Venetian art, completely ignored in the first edition in which the Aretine author's purely Florentine-centric vision emerged⁷⁵. Here, the biographies of artists widely known nowadays such as Titian Vecellio, Iacopo Sansovino and Bronzino, to mention but a few, appeared. This widening played an important role on an artistic and historiographical level, as the geographical range analysed by the author came to touch on an artistic school that was extremely flourishing in the Renaissance period, but little addressed on a literary level until that moment.

⁷² *Auctoritas*: from Latin, the term denotes in this context the authoritative and trustworthy oral sources Vasari relied on, which however at times turned out to be erroneous.

⁷³ Teaching material, Course of *Museology*, Professor A. M. Monaco, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2022.

⁷⁴ Michelangelo Buonarroti (Caprese Michelangelo, 1475 – Rome, 1564).

⁷⁵ M. Firpo, *Sui contesti politici delle Vite di Giorgio Vasari*, in *Figura. Studi sull'Immagine nella Tradizione Classica*, Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Vol. 1, 2013.

Available at: < <https://econtents.bc.unicamp.br/> >

Lastly, Giorgio Vasari included his autobiography at the end of the 1568 edition: by placing himself among the most outstanding artists, sculptors and architects, Vasari wanted to promote his role as intellectual, scholar and artist in Florence in the 16th century. He wished to be remembered by posterity not only for the substantial literary work he wrote, but also as a valuable artist and craftsman in the field. His intention to produce an opus aimed at glorifying and imprinting the names of these artists in the memory of posterity therefore ended with a self-referential praise of his talents and his immense work of research and study.

The second edition of the text was later also republished in Bologna in 1647⁷⁶, as mentioned by Hope, maintaining the three-volume structure.

Many other editions will then follow in the subsequent centuries to these days.

Vasari's work is revolutionary and a turning point for art history and museology because a comprehensive book containing such a vast amount of information, albeit with errors in attribution and dating, has never existed and will never exist for the historical period between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Consequently, Vasari's *Le Vite* became the primary point of reference for any author, scholar, art historian and researcher who wanted to address Renaissance art. Considering the fact that Vasari included not only biographical and personal information on the artists, but also on the artworks they created, including technical comments on the materials used and the supports, iconographic analyses, and topographical information on the location of these works, the masterpiece volumes could be described as one of the most exhaustive ever produced in the field of art history.

The topographical index⁷⁷, in fact, is one of the most emphasised aspects in Charles Hope's research because of its richness of details, listing churches and palaces for each city mentioned in a meticulous and accurate way.

On a linguistic level, *Le Vite* were published from the first edition in the vulgar Florentine, and not in Latin as in some guidebooks mentioned earlier by Hope and addressed in this dissertation (Albertini's *Opusculum*⁷⁸, for example, was written

⁷⁶ G. Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (third edition), Bologna, edited by Heredi Evangelista Dozza, 1647.

⁷⁷ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 135.

⁷⁸ Cfr. footnote 49.

exclusively in Latin). A publication of this value written in Florentine was immediately accessible to anyone who merely knew how to read, without the necessity of being fluent in Latin: Vasari's work was comprehensible to the non-expert public and to anyone who wished to broaden their knowledge of artists, artworks and painting. Conversely, the diffusion of the work remained limited to the Italian territory as it was only published in the Florentine language and was not translated into any other language for a long time: the first English translation of the work dates to the 19th century⁷⁹, several centuries after the first editions.

Le Vite is still today a widely used and cited bibliographical reference, both academically and otherwise, although it must be supplemented nowadays by contemporary critical research. Many critical editions of *Le Vite* have appeared since the 17th century.

Among the most famous and recent is the colossal edition published between 1966 and 1987, with the text edited by Rosanna Bettarini and the *Commento Secolare* by the Italian art historian Paola Barocchi⁸⁰. The Bettarini-Barocchi edition was revolutionary in that, for the first time, it presented the first two editions of *Le Vite* (the Torrentiniana of 1550 and the Giuntina of 1568) in direct comparison with each other, accompanied by a so-called secular commentary, that dwelt on the way this work had been read and interpreted in previous editions. The aim was to highlight the orientations, dependencies and contributions of each commentator and to produce a critical and comparative study.

Recently edited and published in 2009 is the exemplary two-volume edition *Giovan Pietro Bellori. Le vite de' pittori scultori e architetti moderni*⁸¹, dedicated to the revision and study of Bellori's *Le Vite*⁸². This new publication, thanks also to the contribution of Giovanni Previtali, who wrote the introduction, and Tomaso Montanari

⁷⁹ Eliza Vere Foster as Mrs. Jonathan Foster, first English translation with annotations of Vasari's *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, in 5 volumes, York Street, Covent Garden London editor Henry G. Bohn, 1850-1851.

⁸⁰ *Giorgio Vasari. Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, edited by Rosanna Bettarini, *Commento Secolare* by Paola Barocchi, Firenze, Sansoni Ed. S.P.E.S. Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 1966-1987.

⁸¹ *Giovan Pietro Bellori. Le vite de' pittori scultori e architetti moderni*, curated by Evelina Borea, introduction by Giovanni Previtali, afterword by Tomaso Montanari, Torino, Einaudi Editore, 2009.

⁸² G. P. Bellori, *Le Vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni*, editio princeps Roma, 1672.

in the afterword, proposed new keys to understanding the genesis, structure and purpose of Vasari's work, defending the validity and immortality of this work as an integral part of art history and artistic literature.

Vasari's text is held in enormous esteem, despite the errors committed by Vasari have been largely discussed, because it influenced the judgement of art history and research in the arts in the centuries following its publication. Vasari is thereby considered in many instances even if only as a comparative standard, to understand whether what was written by another author in later artistic literature was taken from Vasari, thus tracing it back to the primary and main written source of knowledge.

1.4 The diffusion of guidebooks in Italy

Charles Hope, in his article, particularly emphasised the palpable change he felt between pre- and post-Vasarian writings, in terms of contents, form, and also in regard to the nature and target audience for whom authors wrote about art⁸³.

One of the elements discussed by Hope related precisely to the topographical index, which became more and more present in guidebooks to Italian cities, in the form of an index or list of landmarks: the usefulness of these writings therefore openly became that of guiding the interested public (expert and non-expert) through the most beautiful and admirable artworks, paintings, monuments, churches and palaces from an architectural and artistic standpoint. From this moment on, often books of this sort were indeed structured topographically, following an ideal route to visit the cities, an innovative and revolutionary aspect that anticipated the beginning of proper art tourism.

The historical period between the mid-16th century and the late 17th century witnessed the actual diffusion of art guidebooks devoted to Italian cities: from Venice to Naples, via Rome, Florence, Padua and many others, increasingly more was written about art, painting, sculpture and architecture, even though these books were «very expensive

⁸³ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 135.

and cumbersome»⁸⁴ as Hopes defined them. The phenomenon began to spread in a generalised manner through Giorgio Vasari himself, as previously outlined.

1.4.1 Francesco Scannelli: the model for the first artistic pocket guide

Francesco Scannelli's work entitled *Il Microcosmo della Pittura*⁸⁵ and published in 1657 was a treatise on painting, which due to its structure was suitable to be defined as an artistic guide to Italian cities and to the most significant works of art in such cities, according to the author.

The topographical index compiled by Scannelli occupied a total of ten pages⁸⁶: the cities were listed in alphabetical order, and for each one of them the paintings that could be admired in that city were indicated, with a reference to the page of the guidebook where more information was provided on the artistic interpretation and on the precise location of a particular artwork. Following Charles Hope's critical reasoning, this book was considered by him to be an excellent comparison to Vasari's work⁸⁷, both because it was dedicated to the paintings of all Italian cities, and not just to a single city as we shall see later, and because the accuracy of the index seemed to recall the very structure of *Le Vite*, focusing at the same time on the paintings and where they could be admired, almost as an invitation to visit them and as an incentive to observe firsthand the artworks mentioned by Scannelli.

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁸⁵ F. Scannelli, *Il Microcosmo della Pittura (Ovvero Trattato diviso in due Libri. Nel primo spettante alla Theorica si discorre delle grandezze d'essa Pittura, delle parti principali, de' veri primi, e più degni Maestri, e delle tre maggiori Scuole de' moderni, dandosi parimenti a conoscere con autorevoli ragioni varie mancanze degli Scrittori della Professione. Nel Secondo, che in ordine al primo dimostra la pratica, s'additano l'opere diverse più famose, ed eccellenti, le quali hora vivono alla vista de' virtuosi, come ornamento particolare dell'Italia)*, Cesena, Neri editore, 1657.

See Fig. 13.

⁸⁶ Ivi, cit.: *Tavola di quelle Città, e Luoghi dell'Italia, dove si trovano le Pitture nominate nel Libro. Prima personalmente riconosciute dall'Autore in buona parte massime le più degne dei migliori Maestri, e poscia come tali proposte alla virtuosa osservazione.* See Fig. 14.

⁸⁷ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 136.

«Scannelli was the principal source of Giacomo Barri's *Viaggio Pittoresco*»⁸⁸ Hope wrote, referring to the critical essay on Barri's work redacted by A. M. Monaco⁸⁹.

Barri's publication was similarly important in the broadening and growth process of the art public and in the dissemination of pictorial knowledge in Italy. In 1671⁹⁰, Giacomo Barri, a Venetian-born artist and more precisely an etcher, published the first pocket art guide to paintings on display in Italy between the 16th and 17th centuries. As Vasari, Barri as well was both an artist and an art writer, eager to disseminate his enthusiasm for painting through a handy, pocket-sized publication. This writing was addressed to a modern audience and was meant to be useful to art passionate and to those visiting Italy on a primarily artistic itinerary, at a very specific historical moment, that of the beginning of the Grand Tour phenomenon, anticipating the beginning of art tourism⁹¹.

In its structure, Barri's publication was easy to use and immediately comprehensible: after a short introduction, there was a topographical index of the cities he covered, strictly in alphabetical order and with a page reference, just as mentioned above for Scannelli. Following that, for every city Barri listed for each church, palace or garden which artworks could be admired there, sometimes providing only the author and subject, at other times also a brief iconographic analysis of a couple of lines. In its simplicity, this work was innovative, modern but above all useful from a functional point of view: it was practical to carry, and it was sufficiently detailed but not difficult to understand, as the author did not use technical terms that were too complex for the general public.

The first English translation of Giacomo Barri's work was published only few years after the Italian one, which is an indication of how highly the book was regarded: translated by William Lodge and published in 1679 under the title *The Painter's Voyage of Italy, in which all the famous paintings of the most eminent masters are*

⁸⁸ Ibidem.

⁸⁹ A.M. Monaco, *Giacomo Barri "francese" e il suo Viaggio pittoresco d'Italia. Gli anni a Venezia di un peintre-graveur scrittore d'arte nel Seicento*, Firenze, Edifir Edizioni Firenze, 2014.

⁹⁰ G. Barri, *Viaggio Pittoresco in cui si notano distintamente tutte le pitture famose de' più celebri pittori, che si conservano in qualsivoglia città d'Italia* (abbr. *Viaggio Pittoresco d'Italia*), Venice, Giacomo Herz editor, 1671. See Fig. 15.

⁹¹ Monaco, *Giacomo Barri "francese" e il suo Viaggio pittoresco d'Italia. Gli anni a Venezia di un peintre-graveur scrittore d'arte nel Seicento*, cit., pp. 88-97.

*particularised, as they are preserved in the several cities of Italy*⁹², it was enriched by Lodge himself with etchings and engravings made by him, who was an engraver by profession.

This first artistic pocket guide by Barri, as Hope stressed, was the first book that could be defined as a guidebook entirely dedicated to painting⁹³.

1.4.2 Guidebooks to the beauties of Italian cities

Also noteworthy within the phenomenon of the spread of artistic guidebooks in Italy are the many publications dedicated to the works of art, picturesque but also sculptural and architectural, of individual cities: books were produced on the major artistic cities such as Florence, Venice and Rome, but also on minor cities that were nonetheless flourishing such as Padua, Mantua, Bologna, Parma and Modena to name but a few. In some cases, these texts included only brief references of an artistic kind, while the majority of the content did not focus on purely pictorial matters. Other times, however, they were authentic art guidebooks in the fashion of Francesco Scannelli's, but dedicated to individual cities.

For the city of Florence, a text was published in 1591 that was unequalled in thoroughness for several centuries to follow: *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza*⁹⁴. Written by Francesco Bocchi, an Italian writer and art critic, it was later republished in an expanded version in 1677, and is mentioned by Hope within his critical research as one of the few rare books of this kind issued in the 16th century, immediately following the Vasarian opus and from which the latter seems to take its prompt⁹⁵.

⁹² W. Lodge, *The Painter's Voyage of Italy, in which all the famous paintings of the most eminent masters are particularised, as they are preserved in the several cities of Italy, Englished by W.L.*, London, 1679.

⁹³ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 136.

⁹⁴ F. Bocchi, *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza (dove à pieno di Pittura, di Scultura, di Sacri Tempii, di palazzi i più notabili artifizii & più preziosi si contengono)*, Florence, 1591. See Fig. 16.

⁹⁵ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 136.

The book was a guide to the artworks of the author's hometown, presenting a detailed index of the artists mentioned, with commentaries on the excellence of the works of art and on the technical mastery of the painters and sculptors in question. The treatise then developed discursively from church to church, one historical building after another. Thus, Bocchi did not limit his description to listing the city's prominent historical and artistic landmarks: he elaborated on detailed iconographic descriptions of the paintings and frescoes he referred to⁹⁶, and did not hesitate to describe Filippo Lippi or Domenico Ghirlandaio as «pittor raro»⁹⁷, and Raphael as «pittore rarissimo»⁹⁸. In the index, Bocchi too included cross-references to the page in the guidebook where more in-depth descriptions of individual works could be found, so that the artist's depictions and talent could be better understood in situ. Bocchi dealt extensively with both sculptures and paintings in Florence, which ensured that his book was an excellent guide to the city for a public interested in admiring and experiencing the magnificence of the city in detail. Through this work, in fact, anyone could not only learn the names of many past and contemporary artists, an aspect that Hope stressed at the beginning of his article as something uncommon in the Renaissance artistic audience, but also get to appreciate the artistic and aesthetic qualities of each artist and be empowered to develop their own critical thinking on artistic subjects.

As for the city of Venice, it was Francesco Sansovino who wrote the most important work dedicated to the artistic beauties of the city in the 16th century: the title of the first edition, published by Sansovino in 1556 under the pseudonym of Anselmo Guisconi, was *Tutte le Cose Notabili e Belle che sono in Venetia*⁹⁹, while in later editions the title became *Delle Cose Notabili che sono in Venetia libri due*, and is more commonly known as *Cose Notabili*. The most famous and valued edition was that of

⁹⁶ T. Frangenberg, R. Williams, *Francesco Bocchi's The Beauties of the City of Florence. A Guidebook of 1591 (Studies in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art History)*, «Renaissance Studies», Vol. 21, No. 5, 3 (2007), pp. 756-758.

⁹⁷ Bocchi, *Tavola delle cose più notabili del libro delle bellezze di Fiorenza*, in *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza*, cit.

⁹⁸ Ibidem.

⁹⁹ Anselmo Guisconi (Francesco Sansovino), *Tutte le Cose Notabili e Belle che sono in Venetia*, Venice, 1556.

1561¹⁰⁰, on which Charles Hope dwelled most for its quality and critical and artistic precision: it was thanks to this publication that Francesco Sansovino, son of the famous sculptor and architect Jacopo Sansovino, acquired fame as an art writer. The book he composed on Venice was initially very concise, but was later expanded by the author himself in subsequent publications, divided into two books starting with the 1561 edition as the title itself suggested. Sansovino in the publication extolled the beauty of Venice by means of a detailed and accurate list of illustrious men, such as painters and sculptors, but also doges and notable political figures, and mention was made of various sublime paintings and sculptures in the city that the author suggested foreigners should see, and to which he also provided historical information in this booklet to better understand their significance¹⁰¹.

A book by Marsel Grosso on Sansovino has recently been edited: «*Scultore in parole*». *Francesco Sansovino e la nascita della critica d'arte a Venezia*¹⁰². Divided into two parts, the book deals with the biographical aspects of Sansovino, as well as the origins of the text, the author's sources, and the motivations that led Sansovino to undertake such a publishing venture on the Venetian art scene, through a detailed study of the artists and artworks cited in the treatise, highlighting the significance of his publication.

Although it cannot be defined as an exclusively artistic guidebook, Sansovino's *Cose Notabili* was undoubtedly one of the first guides available to the public when visiting splendid Venice.

On Venice was one of the masterpieces of Renaissance art-historical literature, published a century after Sansovino's booklet: *Le Minere della Pittura*¹⁰³ of 1664,

¹⁰⁰ F. Sansovino, *Delle Cose Notabili che sono in Venetia libri due*, Venice, 1561. See Fig. 17.

¹⁰¹ S. Maffei, *Una Venezia Fiorentina: il trattatello Tutte le cose notabili e belle che sono in Venetia di Francesco Sansovino (1556)*, in *Francesco Sansovino scrittore del mondo. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi Pisa, 5-6-7 dicembre 2018*, curated by di Luca D'Onghia e Daniele Musto, Bergamo, Edizioni di Archilet, 2019.

¹⁰² M. Grosso, «*Scultore in parole*». *Francesco Sansovino e la nascita della critica d'arte a Venezia*, Rome, Officina Libraria, 2023.

¹⁰³ M. Boschini, *Le Minere della Pittura. (Compendiosa informazione di Marco Boschini. Non solo delle Pitture pubbliche di Venezia: ma dell'Isole ancor circonvicine)*, Venice, Francesco Nicolini editor, 1664. See Fig. 18.

subsequently to be renamed *Le Ricche Minere della Pittura Veneziana*¹⁰⁴ in 1674, written by Marco Boschini, an Italian painter, engraver and art writer. Referring specifically to the second edition, this publication by Boschini was the first guidebook, in the proper sense of the term, written about Venice and devoted exclusively to painting.

Much more precise in the organization of the structure, the first edition of the book presented a topographical index of all the places where the paintings and frescoes mentioned by Boschini could be admired, listed in alphabetical order as was already customary in guidebooks¹⁰⁵. Boschini's innovation laid in the arrangement of the work: he divided churches, palaces, schools and sacristies into the six neighbourhoods, or *sestieri*¹⁰⁶, of the city of Venice, so that his book could be employed in a practical way as an artistic guide to the city, one neighbourhood after the other. In the second edition, Boschini removed the initial index, and decided to directly divide the publication into chapters according to the *sestieri*, and to insert instead a table listing the paintings he mentioned and their associated locations at the end of each section - «Tavola del Sestier di ... [...] »¹⁰⁷. Both the structure of this guidebook and the language used by the author, technical but understandable at the same time, and which seemed to guide the public on a visit to the paintings of the city, made it the perfect guide to art in Venice in the Renaissance period, and *Le Ricche Minere* are still today one of the most cited and reliable literary sources regarding the Venetian artistic panorama in the 17th century.

As observed and thoroughly studied by Charles Hope, the city of Rome was without any doubt the richest in guidebooks and books of artistic nature and, as for the other cities of Italy, starting from the 16th century there was a considerable increase in

¹⁰⁴ Idem, *Le Ricche Minere della Pittura Veneziana*, (*Compendiosa informazione di Marco Boschini. Non solo delle Pitture pubbliche di Venezia: ma dell'Isole ancor circonvicine*), Venice, Francesco Nicolini editor, 1674. See Fig. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Boschini, *Le Minere della Pittura*, cit.: *Tavola di tutti i luoghi dove sono descritte le pitture nella presente opera*.

¹⁰⁶ *Sestiere* o *sestier*: term used to indicate a neighbourhood in Venice. The city has six *sestieri* or neighbourhoods: Cannaregio, Castello, Dorsoduro, Santa Croce, San Marco, San Polo.

¹⁰⁷ Boschini, *Le Ricche Minere della Pittura Veneziana*, cit.

publications, indicative of the growth in public interest in modern art and in the demand for these works.

One of the renowned books dedicated to Rome mentioned by Hope, entitled *Cose Maravigliose*¹⁰⁸, was republished several times and in each edition its content expanded and enriched. Initially this book, like many others relating to Rome, did not include any modern artist or modern artwork, but was entirely dedicated to antiquities and relics, very popular at the time among the Roman public. Starting from 1600, the editions of this guidebook were extended with new information and mentions of contemporary works of art. But unlike the aforementioned guidebooks, the focus of *Cose Maravigliose* was not the artists nor the artworks, but rather the patrons commissioning of the same works. For this reason, Hope observed how for Rome the development of guidebooks dedicated entirely to works of art, paintings or sculptures, was slower and more gradual, and the writings for the city also maintained a particular focus on the relationships between art and society¹⁰⁹.

It was in 1638 that a truly informative guidebook was published for Rome, with an excellent and precise table of contents, which openly referred to some high-level sculptural and pictorial works of art: *Ritratto di Roma Moderna*¹¹⁰, written by Pompilio Totti, in fact mentioned artists of the calibre of Caravaggio, even indicating some of his paintings.

On the same stylistic line was Filippo Titi's publication of 1674, *Studio di pittura, scoltura, et architettura nelle chiese di Roma*¹¹¹: the guidebook provided a descriptive inventory of the contents of churches and monasteries, as well as information relevant to attribution, building history, patronage, and contemporary artistic taste. Hope specified that it was one of the first large and extensive books on the paintings inside the churches of Rome, and this combined the religious interest of the worshipping

¹⁰⁸ *Le cose maravigliose dell'alma città di Roma*, Rome, Valerio Dorico editor, 1563: the first edition is dated around 1550. The book was redrafted and republished various times by different authors, from 1550 until 1619.

¹⁰⁹ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 137-138.

¹¹⁰ P. Totti, *Ritratto di Roma Moderna*, Rome, 1638.

¹¹¹ F. Titi, *Studio di pittura, scoltura, et architettura nelle chiese di Roma*, Rome, 1674.

public to the artistic interest of the new public, that was growing and becoming increasingly aware and demanding of artistic knowledge.

The phenomenon of the diffusion of guidebooks in Italy continued throughout the 16th century, until it extended and developed throughout Europe. Indeed, with the rising demand for artistic literature on modern artworks, and with an increasingly critical public, it was necessary to organize the writings in a more rigorous, orderly and precise manner to satisfy their expectations. It was thanks to the curiosity of the public and the ability of art writers that the phenomenon of art tourism was born between the 16th and 17th centuries. In the same historical era, the first modern catalogues as we know them today were published, marking a groundbreaking change in artistic literature.

CHAPTER 2

The first modern catalogues to collections of paintings in Europe

Studying the primary sources of historiographic and artistic literature, it was possible to comprehend why the process of dissemination of artistic notions and knowledge was slow and gradual.

As was stressed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the historical period between the 14th and 16th centuries witnessed many transformations in the field of artistic literature. Not only did the number of publications relating to the arts increase, stimulated above all by Vasari's publication, but also a new genre of literary writings dedicated to the public was born: artistic guidebooks and pocket guides. These booklets, which belonged neither to the category of mere pamphlets nor to that of theoretical treatises, gained popularity mainly in the second half of the 16th and early 17th century. The intention of the authors of these texts, who were very often themselves art historians, art critics, or even painters, was initially simply descriptive, almost inventory-like. With the proliferation of publications, the target audience of the guidebooks became the visitors, the general public, experts but also non-experts in art and painting.

The increasing frequency with which new books of this genre appeared was explicative of a rise in the demand from the public. As was desirable, the diffusion of artistic knowledge was followed by a manifested growth of interest on the part of the public of artworks of their own time, increasingly curious to learn more about the artists mentioned in the guidebooks, and to gain an artistic culture.

At a time in history when there were no museums yet with their respective museum catalogues, which constitute today's primary source of information in the field of art, the guidebooks fulfilled their function as promoters of culture: the growth of public interest in art and painting was remarkable.

The diffusion of guidebooks in Italian cities previously discussed will act as a starting point for this second part of the dissertation: initially, the birth and development of art

tourism in Italy and outside Italy will be explored. Indeed, the literary and historiographic revolution that led to artistic tourism began in Italy in the very first place but, as time passing, the phenomenon took hold in other European countries as well. The growth of public interest in art and painting also developed in France, Germany and Austria, during the 18th century in particular, thanks above all to the circulation of guidebooks, and additionally to the subsequent emergence of the first museum catalogues and luxury productions inherent to picture galleries and public and private museums, which opened in the course of the same century, a topic that will be addressed in this chapter.

2.1 A new interest in the arts: guidebooks and pamphlets in 17th century Italy

Charles Hope's critical discourse moved on from one century to the next.

The 15th century was the moment when the first names of artists, sculptors and painters appeared in literature, sometimes mentioned out of a purely artistic context and only as exemplary characters.

The 16th century, instead, was the era that made known the names of the greatest modern artists, mentioned in various literary works. Although information of an artistic nature was frequently scarce, often confined only to the name of the artist and some biographical information, with the progressive circulation of knowledge of an artistic nature authors were also able to include the locations and sometimes descriptions of certain works of art, both pictorial and sculptural, and they would often attempt to make attributions (at times correct, at other times less precise, as was also true for Vasari himself in *Le Vite*).

From the 17th century onwards, guidebooks and pamphlets dedicated to the works of art of all Italian cities flourished considerably. Not only new publications were appearing regularly, but also the books published in the previous century were corrected and expanded to be republished in numerous new editions. Over the course

of the century, in fact, as Hope reports, far more artistic guidebooks were published than in the previous centuries¹¹².

It was not only the increase in publications that testified to a new enthusiasm for the arts, but also the introduction of the first prints that replicated original paintings: anachronistically but effectively defined as reproductive prints¹¹³, their purpose was precisely to create a replica of works of art through the printing technique, essentially replacing the hand-painted or engraved copies of artworks, which could not be marketed widely and cheaply for their value¹¹⁴.

In the 17th century, the *modus operandi* for studying and writing about art did not require seeing the artworks in person. This point was attested for example by the writer and art historian Giovanni Pietro Bellori who did not deem it necessary to see the works first-hand in order to be able to describe them accurately¹¹⁵. Thus, the arrival of reproductive prints allowed art historians and the public to see paintings for the first time: although not in their original version, this innovation helped to provide the public with a new tool for admiring and understanding artworks.

Referring to the three levels of knowledge described by Charles Hope at the beginning of his article, the introduction of prints in both guidebooks and in the catalogues later (during the 18th century) enabled the public to develop the ability to recognise artists by their individual artistic style¹¹⁶. Still missing for the public was the contextualisation of the individual works and the figures of the artists within the correct art-historical framework, an element that would also develop in the following century through the combined use of catalogues and displays.

¹¹² Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 141.

¹¹³ *Reproductive print* is the term used in this dissertation to refer to prints in the pre-photographic era.

¹¹⁴ A. Griffiths, *The print before photography. An introduction to European printmaking 1550-1820*, London, The British Museum Press, 2016, pp. 498-499.

¹¹⁵ D. Sparti, *Le Vite di Bellori e il suo modus operandi*, in *Begrifflichkeit, Konzepte, Definitionen. Schreiben über Kunst und ihre Medien in Giovan Pietro Belloris Viten und der Kunstliteratur der Frühen Neuzeit* (transl. *Terminology, concepts, definitions. Writing about art and its media in Giovan Pietro Bellori's life and early modern art literature*), edited by E. Oy-Marra, M. von Bernstorff and H. Keazor, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Publishers, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 131.

The literature examined so far was devoted to the artistic and architectural treasures of Italy, sometimes of individual Italian cities, but never of individual artworks or palaces.

It was at this point in history, in the mid-17th century, that the first guidebooks and pamphlets specifically addressed to visitors appeared: for the first time, literary productions aimed to present more artistic content to an audience of visitors, not to art historians or other artists. These early publications marked a further turning point in the development of art literature, anticipating today's art guides.

It was not only Charles Hope, but also Schlosser, and even the English writer Sir Philip Skippon¹¹⁷, who attested to two particular cases in which guidebooks were created for visitors. Both writings maintained the focus on Italy and more specifically on Rome, in alignment with the proliferation of books on the city noted earlier.

The first work, published in 1640, was a short pamphlet about twenty pages long entitled *Dichiaratione delle pitture della Sala de' Signori Barberini*¹¹⁸, published by Mattia Rosichino: he was the *scopatore* of the palazzo, the sweeper, and had custodian duties at the time of publication. Quoting John Beldon Scott, Rosichino was «... a kind of doorman-sweeper who was charged with admitting visitors into the salone to view Cortona's masterwork»¹¹⁹. He was indeed in charge of showing visitors the spectacular frescoed ceiling of the salon of Palazzo Barberini in Rome, realised by Pietro Da Cortona between 1632 and 1639. To satisfy the curiosity of the visitors, whose numbers had proved conspicuous, Rosichino asked a friend who was more knowledgeable than him (later proven to be the Italian poet Francesco Bracciolini) to write an explanation of the volta's iconography. At the time, the palace appeared to be semi-open to the general public: it was accessible to all respectable visitors, as Scott reported, with those of higher rank enjoying privileged access¹²⁰. The pamphlet

¹¹⁷ Sir Philip Skippon (1641 – 1691) was an English traveller, writer and diarist. An account of his travels throughout Europe from 1663 and 1666 was published posthumously in 1732.

P. Skippon, *An Account of a Journey Made Thro' Part of the Low-Countries, Germany, Italy, and France*, London, edited by H. Lintot and J. Osborn, 1732.

¹¹⁸ M. Rosichino, *Dichiaratione delle pitture della Sala de' Signori Barberini*, Rome, Fabio de Falco publisher, 1640. See Fig. 20.

¹¹⁹ J. Beldon Scott, *Images of Nepotism. The Painted Ceilings of Palazzo Barberini*, Princeton New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 137.

¹²⁰ J. Clifton, *Review of Images of Nepotism. The Painted Ceilings of Palazzo Barberini*, «The Sixteenth Century Journal», Vol. 23, No. 4, 3 (1992), pp. 811-813.

published by Rosichino was therefore of excellent quality, and included elements that were comprehensible and appreciable to both the vulgar and a more refined and intellectual public as well. If the opening of the palace to the public was already a novelty in itself for the period, the presence of a *cicerone* to guide the visit, together with the possibility of consulting (and presumably also purchasing on site¹²¹) a booklet describing the paintings constituted clear and strong evidence of a growing art public. Seven years later, Girolamo Teti's *Aedes Barberinae*¹²² was published, a much more extensive literary work, containing a description of the same Palazzo Barberini and detailed descriptions of its interiors, a luxurious publication intended not so much for visitors as for the elite international audience that came as guests at the palace. Written entirely in Latin, it was richly decorated with engravings depicting the interiors and exteriors of the palace; the artists were accurately named, and their paintings were reproduced. It was a much more expensive book than Rosichino's pamphlet and it was aimed at a very specific and limited audience.

The second guidebook designed for the public was *Villa Borghese fuori di Porta Pinciana*¹²³, a work entirely dedicated to Villa Borghese in Rome, written and published in 1650 by Giacomo Manilli. For Manilli, the book was a «... modo da servire alla curiosità de' forastieri, e particolarmente de' signori oltramontani, divotissimi, per così dire, delle antichità nostre»¹²⁴, a way to satisfy the interest of visitors, and especially of the northern aristocracy, who were passionate about both ancient and modern Italian artworks. It is known that Giacomo Manilli was the keeper of the Villa Borghese, a cloakroom attendant or *guardarobba* as he called himself on the frontispiece of the book¹²⁵, and the author of this early and influential guide for visitors.

Built for Cardinal Scipione Borghese on Rome's Pincio hill and surrounded by ample gardens, the villa was designed to house a rich collection of works of art of all kinds,

¹²¹ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 142.

¹²² Hieronymus Tetius (Girolamo Teti), *Aedes Barberinae ad Quirinalem (A' Comito Hieronymo Tetio descriptae)*, Rome, 1647. See Fig. 21.

¹²³ G. Manilli, *Villa Borghese fuori di Porta Pinciana (descritta da Iacomo Manilli Romano, Guardarobba di detta Villa)*, Rome, edited by Ludovico Grignani, 1650. See Fig. 22.

¹²⁴ Ivi, *Dedicatoria*, p. a5^r.

¹²⁵ Ivi, frontispiece of the book. See Fig. 22.

including modern paintings, antiquities and sculptures, both inside the building and outside in the garden and park. Manilli's detailed account, written in the engaging tone of a tour guide, provided an inestimable overview of the villa's architecture and its treasures: the layout and sculptures of the famous secret gardens surrounding the villa are described, along with the architecture and sculptural and painted decorations of the exterior and interior. The author listed the masterpieces, exhibited in twenty rooms, with the name of the artist and the theme represented: among them are paintings by Caravaggio, Titian, Veronese and Giulio Romano, to name only a few prestigious artists.

What is remarkable about Hope's critical research is that, in this guidebook, Manilli reported differences of opinion on the attribution of paintings, which was unusual for the time and which instead we often find in contemporary works of art criticism¹²⁶.

It is interesting to note that, unlike the guidebooks of the time, in *Villa Borghese* Manilli did not include an index at the beginning or end of the work, for reasons that remain unclear.

Nonetheless, the author's speech was openly addressed to the public, and it was pleasant to read it while admiring the beauty of the palace. Manilli's intention to guide the public through the villa was evident and by providing detailed artistic information he helped to increase knowledge of the artists shown, and to stimulate the artistic interest of the public.

All in all, the new curiosity of the public, which began to visit artistic sites, for the arts led writers for the first time to produce works specifically for visitors. The first guides, who in the above-mentioned cases were guardians, led tours and visits to the villas where they worked, with the help of artistic and iconographic pamphlets. These *ciceroni*¹²⁷, together with the greater number of literary sources available, led to more knowledge being available to the general public: artists were regularly identified by name, and the more informed might even be able to recognise their painting style. This

¹²⁶ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 143.

¹²⁷ Schlosser, Kurz, *La letteratura dei ciceroni*, in *La letteratura artistica, Libro Ottavo*, cit., p. 535-553.

new appetite for admiring works of art for their own sake was the beginning of what we now call art tourism.

2.2 The beginning of artistic tourism in the Renaissance

The emergence of topographical literature and, at the same time, the birth of the literature of the *ciceroni*, as Schlosser defined it¹²⁸, contributed to the expansion of cultural and artistic tourism, aimed at admiring and appreciating «art for art's sake»¹²⁹.

It began in the seventeenth century, and advanced further in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the authentic travel literature that developed mainly in Italy, and in Italy more than anywhere else. These books, as previously mentioned, did not deal with travel in the sense of pilgrimage, but with Italy as a destination for travel in the modern sense, a journey from city to city to discover the artistic beauties of the country, and they aimed to satisfy the immediate demands (artistic and practical) of travellers and visitors.

Italy, famous for its artistic and historical richness, offered a unique experience that included Greco-Roman antiquity, the Renaissance, and the undeniable beauty of its landscapes. On Italian soil, figurative art had become a public interest, passionately cultivated by all the people from the earliest times, and in the centuries between the Renaissance and the Baroque it had experienced a true rediscovery thanks to an increasingly detailed, precise and targeted art historiography. It is for this reason that public artistic judgement, and a didactic and historical approach to art, were able to develop so early and so intensively, serving as a model and example for the whole of Europe.

In the 18th century, art literature was increasingly moving towards modern art historical research and, as has already been documented, was primarily heuristic and critical in

¹²⁸ Ibidem.

¹²⁹ Although anachronistic as it developed later in the 19th century, the concept of *art for art's sake*, also known in French as *art pour l'art*, correctly frames the desire to admire art as an end in itself, as pure beauty without utilitarian, moral or political connotations.

its collection and study of material, and above all in its editions and reinterpretations of older art historical writings.

The development of art tourism in Italy was undoubtedly stimulated by the illustrious works published in the previous two centuries. Whereas before art travel had been the exclusive activity of practising artists, now anyone could embark on an artistic journey to learn about art, guided and assisted by guidebooks and pamphlets that provided information on the location of works of art, and even some topographical maps of Italian cities that were included over time (although these were not particularly accurate, as Schlosser reported)¹³⁰.

Looking critically at the literature analysed so far in this dissertation, there is no doubt that the advancement of art literature has contributed to an increased public interest in art and painting, as Charles Hope also argued¹³¹.

What literature stimulated in the first place was the formation and artistic and cultural education of the public, in this case a very specific public, elitist and mainly aristocratic, which between the 17th and 19th centuries undertook what is commonly known as the Grand Tour. It consisted of a proper educational journey through the culture and art practised by the English, French and German aristocracy, the actual travelling public of the time. Italy was at the heart of the experience. The Grand Tour also involved the activity of artists, both Italian and foreign, and of guides or intermediaries for the purchase of paintings and works of art, as well as for visits to palaces and private art collections that already existed, albeit in smaller numbers than today¹³².

The same intellectuals who went on the Grand Tour contributed to the production of literary works of great value on Italian art. The German writer J.J. Volkmann, for example, was the author of the voluminous *Notizie storico-critiche dell'Italia* (the original German title is *Historische-kritischen Nachrichten von Italien*¹³³, transl. in English as *Historical-Critical Notes on Italy*), a guide to Italy that was very popular in

¹³⁰ Schlosser, Kurz, *La letteratura artistica*, cit., p. 536.

¹³¹ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., pp. 131-159.

¹³² S.v. *Grand Tour*, in *Enciclopedia Treccani*: < <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/grand-tour/> >.

¹³³ J.J. Volkmann, *Historische-kritischen Nachrichten von Italien*, 3 Vols., Leipzig, 1770-1771.

German-speaking countries at the time and whose historical-artistic section is remarkably extensive. Volkmann's work played an important role for German-speaking visitors to Italy. The guide was later used by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe on his journey through Italy, at the end of which he himself published another valuable work, the *Italienische Reise*¹³⁴ or *Viaggio In Italia*, in 1895.

The greater availability of artistic literature and the growing interest of the public, not only of the aristocracy, in art contributed to the creation of the first modern museum catalogues. The 18th century would lead this museum literature into the modern path, especially with the important publications on galleries not only in Italy but also in the rest of Europe, where the phenomenon of art tourism spread widely: France, Germany and Austria were co-protagonists with Italy in this era of a profound revolution in the world of art and collecting.

2.3 Guidebooks, catalogues and luxury productions in 18th century Europe

Looking at the 18th century as a whole, it was the first century in which writers and art historians attempted to provide amateur public and visitors with an art-historical context in which to place the paintings and sculptures they could admire in collections and palaces. In fact, it was in this historical phase that the largest and most famous collections of works of art were created throughout Europe, belonging to royal families or to nobles and aristocrats: it is to these collections and galleries that we owe the birth of the modern art catalogue, which was originally designed to be an inventory, or catalogue indeed, of the works of art that made up these collections.

Charles Hope divided the publications of this century into two distinct categories, which we will mention here in order to place the catalogues discussed hereafter in the proper context.

According to Hope, eighteenth-century literary works were either specifically designed to assist visitors to the galleries where the paintings were exhibited, or they

¹³⁴ J.W. Goethe, *Italienische Reise* (*Viaggio In Italia*, 1st Italian translation in 1875), Leipzig, Im Insel Verlag, 1816-1817.

were produced with the intention of celebrating and publicising an aristocrat's collection, and were therefore aimed at a more affluent audience who would not necessarily have seen the collection in question at first hand. Chronologically, the first half of the century was marked by catalogues and guides for the nobility, in the style of Teti's *Aedes Barberinae* mentioned above, while the circulation of museum catalogues for the general public occurred mainly in the last decades of the century¹³⁵. It should be noted, however, that most of the art historical information about artworks and their masters was to be found only in the most exclusive and expensive catalogues, which belonged to the second category: Hope observed that the process of dissemination of artistic knowledge was particularly slow and gradual because it went hand in hand with the spread of literary production available to the general public¹³⁶.

This same century saw a further improvement in the field of art and museums. The display of artworks in the public or semi-public collections of the time began to be more thoughtful, playing a central role in guiding the visitor to an understanding of the works of art and in conveying notions of art history, including the genre of the artist, the geographical region where he had learnt the art of painting, and the master with whom he had trained in the workshop during his apprenticeship. However, museum display has undergone several transformations over the course of the century, and different types of display have been used, without one dominating over the others in most collections, and despite the obvious attempt to convey historical notions through display, the result is not as immediately useful to the public as desired. In the following paragraphs, the issue of display will be addressed contextually for each of the countries considered: France, Germany, Austria and, finally, Italy.

In order to thoroughly understand the growth of the public in the field of art and painting during this period, it is therefore necessary to consider in parallel and simultaneously the formation of collections, the publication of the first modern catalogues, the above-mentioned guidebooks, and the use of the display as a means of communication.

¹³⁵ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., pp. 155-156.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*.

In this context, and taking into account the new literary publications, Charles Hope defined the three types of art book that would play a central role in the 18th and 19th centuries: guidebooks, museum catalogues and luxury productions¹³⁷. If much has already been said about the guidebook, and by museum catalogue we mean the modern art catalogue, the term luxury productions refers to those publications not aimed at the general public of gallery visitors, but at a more affluent, noble and aristocratic audience who could afford expensive, exquisitely crafted and finely decorated books. Hope noted that the differentiation between catalogues and luxury productions became explicit only gradually¹³⁸, as it was not obvious at the outset, but as this dissertation progresses the distinction will become clearer.

For the first time in this research, the following sub-chapters focus on European, and not just Italian, artistic literature. This is representative of the spread of artistic knowledge throughout the continent.

2.3.1 France: from Roger de Piles to Pierre Crozat's luxury production

In France, the first half of the 18th century saw the birth of extraordinary artistic and literary productions, including theoretical treatises, guides, catalogues and even the aforementioned luxury productions, as defined by Hope.

Roger de Piles, the pseudonym of Jean-François Torteбат, was a unique figure: painter, engraver, collector, theoretician, and art critic. He is also known for his role as a diplomat at the court of Louis XIV, for whom he travelled and studied the most famous European art collections.

One of his literary works fits precisely into this research: the book in question, published in French in Paris in 1699, was entitled *Abregé de la vie des peintres*¹³⁹ (Eng.

¹³⁷ Ivi, pp. 144-145.

¹³⁸ Ibidem.

¹³⁹ Roger de Piles, *Abregé de la vie des peintres. Avec des reflexions sur leurs Ouvrages, Et un Traité du Peintre parfait, de la connoissance des Dessesins, & de l'utilité des Estampes*, Paris, edited by François Muguët, 1699 (first edition). See Fig. 23.

transl. *Summary of the life of painters*). Divided into seven volumes, the work contained biographies of a carefully selected number of artists, as well as critical reflections on their most notable works. The subject matter was organised by the author according to the succession of the various artists, taking into account a geographical subdivision of the Italian and European schools of painting. The first book was peculiar: it contained *L'Idée du peintre parfait*¹⁴⁰ (Eng. transl. *The idea of the perfect painter*), a manual of painting aimed at artists but, as the author himself said, written in a language understandable to anyone wishing to approach the knowledge of painting, offering a simple guide to artistic techniques and their applications. De Piles reflected on the importance of the concept of artistic taste and went on to discuss the nature of painting, stressing the importance of drawing and the usefulness of prints, as the title of the book suggested.

In this text, de Piles included an index, *Tables des Chapitres*¹⁴¹, with a division into chapters and their respective subjects with page references, in accordance with what had become common practice in artistic literary production. There followed a *Noms des peintres, dont on a séparé les Réflexions sur leurs Ouvrages d'avec leurs Vies*¹⁴², in which he listed the names of the artists mentioned in the work, again with a cross-reference to the biographical page. It is worth noting that this book was soon translated into English and German, an indication of its importance considering that the translation of a book was still a demanding task at the time. This literary production, which combined the genres of biographies and artists' lives in the Vasarian style, a theoretical treatise on painting, and presented a division into chapters according to geographical schools (an innovation at the time), was revolutionary not only in France but throughout Europe, and served as a model for many publications on this genre that followed.

In fact, between 1745 and 1752, the French naturalist and art historian Antoine Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, inspired by this very work by Roger de Piles, in which the author, d'Argenville claimed, had openly encouraged someone to expand on his project

¹⁴⁰ Ivi, pp. 1-65.

¹⁴¹ See Fig. 24-25.

¹⁴² English translation: *Names of painters, whose Reflections on their Works have been separated from their Lives*. See Fig. 25.

in the future, published a new *Abregé de la vie des plus fameux peintres* in French in two volumes¹⁴³. Although the title and purported content of the two works might suggest a close resemblance, there were certain structural differences.

Firstly, the latter presented an initial theoretical discussion on the importance of drawing, *Discours sur la Connoissance des Dessesins et des Tableaux*¹⁴⁴, which was followed by a *Table des noms des Peintres, dont les vies & les portraits se trouvent dans la premiere partie de cet Ouvrage*¹⁴⁵, a list of the names of the painters whose lives and portraits are to be found immediately afterwards. The organisation of the biographies is similar to that of de Piles, and even more so to that of Vasari: for each artist, the portrait was engraved on the first page of his biography, which preceded the historical and biographical presentation. In this respect, it is noteworthy that d'Argenville presented the artists he chose in the order of their geographical schools: initially there was the *École d'Italie*¹⁴⁶, and there were Roman, Florentine, Venetian, Lombard, Neapolitan and Spanish and, finally, Genoese artists; then the author included seventy-nine entries of Dutch and Flemish artists, which he considered «the true painters»¹⁴⁷. This practice of subdividing the artists and paintings treated critically and geographically by school became increasingly common in art writings; we will see this model recurring also in the display of the first European art galleries and collections, contemporary with these texts.

The accuracy of the information provided by these writers, the theoretical and historical explanations and, lastly, the classification of painters according to schools, gave the public new knowledge and more guidance in the world of art and, above all, contributed to spread the beauty of Italian painting.

¹⁴³ A. J. D. d'Argenville, *Abregé de la vie des plus fameux peintres (Partie I, avec leurs portraits gravés en taille-douce, les indications de leurs principaux ouvrages, quelques réflexions sur leurs caractères, et la maniere de connoître les desseins des grands maîtres)*, Eng. Transl. Summary of the lives of the most famous painters (with their portraits engraved in intaglio, references to their main works, some reflections on their characters and the way to know the designs of the great masters), Paris, 1745-1752. See Fig. 26.

¹⁴⁴ Ivi, pp. XV-XLIV.

¹⁴⁵ Ivi, pp. XLV-XLVI-XLVII-XLVIII.

¹⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ P. Michel, *Dezallier d'Argenville's Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres: a guide for contemporary collectors or a survey of the taste for paintings of the northern schools?*, «Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art», Vol. 34, No. 3/4, 13 (2009-2010), pp. 212-225.

In his critical essay, Hope furthermore cited three writers who published luxury productions for the art field in 18th century France, which constituted namely the first catalogues published for the magnificent art collection of the French noble and reigning family. Hope argued, however, that this kind of catalogue, both in terms of its material value and the audience for which it was written, was not aiming at the general public of readers, amateurs and art lovers, but more specifically at an elite and often aristocratic or royal audience. In most cases, the purpose of these luxury productions was to popularise the wealth and splendour of the royal collection and to impress other families of the same rank in Europe at the time¹⁴⁸.

*Description des tableaux du Palais Royal avec la vie des peintres à la tête de leurs ouvrages*¹⁴⁹ was written in 1727¹⁵⁰ by Louis-François Du Bois de Saint-Gelais, a French intellectual who later became secretary of the *Académie royal de peinture et de sculpture* in Paris: it is the first artistic catalogue ever published of a French royal collection, albeit in an inventorial form, and it was precisely a luxury production according to Hope's critical opinion. The book was a lengthy and elaborate description and inventory of the Royal Collection of Philippe d'Orleans¹⁵¹, Duke of Orleans, a vast collection of more than five hundred works of art displayed in the Duke's magnificent Parisian seat, the Palais-Royal. The collection was significant in the history of art collecting as it was one of the largest private collections ever assembled and was almost entirely open to the public. In this case, Du Bois's catalogue could help visitors to enjoy the works of art. The author organised the catalogue as follows: alphabetically arranged, for each artist he included a biography, followed by a list of the works by that artist in the collection; and then for every artwork he also provided technical data,

¹⁴⁸ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 146.

¹⁴⁹ L.F. Du Bois de Saint-Gelais, *Description des tableaux du Palais Royal avec la vie des peintres à la tête de leurs ouvrages*, (Eng. transl. Description of the paintings in the Palais-Royal, with the lives of the painters at the head of their works), Paris, 1727. See Fig. 27.

¹⁵⁰ A second and updated edition of the *Description* was published in 1737.

¹⁵¹ Philippe II, Duke of Orléans (1674 - 1723) was a prince, soldier and state leader who served as Regent of the Kingdom of France from 1715 until his death in 1723. He is known in French as *le Régent*. The Duke assembled the Orléans Collection, one of the finest and richest collections of paintings ever assembled by a non-monarch.

though of little interest to visitors, such as the material, size or type of medium used¹⁵². Finally, he presented a brief, uncritical description of each artwork, referring to its subject and describing the scene.

The importance of this first printed catalogue was immense: it was at once an art guide, a catalogue and an inventory of the collection, and the *Description* paved the way for the subsequent and equally valuable catalogues by Lépicié and Crozat.

François-Bernard Lépicié, a French engraver and biographer, was the author of another luxury catalogue, more elegant and refined than Du Bois's, according to Charles Hope¹⁵³, entitled *Catalogue raisonné des tableaux du Roy*¹⁵⁴. Divided into two volumes, it was entirely devoted to Italian painting and included works belonging to the French royal collection. As with De Piles and D'Argenville, the artists were classified by school: the first volume, published in 1752, analysed the *École Florentine* and the *École Romaine*; the second, published in 1754, dealt with the *École Vénitienne* and the *École de Lombardie*. Unlike Du Bois, Lépicié not only preferred the subdivision by schools to the purely alphabetical one, but also arranged the artists within each school according to a peculiar criterion: chronologically by the artists' date of birth¹⁵⁵. The format of the biographies, followed by a critical analysis of the works, remained unchanged, although Lépicié's commentaries were more critical and direct in their reading of the paintings. It is also clear that the very structure of the text helped readers and visitors to the collection to place the artists and their works in a historical and orderly context, thus contributing to the dissemination of art historical notions that were not yet fully available and accessible to the general public.

Moreover, since François Lépicié was an engraver by profession, he referred several times in the text to the importance of prints and their practical as well as aesthetic usefulness in enabling anyone to judge a work of art¹⁵⁶. He also stressed that catalogues

¹⁵² Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 145.

¹⁵³ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 146.

¹⁵⁴ F.B. Lépicié, *Catalogue raisonné des tableaux du Roy (avec un abrégé de la vie des peintres, fait par ordre de Sa Majesté, contenant l'École Florentine, & l'École Romaine/l'École Vénitienne, & l'École de Lombardie)*, Paris, Imprimerie Royale (royal printing house), 1752-1754. See Fig. 28-29.

¹⁵⁵ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 146.

¹⁵⁶ Lépicié, *Avertissement*, in *Catalogue raisonné des tableaux du Roy*, cit., pp. V-XIII.

including prints and engravings, in addition to written descriptions of the paintings, served to preserve and safeguard artworks in the memory of posterity as well, who might not be able to admire paintings in person because they could have deteriorated or have been lost. The design and composition of Lépicié's volumes was therefore intended to make artistic knowledge accessible not only to his contemporary public, but also to future audiences, and to transmit the beauty of art to posterity.

The third literary work that Hope identified as a luxury production in 18th-century France was Pierre Crozat's grandiose printed work, *Recueil d'estampes*¹⁵⁷.

Pierre Crozat was a renowned art collector and functionary of the French Crown. At the suggestion of the Duke of Orléans, he undertook the project of compiling a catalogue of reproductive prints of the works in the vast Orléans collection¹⁵⁸, with the aim of celebrating it and making it known to everyone in France and throughout Europe. Crozat was assisted in the management of the project by the engraver and art historian Pierre-Jean Mariette, who wrote the texts and captions for the works. Crozat employed a considerable number of engravers to reproduce all the paintings and drawings in the collection: however, Francis Haskell reported in *The Painful Birth of the Art Book*¹⁵⁹ that Crozat was often dissatisfied with the quality of the engravings.

The *Recueil's* plan was ambitious, to say the least: several volumes were to be published, mainly devoted to Italian art, but also Flemish and Dutch art. Instead, only the first two volumes, covering the Roman and Venetian schools of painting, were published, and they were splendidly crafted, both for the presence of numerous engravings and for Mariette's useful descriptive and critical captions. In his critical essay, Hope noted that each work was accompanied by a description of its historical context¹⁶⁰, in accordance with what had already been seen earlier in this century: the attempt by art historians to provide a historical and pictorial context in the catalogues of collections and in art books, in order to enable the public - educated and not - to

¹⁵⁷ P. Crozat, J.P. Mariette, *Recueil d'estampes (d'après les plus beaux tableaux et d'après les plus beaux dessins qui sont en France: dans le Cabinet du Roy, dans celui de Monseigneur le duc d'Orléans, & dans d'autres cabinets; divisé suivant les différentes écoles avec un abrégé de la Vie des peintres et une description historique de chaque tableau)*, Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1729-1742. See Fig. 30.

¹⁵⁸ Pierre Crozat, in *Enciclopedia Treccani*: < <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pierre-crozat/> >

¹⁵⁹ F. Haskell, *The Painful Birth of the Art Book*, London, Thames and Hudson editor, 1987.

¹⁶⁰ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 147.

better understand individual paintings and collections, was now evident in France, unlike at the same time in Germany as will be further examined.

The introduction of critical and art historical descriptions was a pivotal moment in the process of the development of the art public, as never before had the third and highest level of art knowledge - according to Hope - been available to the public, and it is through this type of knowledge that the public becomes aware of and able to fully appreciate works of art.

2.3.2 Germany: inventory catalogues to princely collections and paintings galleries

In Germany, the 18th century was a crucial period for the world of art and art collecting, because it was the first time that large collections of artworks from royal or noble families were regularly opened to the general public, anticipating the modern museum as a public institution¹⁶¹. These first German picture galleries displayed great masterpieces that were of interest both to artists as objects of study, and to art lovers and amateurs who could admire them and experience their beauty. The aim of these galleries was not yet to provide an art historical perspective on the paintings in the collections, but rather to display relevant examples of European art.

Nevertheless, the earliest art catalogues relating to this kind of art gallery were mostly inventories: Hope called them inventory catalogues¹⁶² indicating that the authors had relied on manuscript inventories of the collections to compile them, and that these catalogues contained little information truly useful to the public visiting the galleries, but rather more details and technical information about the artworks, such as dimensions, type of support, inscriptions present, and so on. Yet these catalogues played an essential role in unambiguously identifying the paintings in a given collection, as they provided a great deal of specific and detailed data on each painting.

¹⁶¹ *The First Modern Museums of Art: the Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early 19th-Century Europe*, edited by C. Paul, Los Angeles, published by The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012.

¹⁶² Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 143.

Many of these German catalogues, which will be discussed here, were made available to the public in this century and, together with these literary productions, the display of paintings in galleries began to be used as a medium of information for visitors, providing them with a minimum of historical and artistic context (albeit still imprecise and unclassified). In fact, the criteria used to display the paintings were not uniform from one collection to another: sometimes the paintings were displayed in chronological order, sometimes by artist, sometimes by national or regional schools of painting.

The first princely painting gallery was built in Düsseldorf between 1709 and 1714 and was intended to be temporary, with the idea of building a separate palace to permanently house the collection¹⁶³. It was built at the request of the Prince and Elector Palatine of Düsseldorf Johann Wilhelm II, who commissioned the painter and curator Gerhard Joseph Karsch¹⁶⁴ to produce the first ever printed catalogue of a painting gallery. The catalogue appeared in two editions in German and two in French before 1750¹⁶⁵, and listed the 341 paintings in the Elector's collection, room by room, in the order in which they hung on the gallery walls. At the heart of this collection were the works of Peter Paul Rubens: the Rubens collection in Düsseldorf, together with that of the King of Spain, was the largest and most important of its time, and indeed an entire room of the gallery was devoted exclusively to the paintings of this artist, something that had never happened before. In the other rooms, however, the paintings were not arranged by artist, nor did there seem to be any attempt to display them chronologically or by school. Karsch included a short caption for each painting, giving the number,

¹⁶³ Ivi, p. 144.

¹⁶⁴ Gerhard Joseph Karsch (1661-1753) was a German painter who, after being appointed inspector of the Düsseldorf Picture Gallery, wrote the first catalogue of the gallery around 1719, following the death of the Elector in 1716. The catalogue is not dated, so it is not possible to know exactly when it was first published, but it is certain that it was not published before 1716. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the first editions of the catalogue contain a dedication to the new Elector, Karl Philipp III, who came to power in that year.

¹⁶⁵ G. J. Karsch, *Ausführliche und gründliche Specification derer kostbarsten und unschätzbaren Gemälden welche in der Gallerie der Churfl. ResidentzStadt Düsseldorf in grosser Menge anzutreffen find*, Düsseldorf, c. 1716.

French version: *Designation exacte des peintures precieuses, qui sont en grand nombre dans la galerie de la residence de Son Altesse Serme. Electorale Palatine à Dusseldorff*, Düsseldorf, c. 1725 and 1750. See Fig. 31.

size, medium and some brief iconographic data on the subject depicted¹⁶⁶. This clarifies the meaning of the term *inventory catalogue* as used by Charles Hope: much of the information contained in these early editions of the Düsseldorf catalogue was of no interest to visitors of the gallery, and in its content and structure it was reminiscent of an inventory of the collection. A comparison of this catalogue with the contemporary *Recueil* by Crozat, mentioned above, reveals the divide between the two types of catalogues, even though they developed in the same century.

A new catalogue of the Düsseldorf collection, shorter and more similar to a pamphlet, was edited in the 1750s by the restorer François-Louis Colins, in French and German¹⁶⁷.

It was later in 1756 that the German Prince and Elector Karl Theodor decided to change the arrangement of the paintings in the gallery, and entrusted the task to the architect and painter Lambert Krahe, as Hope recounted. In the new arrangement, three of the five rooms seemed to have a specific display in mind: the first room was devoted exclusively to Flemish painters; the third to Italian painters; while the fifth remained entirely devoted to Rubens, as it had been before¹⁶⁸. The new catalogue was compiled by the court architect Nicolas de Pigage, with the help of the printer and art dealer Christian von Mechel and the young French linguist Jean-Charles Laveaux, and was published in 1778¹⁶⁹. It is considered one of the most famous museum catalogues of the 18th century: firstly, for the richness of the engravings and prints showing the position of the pictures on the gallery walls, which were extremely helpful to the public in finding their way around the paintings on display; but also for the completeness and precision of the captions of the pictures, which included a brief description of the subject depicted and the most salient aspects - as the small size of the engravings in

¹⁶⁶ T. Ketelsen, *Zur Geschichte des Sammlungs- und Galeriekataloges im 18. Jahrhundert* (The history of the collection and gallery catalogue in the 18th century), «Journal of Swiss Archaeology and Art History», No. 62, 6 (2005), pp. 153-158, 156.

¹⁶⁷ F. L. Colins, *Catalogue des tableaux qui se trouvent dans les Galleries du Palais de S.A.S. Electorale Palatine a Düsseldorf*. German version: *Verzeichnis der Schildereyen, welche zu Düsseldorf in den Galerien des Schlosses seiner Churfürstlichen Durchlaucht zu Pfalz anzutreffen sind* (both editions are not dated).

¹⁶⁸ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 150.

¹⁶⁹ N. de Pigage, *La galerie électorale de Düsseldorf ou catalogue raisonné de ses tableaux*, Basel, 1778. See Fig. 32-33.

the catalogue did not allow all the details to be grasped - , thus adding a little more art appreciation to the usual technical data such as dimensions, support and inscriptions. This catalogue remained an inventory but, unlike Karsch, Pigage included an index of artists at the end of the publication and, in contrast to previous catalogues that only provided the record of artworks, this one also included a description of each painting in the collection¹⁷⁰. The combination of text and engravings makes it clear that the intention of Pigage, von Mechel and Laveaux was to produce a catalogue that would make art accessible and comprehensible to the public, albeit an educated public. Although still far from offering a history of art, this catalogue not only served to celebrate the Elector's collection, but also to promote art historical education.

Charles Hope also brought the Dresden gallery as an example of an inventory catalogue produced for a picture gallery established in 18th-century Germany. The first catalogue dedicated to the royal collection in Dresden dates from 1753¹⁷¹, with a second edition published soon after in 1757. Written in French and Italian by the German art historian and librarian Carl Heinrich von Heineken, it was a proper inventory - or inventory catalogue - that collected and catalogued the collection's hundred or so paintings, with prints and concise descriptions. The author was undoubtedly inspired by the model of Crozat's *Recueil*. Heineken did not include biographies of the artists, limiting himself to a general introduction to the collection, followed by the printed reproductions of the paintings. As Hope emphasised in his analysis¹⁷², Heineken also added information about provenance of the pictures in the collection: the aim was not so much to reconstruct the history of such paintings, as to testify to their value and quality in the light of the former noble or royal owners¹⁷³.

The royal collection in Dresden was then exhibited in two galleries - *Exterieur* and *Interieur* – and, in both of them, the display of the paintings followed no other pattern

¹⁷⁰ T. W. Gaehtgens, L. Marchesano, *Display and Art History: The Düsseldorf Gallery and Its Catalogue*, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute Publications, 2011.

¹⁷¹ C. H. von Heineken, *Recueil d'Estampes d'après les plus célèbres Tableaux de la Galerie Royale de Dresde (contenant cinquante pièces avec une description de chaque tableau en françois et en italien)*, 2 vols, Dresden, 1753.

¹⁷² Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 147.

¹⁷³ S. Raux, *From Mariette to Joullain: Provenance and Value in Eighteenth-Century French Auction Catalogs*, in *Provenance. An Alternate History of Art*, Los Angeles, edited by G. Feigenbaum and I. Reist, 2012.

than to make the viewing of the paintings pleasant for the visitors. The first catalogue of the galleries, printed in French in 1765¹⁷⁴ and in German in 1771, was again of the inventory type: it did not contain printed reproductions of the paintings, but rather a list of artists and the subjects they portrayed, with the usual technical data. However, unlike the previous ones, this one included some biographical information on the painters.

Instead, the most extensive catalogue dedicated to Dresden was the one written and published in 1782 by Johann August Lehninger, entitled *Abrégé de la vie des peintres, dont les tableaux composent la Galerie Electorale de Dresde*¹⁷⁵: written entirely in French, it was a luxury production. Not only it was much longer than the preceding catalogues, but it also had a more detailed structure and content: the artists were divided into national schools, first and foremost the Italian school, and listed in chronological order; for each, Lehninger wrote a short biography based on Dézallier d'Argenville's *Abrégé*. Despite its sophistication, Charles Hope argued that this catalogue was not written specifically for the public visiting the galleries¹⁷⁶: even after 1750, German catalogues remained predominantly inventory-based, and it was not yet common for art historical notions to be included in art literature.

Charles Hope, in his critical essay, also reported on a notable case: the case of Potsdam seems to be a partial exception to the compilation of non-informative and not for public use German inventory catalogues, developed in the 18th century and analysed here¹⁷⁷. A picture gallery was set up in Potsdam, more precisely in Sanssouci Palace: situated in the eastern part of the homonymous park, it is one of the most prestigious castles in Potsdam, the capital of Brandenburg, now Germany. In 1745, Frederick II the Great, King of Prussia, built a summer residence to display his art collection, a work he entrusted to the *galerieinspector* Matthias Oesterreich, then director of the Sanssouci

¹⁷⁴ J.A. Riedel, C.F. Wenzel, *Catalogue des tableaux de la Galerie Electorale à Dresde*, Dresden, 1765.

¹⁷⁵ J.A. Lehninger, *Abrégé de la vie des peintres, dont les tableaux composent la Galerie Electorale de Dresde (avec le détail de tous les Tableaux de cette Collection & des Éclaircissemens historiques sur ces Chefs-d'œuvres de la peinture)*, Dresden, Libraires-Imprimeurs de la Cour, 1782. See Fig. 34.

¹⁷⁶ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 149.

¹⁷⁷ Ivi, pp. 151-152.

Gallery¹⁷⁸. Oesterreich, who was also a painter and engraver in his lifetime, used his expertise as an artist to produce the first printed plan of a gallery for Potsdam in 1763, to be hung on the wall, a tool designed and produced to guide the public in their visit to the gallery¹⁷⁹.

The custom of using a plan showing the layout of the gallery and the position of the paintings within it is still used today in every museum as a basic guide to help visitors find their way around the collection. But that is not all: a medium such as the printed plan allowed, and still allows, the public to choose which works of art to see, in which order to see them and, above all, whether to see them all or only those in which they were most interested, or those created by leading artists. Such a simple but extremely useful tool changed the role of the art public from a purely passive one to an active one, in which the visitor could construct his or her own visit.

Oesterreich also compiled a catalogue for the Potsdam gallery, firstly published in German and French in 1764¹⁸⁰, a year after the hanging gallery plan, and which was republished several times with slight modifications in the years immediately following¹⁸¹. Oesterreich's catalogue was designed to be used by the visitor in conjunction with the gallery plan: it was organised by artist, with a biography for each of them, and the paintings were numbered in the order in which they were exhibited, further facilitating the combined use of catalogue and plan. The artists were then divided into geographical schools - Italian, Flemish and French - according to the layout of the gallery rooms. In fact, as Hope wisely pointed out, Oesterreich's preferred method of displaying paintings was to separate Italian from Northern art¹⁸².

Indeed, the example of the Potsdam Gallery illustrates the development of the German catalogue and the princely collections: although the majority of 18th-century catalogues were inventory catalogues, towards the end of the century the first

¹⁷⁸ *Picture Gallery Sanssouci, Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg, Potsdam Germany*, in *Google Arts & Culture*.

Available at: < <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/bildergalerie-sanssouci> >.

¹⁷⁹ See Fig. 35.

¹⁸⁰ M. Oesterreich, *Beschreibung der Königlichen Bildergalerie und des Kabinetts im Sans-Souci*, (transl. *Description of the Royal Picture Gallery and the Cabinet at Sans-Souci*), Potsdam, 1764.

¹⁸¹ M. Oesterreich, *Beschreibung der Königlichen Bildergalerie und des Kabinetts im Sans-Souci*, Potsdam, 1770. See Fig. 36.

¹⁸² Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 152.

catalogues for the public and the first useful tools for visitors began to emerge, clearly encouraging and stimulating people to visit these semi-public collections of paintings and to engage proactively and curiously with the paintings and galleries.

2.3.3 Austria: a new arrangement for the Habsburg imperial collection

In neighbouring Austria, the best-known painting gallery in the 18th century was in Vienna, where the art collection of the Habsburg imperial family was housed in the Stallburg, an imposing Austrian castle used as an imperial residence at the time.

The spectacular and refined collection of the Habsburgs, the fruit of their patronage and the artistic expression of the countries over which they ruled, included not only paintings but also sculptures, jewellery, goldsmith's works, and artefacts of various kinds; indeed, the collection continued to grow throughout the 19th century¹⁸³. The development of Austrian artistic literature and art catalogues is closely linked to the extensive Habsburg collection of paintings, including works by famous Italian masters such as Raphael, Titian, Giorgione, Antonello da Messina, Caravaggio, and many others. The interest of the art historian Charles Hope at this time lay precisely in the cataloguing of this imperial gallery.

The compilation of the first catalogue was entrusted to Anton Joseph von Prenner¹⁸⁴, an Austrian painter and engraver: the original plan, agreed with the imperial family, was to produce no fewer than thirty volumes that together would embody the essence of the collection. However, the original project was never completed: von Prenner published *Theatrum Artis Pictoriae*¹⁸⁵ in four volumes between 1728 and 1733, and a fifth volume entitled *Prodromus*¹⁸⁶ in 1735, which was intended to serve as an introduction to the subsequent volumes, that were never realised.

¹⁸³ Catalogue *Connoisseurship and the arts*, Ursus Rare Books Ltd., New York, 1997.

¹⁸⁴ Anton Joseph von Prenner, in *Google Arts & Culture*.

Available at: < <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/anton-joseph-von-prenner/g12314d7w?hl=it> >.

¹⁸⁵ A.J. von Prenner, *Theatrum Artis Pictoriae (quo tabulae depictae quae in Caesarea Vindobonensi Pinacotheca servantur leviores caelatura aeri insculptae exhibentur)*, 4 vols., Vienna, 1728-1733.

¹⁸⁶ A.J. von Prenner, F. van Stampart, *Prodromus*, Vienna, 1735.

What Hope regarded as peculiar and remarkable was that, while Pierre Crozat had published his sumptuous and rich *Recueil* at about the same period, von Prenner's catalogue included no written text, neither descriptive nor inventory-like along the lines of the German model: these volumes contained only printed engravings reproducing the paintings in the collection¹⁸⁷. For each work, von Prenner added the name of the author and the dimensions of the original painting, but nothing else: no description of the subjects depicted, no biographical information on the artists, no art historical notes. It is not surprising that this text was never mentioned by Schlosser in his *La Letteratura Artistica*: although the engravings were of good quality, the catalogue was not particularly memorable, nor was the gallery arrangement which did not seem to follow any criteria.

In 1776, Maria Theresa of Austria and her son, Emperor Joseph II, decided to move the Habsburg Imperial Picture Gallery to Upper Belvedere Palace, one of two baroque palaces built in the early 18th century as a summer residence for the ruling family. The two palaces, Upper and Lower Belvedere, now house the *Österreichische Galerie Belvedere*, one of Austria's most renowned museums.

Emperor Joseph entrusted Christian von Mechel with the task of organising, cataloguing and exhibiting his huge and important collection. Mechel, who was an engraver, publisher and art dealer by profession, was faced with a historic enterprise: it was Joseph II's intention to transform the Habsburg private collection into a public exhibition that would show the beauty of art to the general public - both educated and uneducated -, an act that was revolutionary in itself, since art had always been considered the exclusive domain of the upper classes, and even more so since it was an emperor who was expressing this wish. The greatest difficulty in Mechel's task was therefore to make art accessible from a new perspective, thus devising an arrangement and a catalogue that would explain art to the people¹⁸⁸. The Habsburg gallery became one of the first public museums in the world.

¹⁸⁷ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 147.

¹⁸⁸ N. Prottas, *Where Does the History of Museum Education Begin?*, «Journal of Museum Education», Vol. 44, No. 4, 5 (2019), pp. 337–341.

The arrangement of the collection was completed in 1781: using an almost scientific method of organising works of art, according to Hope the display was innovative because it was both chronological and art historical, in that the artists were organised by national and then more specifically stylistic regional schools, a model that was now widely employed in art catalogues but had never been applied to the physical display of artworks. It should also be noted that, when comparing this gallery with the coeval Potsdam and Dresden galleries discussed above, the rooms in the Upper Belvedere were smaller and thus more suited to Mechel's division by school¹⁸⁹.

The first catalogue of the Belvedere painting gallery, published in German in 1783¹⁹⁰ and in French in 1784, was a literary production that Hope described as «unusual»¹⁹¹ for the time: the focus of the catalogue was primarily art historical, providing much detail on the history of the collection, attributions and the originality of the paintings on display, emphasising their immeasurable artistic value.

The structure of the catalogue followed the layout of the gallery and the division into geographical schools. All the paintings were numbered, suggesting that this catalogue was designed to be used and consulted by visitors, and Mechel introduced the new practice of placing a star next to the most important paintings, establishing in this way a hierarchical scale of importance among the artworks exhibited.

The emphasis of the catalogue and the arrangement was thus on the new educational role of the painting gallery and of art, making this first public gallery the model for many modern museums¹⁹².

¹⁸⁹ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 154.

¹⁹⁰ C. von Mechel, *Verzeichniß der Gemälde der Kaiserlich Königlichen Bilder Gallerie in Wien* (Eng. Transl. List of paintings in the Imperial Royal Picture Gallery in Vienna), Wien, 1783. See Fig. 37.

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹² Y. Michael, *Kunsthistorisches Museum/ Belvedere, Vienna. Dynasticism and the Function of Art*, in *The First Modern Museums of Art. The Birth of an Institution in 18th and 19th Century Europe*, edited by C. Paul, Los Angeles, 2012, pp. 167-190.

2.3.4 Italy: the first catalogues to public museums in Rome and Florence

While the history of Italian art literature could claim very ancient origins¹⁹³, in the 18th century Italy did not yet have museums or galleries of a modern kind comparable to those in Germany and Austria. As already discussed by Hope, it must also be taken into account that the Italian art public was still more fascinated by the collections of ancient art and sculpture, which had been growing in popularity since the 16th century¹⁹⁴.

The first public art museum was the Museo Capitolino in Rome, opened in 1734, to which a picture gallery was added in 1751. It was originally designed for the students and artists of the Accademia di San Luca¹⁹⁵ and not for the general public.

In Rome, too, it was only at the end of the 18th century that the first modern catalogues of two art collections appeared: a first *Catalogo de' quadri e pitture esistenti nel palazzo dell'eccellentissima Casa Colonna in Roma*¹⁹⁶, published in 1783, and later the *Descrizione ragionata della Galleria Doria*¹⁹⁷ in 1794. A critical analysis of these two literary works reveals that they were based on inventories, hence very concise and not very argumentative, and that neither of them included any description of an artistic-historical nature. This indicates that, although artistic literature had been born and developed in Italy in the previous centuries, by the end of the 18th century this progress had slowed down and Italian production was no longer comparable in terms of richness and accuracy to what had already been published in other European states, such as

¹⁹³ Schlosser, Kurz, *La letteratura artistica*, cit., p. 541.

¹⁹⁴ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 152.

¹⁹⁵ The *Accademia Nazionale di San Luca* is an association of artists in Rome, founded in 1593 by Federico Zuccari.

¹⁹⁶ Anonymous, *Catalogo de' quadri e pitture esistenti nel palazzo dell'eccellentissima Casa Colonna in Roma (Coll'indicazione dei loro Autori, diviso in sei parti, Secondo i rispettivi Appartamenti)*, Rome, Arcangelo Casaletti editor, 1783.

¹⁹⁷ S. Tonci, *Descrizione ragionata della Galleria Doria (preceduta da un breve saggio di pittura, dedicata a Sua Altezza la Principessa di Radzivil, Castellana di Vilna)*, Rome, Luigi Perego Salvioni editor, 1794.

France, Germany and Austria, which were increasingly approaching today's concept of art history¹⁹⁸.

Moving the focus from Rome to Florence, the *Gallerie degli Uffizi* opened as a public museum for the first time in 1769, at the behest of Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo, who encouraged a radical transformation of the galleries. The focus was on early Renaissance paintings, a period in which art had not yet reached its peak and was largely neglected, but which were nevertheless included and highlighted here because they contributed to the creation of a truly historical-artistic visit. Although in the previous century Giulio Mancini had recommended¹⁹⁹ that works from different historical periods should be exhibited together, and that works from the same historical period should be hung side by side, with works by different artists, the first Uffizi arrangement seemed to have no intention of categorising Italian painting according to schools, nor of separating it from that of the Nordic countries, as was customary in Germany. In Italy, the first public art museums reflected an unsystematic and non-purely artistic approach to the arrangement of works of art.

The reorganisation of the Gallerie was entrusted to abbot Luigi Lanzi and completed in 1780-1782. In 1780, the Uffizi was enriched with a Cabinet of Antique Paintings, which initially contained only drawings by Florentine artists from the 14th and 15th centuries.

In 1782, after the rearrangement of the galleries, Lanzi published a catalogue entitled *La Real Galleria di Firenze accresciuta e riordinata*²⁰⁰, in which he described the new and more modern display of paintings, emphasising how he had structured the exhibition to enhance its historical-artistic aspect. The catalogue was discursive and covered the galleries and the drawings cabinet room by room, describing their contents in a critical and contextualised manner.

Francesco Zacchiroli, a poet and essayist, also produced a catalogue of the Gallerie degli Uffizi in Florence, this time written in French, published in 1783 under the title

¹⁹⁸ A.M. Clark, *The Development of the Collections and Museums of 18th Century Rome*, «Art Journal», Vol. 26, No. 2, 8 (1966-1967), pp. 136-143.

¹⁹⁹ G. Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, 1619-1628 (published later in two volumes in 1956-1957).

²⁰⁰ L.A. Lanzi, *La Real Galleria di Firenze accresciuta e riordinata (per comando di S.A.R. l'Arciduca Granduca di Toscana)*, Florence, 1782. See Fig. 38.

*Description de la Galerie royale de Florence*²⁰¹: not only did it contain a printed plan of the galleries, which in this case had become an integral part of the catalogue, but Zacchioli's focus in the text was precisely the history of the galleries, the history of the Renaissance revival of painting, and the history of art in Italy.

The developments in art literature in Europe between the 17th and 18th centuries were immense, but the greatest achievement was achieved through the combined use of displays, labels and the contextualisation of paintings in the emerging galleries and museums: the late 18th-century public could finally admire and read the true history of art.

²⁰¹ F. Zacchioli, *Description de la galerie royale de Florence*, Florence, 1783.

CHAPTER 3

The educational role of modern museums and catalogues

The development and growth of public interest in art and painting, and the simultaneous development of art literature, are evident at this point. As has been witnessed and critically analysed in this research, following the rigorous methodology of Charles Hope and the elaboration of his study on the subject, the presence of artists in literature, especially Italian literature, has been recorded since the 14th century. This research has also shown how the emergence of a proper art literature has gone from pamphlets to pocket guides, to guidebooks, all the way to collection catalogues in the 18th century. The process of growth was long and arduous, due to a number of factors: first and foremost, the difficulty of obtaining information in the Renaissance period - before printing and printed copies of paintings - and the cultural and knowledge barrier between the general public and art history, which somehow slowed down and restrained the public's interest in approaching art, at the time considered to be the exclusive preserve of the social elite.

By the end of the 18th century, the first public museums with an institutional role had been founded, as well as the first galleries open to the public in the broadest sense, without any particular distinction of social class or level of education. This new and expanded availability of works of art was accompanied by the catalogues of the collections and museums themselves which, although not always produced primarily for the public, were nevertheless extremely useful and increasingly accurate tools. The catalogue became a fundamental medium, surpassing guidebooks and pamphlets in content, precision and in the expertise required to compose it, which automatically made it more reliable.

Even in the light of the new use of the display as an exhibition and communication tool, it is clear that curators and catalogue authors were attempting to organise the content - and the artworks themselves - in an art historical manner in order to properly

communicate them to the public. However, this practice was not yet uniformly applied in museums and galleries and, above all, not with the necessary quasi-scientific rigour. This tendency changed, especially at the turn of the 19th century, with the systematic organisation of paintings in their display and with the increasingly frequent choice of a national or chronological arrangement.

The very fact that catalogues were supplemented by a reasoned display, and that many collections were rearranged for this purpose during the 18th and 19th centuries, is indicative of a new interest in art, this time not simply for the artworks themselves²⁰², but for the creation and dissemination of a history of art to be communicated to the public and made especially for the public: a history of art to be taught through the new educational museums and modern catalogues.

The public thus became an integral part of the art world, along with artists, amateurs, art historians and art dealers who were already part of it.

3.1 Art historical arrangement of paintings

The 19th century was a century of change in the art world. From an analysis of Hope's research, it can be seen that the developments were manifold and multifaceted, but all tended to improve and advance the history of art²⁰³. Beginning with a new way of displaying paintings, which went hand in hand with a new taste and interest in different kinds of art, the change also involved the way in which works of art were read and interpreted; the questioning of centuries-old attributions of certain works by re-examining them and investigating their provenance; the desire on the part of curators and art historians to carry out art historical research and to display paintings in a historically coherent and chronological manner. All this with the primary aim of making art history accessible to the expert and non-expert public, in an educational and thoughtful way.

²⁰² Intended as «art for art's sake». Cfr. footnote 129.

²⁰³ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., pp. 156-159.

With regard to display, it was noted that in the 18th century the most common tendency was to display pictures from different schools of painting together, often out of chronological order. There were therefore no rules about the most appropriate way to arrange them. This persisted until the end of the century, when in some galleries - the case of Von Mechel in Vienna was analysed in the previous chapter²⁰⁴ - some curators began a tentative reorganisation of the exhibition, first separating Italian painters from those of northern Europe (the distinction between Italian artists and Flemish ones was often drawn), and sometimes even organising them into schools of painting, similar to what is done in museums today.

The real question of the most appropriate form of display arose at the time of the French Revolution, at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, when a large number of looted works of art arrived in France and had to be organised for display in French, and especially Parisian, collections and museums. What made France central to this discourse was that it was here that the best criteria for exhibiting works were first discussed, taking into account not only aesthetic but also political, cultural and historical factors. Museums, as they emerged in France, were innovative because they were public institutions with both conservative and educational purposes for the people²⁰⁵. In the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, however, Hope testifies that the display was still based on an aesthetic arrangement and not yet on a critical historical one: although the debate had begun, the visually pleasing display still prevailed²⁰⁶.

There was also a change in the choice of artworks that were considered appropriate and more interesting to exhibit, which contributed as well to a change in the display methodology: there was in fact a new interest in the so-called primitive artists - a phenomenon analysed in detail by the art historian Ernst Gombrich in his publication entitled *The Preference for the Primitive*²⁰⁷ - that is, Italian artists who lived and

²⁰⁴ Concerning Von Mechel in Vienna, see section 2.3.3 *Austria: a new arrangement for the Habsburg imperial collection* of this dissertation.

²⁰⁵ A. McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre. Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth Century Paris*, Berkeley-LA University of California Press, 1994, pp. 1-2.

²⁰⁶ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 156.

²⁰⁷ E.H. Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive. Episodes in the History of Western Taste and Art*, London, Phaidon Press, 2002.

worked between the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, also according to Vasari's categorisation²⁰⁸. Although an interest does not necessarily mean a preference, the Primitives, which had been neglected and considered of lesser value in previous centuries, were revalued at this time. It was mainly the living artists themselves who emphasised the historical artistic value of the Primitives as predecessors of great Renaissance masters such as Raphael and Michelangelo, but they also stressed their educational value, as Primitives' paintings were easier to copy in order to improve and develop more refined artistic abilities²⁰⁹. This new interest was much criticised and debated because it openly challenged «the monopoly of taste cherished by connoisseurs»²¹⁰ and art historians, who had established the superiority of the long-celebrated Old Masters. It must be stressed, however, that this interest initially remained at a purely theoretical level, firstly because the presence of the Primitives in museums was exclusively confined to France and England (not happening, for example, in Italy²¹¹), but above all because the selection choice of paintings to be exhibited remained conventional even at the beginning of the 19th century²¹², with a broad predilection for the Old Masters, already universally appreciated.

The fact that paintings of the Primitives were exhibited in Paris alongside the conventional works of the Old Masters was thanks to Dominique Vivant-Denon. Writer, engraver and art historian, Denon was responsible for much of the Napoleonic looting of works of art from all over Europe, which were then displayed in French museums at the beginning of the 19th century. It was Denon himself, as director of the Musée Napoleon - which later became the Musée du Louvre Napoleon - who recovered the paintings of the Primitives in Italy and exhibited them in the museum²¹³; indeed, Gombrich also reported the presence of the Primitives in the Musée Napoleon as from 1811, the year in which Denon went to Italy with this very intention²¹⁴.

²⁰⁸ For a definition of the Primitives in Giorgio Vasari, cfr. footnote 70.

²⁰⁹ Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive*, cit., pp. 96-97.

²¹⁰ Ibidem.

²¹¹ F. Haskell, *Rediscoveries in art: some aspects of taste, fashion, and collecting in England and France*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1976, p. 24.

²¹² Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 156.

²¹³ Ibidem.

²¹⁴ Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive*, cit., p. 105.

The presence of Primitives in museum collections obviously had repercussions on the display. At first, only these works were exhibited in chronological order, unlike the other paintings that were mainly arranged according to the artist's country of origin or to artistic schools. This difference was probably due to the perceived inferiority of Primitive works compared to later artworks. However, once their value was fully recognised and their presence in museums was accepted and considered appropriate, the chronological order combined with the division according to artistic schools became the main exhibition criteria and gradually became the standard²¹⁵.

As far as art literature is concerned, a modern catalogue of looted works of art from different regions of Italy was never produced, but several inventories were drawn up, listing most of the paintings or at least the most important ones²¹⁶. This was done mainly to assist curators in organising the paintings once they were exhibited in museums, as these inventories were then used to plan exhibitions. However, a critical look at these inventories (e.g. *Notice des principaux tableaux recueillis dans la Lombardie*²¹⁷) reveals that the intention of the historians and curators had shifted towards a more rigorous analysis, of the pseudo-scientific type mentioned earlier: in these inventories, the authors did not simply list the title and the name of the artist, but made a genuine stylistic and technical analysis of each work. The «Maîtres italiens» - as both Primitives and Old Masters were named - were listed in alphabetical order and each was given a number to facilitate classification. This was followed by a few biographical details, such as birth, death and studies, and then the artist's paintings were presented, also in chronological order when possible, with a brief description. And if the structure of the inventories was not new up to this point, what appeared for the first time in a particularly detailed manner were data on the provenance of each painting: where it was located in Italy, for whom it was originally made, how much it was paid for, and all the information derived from proper historical research²¹⁸. This

²¹⁵ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 156.

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

²¹⁷ *Notice des principaux tableaux recueillis dans la Lombardie (par les commissaires du gouvernement français: dont l'exposition provisoire aura lieu dans le grand Salon du musée)*, Paris, Imprimerie des Sciences et Arts, 1797. See Fig. 39.

²¹⁸ *Ivi*, pp. VI-VII-VIII.

unusual interest in provenance actually highlights the fact that the intention of the French scholars and curators was precisely to reconstruct the history of these paintings and then translate it into the exhibition, making it accessible to the public, an undoubtedly worthy and fundamental step towards the critical arrangement of works in museums.

It is also noteworthy that these inventories, especially the introductory section entitled *Avertissement*²¹⁹, invited the public to make an informed judgement on the basis of all the knowledge contained in the inventories and by observing the works, also by comparing them with others from the same school of painting or depicting the same subject, which was also made possible by the large number of pictures exhibited together. The public was therefore the first recipient of all this research.

In order for the display of the new museums and collections to be considered art historical, it was also imperative for the curators to re-examine the attributions of the paintings they contained. The institutional role of the museum required complete professionalism and precision in what was displayed as a medium for teaching and disseminating historical and artistic knowledge. In particular, the addition of Primitive paintings, for which there were not yet sufficient studies to confirm the attribution of a painting to an artist (rather than to a painter in his bottega, to make a problematic example) made it necessary to question the attributions hitherto taken for granted, as well as the dating of the works themselves, and to carry out methodical and rigorous historical research through written sources and earlier texts. No such research had been carried out in the previous century because most of the art was exhibited in royal collections where, as Hope reported, attributions were not questioned²²⁰.

In the first half of the 19th century, curators increasingly focused on art historical research, and a historical organisation of exhibitions and catalogues could not include dating errors or dubious attributions. The art world began to invest time and research into creating a history of art that could be communicated to the public and transmitted to posterity.

²¹⁹ *Notice des principaux tableaux recueillis en Italie (par les Commissaires du Gouvernement Français)*, Paris, Imprimerie des Sciences et Arts, 1797, pp. V-VIII. See Fig. 40.

²²⁰ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 156-157.

3.2 Educational catalogues for expert and non-expert public

To conclude this study on the intrinsic link between artistic literature and the public, and thus to talk about the first modern catalogues, organised in an art-historical manner and with an educational and formative role for the public, it is necessary to examine the figures of certain curators and art historians who contributed to the creation of today's art literature. First and foremost, Frédéric Villot.

Frédéric Villot was a French printmaker, engraver and art historian who was appointed *conservateur des peintures* (director and curator of paintings²²¹) for the Louvre Museum in Paris²²², a position he held from 1848 to 1861. Inaugurated in 1793 as the *Muséum central des arts de la République*, the Louvre contained many works of great historical value. The project that Villot undertook as soon as he was appointed director was exceptional. He almost completely reorganised the arrangement of the collection, considering it advisable - if not essential - to arrange the paintings according to very precise historical criteria: works by the same artist had to be hung together, and displayed with all those from the same artistic school; he emphasised and applied the chronological criterion as a primary basis, believing it to be fundamental in order to highlight the historical development of painting and for the public to learn from it²²³. Only a year after his assignment, in 1849, Villot published the catalogue *Notice des tableaux exposés dans les galeries du Musée National du Louvre. Ire partie: Écoles d'Italie*²²⁴, dedicated to the works of the Italian school of painting in the Louvre collection. This was the first catalogue to be produced with the intention of creating a rigorous and up to date history of art, in line with the approach adopted by Villot when exhibiting the collection. The catalogue was organised by artist, alphabetically by surname, and for each artist the works produced were listed and given a number to

²²¹ In the past, the director of the Louvre was known as *Conservateur*, whereas nowadays he is referred to as *Président directeur général*.

²²² Villot Frédéric, in *The Dictionary of Art Historians*: < <https://arthistorians.info/villotf> >.

²²³ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 157-158.

²²⁴ F. Villot, *Notice des tableaux exposés dans les galeries du Musée National du Louvre. Ire partie: Écoles d'Italie*, Paris, Charles de Mourgues Frères Imprimeurs de Musées Nationaux, 1849. See Fig. 41.

make them easier to identify and find in the museum. For each painter, then, Villot provided detailed biographical information, dates of birth and death, the studies undertaken, the workshop and the master with whom the artist had trained, as well as the artistic school to which he belonged. Each painting was then described in detail, both iconographically and technically: there were inventory details such as size, support and technique, but also the collection or place from which the work came, i.e. the provenance. The richness of detail in this catalogue was impressive: it was a true *raisonné* and critical catalogue, compiled with precision, verifying written and documentary sources, questioning attributions, correcting and searching for errors in previous art literature through current research.

In the mid-19th century, there was another catalogue with the same attention and concern for art historical development as Villot's, and that was the catalogue of the National Gallery of London's collection of paintings²²⁵, compiled by Ralph Nicholson Wornum in 1847. Wornum was a painter and art historian, and he held, like Villot, administrative positions within the museum: he was Chief Curator of the National Gallery, and during his tenure he undertook to update, correct and republish the Gallery's existing catalogue²²⁶. Wornum believed that it was essential to know the artists and to be able to place them in their correct art historical context to develop critical thinking and a personal opinion on the artworks²²⁷. Without this level of knowledge, artistic judgement would remain on a personal level and not historically consistent.

In designing the new catalogue, Wornum followed the ideal of producing an educational and informative catalogue that was as accurate and precise as possible, and he achieved the exact correspondence between the information contained in the catalogue and the display of the paintings in the gallery. He included at the beginning of the catalogue an *Index to the names of the Masters of the Pictures in the National*

²²⁵ R.N. Wornum, *Descriptive and historical catalogue of the pictures in the National Gallery; with biographical notices of the painters*, revised by C. Eastlake, London, printed by Clowes and Sons, 1847. See Fig. 42.

²²⁶ Wornum, *Ralph Nicholson*, in *The Dictionary of Art Historians*:
<<https://arthistorians.info/wornum/>>

²²⁷ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 158.

*Gallery*²²⁸, arranged according to the number of pictures, and immediately afterwards a *Tabular View of the Schools of Painting as represented by the Pictures in the National Gallery*²²⁹: fundamental and extremely valuable tools for a full understanding of the works of art.

However, Charles Hope, in his essay, points out that there is a significant difference between Villot's catalogue and Wornum's, which needs to be emphasised here as well: whereas Wornum's catalogue was openly addressed to the general public and thus to non-experts in the field of art, Villot's catalogue seemed to be addressed more to the expert public, thus to curators, art historians and museum directors²³⁰. Villot created it with the intention of producing a model catalogue that experts could study and follow in their art historical research. Quoting Hope:

«Villot, it would appear, was the first curator who recognised that catalogues could assist the researches of those working in other museums [...]»²³¹

In this sense, Villot was aware that his catalogue was a theoretical ideal and a guide to research, and he hoped that other art historians would examine and revise it in subsequent editions, following his instructions to renew and update artistic literature in the light of modern research.

Indeed, in 1850, only a year after the publication of Villot's catalogue, the first extensive critical work re-evaluating Villot's *Notice* appeared: *Essai d'une analyse critique de la notice des tableaux italiens du Musée National du Louvre, accompagné d'observations et de documents relatifs à ces mêmes tableaux*²³², written by Otto Mündler. He was a German-born art dealer who, through his close contact with artists and art historians of his time, earned a reputation as celebrated connoisseur for his scientific and technical expertise in the field²³³. The figure of Mündler and his writing

²²⁸ Wornum, *Descriptive and historical catalogue of the pictures in the National Gallery*, cit., pp. 8-9-10.

²²⁹ Ivi, pp. 12-16.

²³⁰ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., p. 158.

²³¹ Ibidem.

²³² O. Mündler, *Essai d'une analyse critique de la notice des tableaux italiens du Musée National du Louvre, accompagné d'observations et de documents relatifs à ces mêmes tableaux*, Paris, Librairie de Firmin Didot Frères, Imprimeurs de l'Institut, 1850. See Fig. 43.

²³³ Mündler, Otto, in *Dictionary of Art Historians*: < <https://arthistorians.info/mundlero/> >

are crucial at this point in the discourse: he was the first to revise Villot's catalogue according to his dictates, examining every detail of the catalogue, checking the accuracy of the dates, descriptions, provenance and sometimes purely arbitrary attributions²³⁴. At the beginning of his *Essai*, Mündler wrote an extensive introductory *Préface*²³⁵ in which he explained his purely art-historical and critical intentions in writing this work. The corrections he made on the basis of documents, written sources, inscriptions and signatures on the works - in accordance with the method of the modern connoisseur - had a twofold function. Firstly, to highlight the shortcomings of Villot's work, which Mündler openly questioned and sometimes severely criticised, with the primary aim of classifying and exhibiting the works while making the most of them. And secondly, to follow the natural course of art historical research by updating the literature and information on the works of art in the Louvre, in order to obtain an educational and useful exhibition and catalogue for the public, understanding the importance and urgency of creating a narrative of the historical development of art.

After Villot, Wornum and Mündler, the need to place paintings in their correct historical, artistic and social context became more and more established, and although this organisational criterion spread more or less slowly, both in catalogues and in museum exhibits, it formed the basis of today's museum display, with a strong educational and informative value openly addressed to the public.

²³⁴ Hope, *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, cit., pp. 158-159.

²³⁵ Mündler, *Préface in Essai d'une analyse critique de la notice des tableaux italiens du Musée National du Louvre*, cit., pp. 1-13.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research study is to show, through a critical literary analysis of written sources in the fields of art history and museology, how the growth of interest in art and painting on the part of the non-expert public occurred, particularly in the historical period between the 15th and 19th centuries.

The study of this phenomenon carried out by the art historian Charles Hope in his essay *Guidebooks, museum catalogues and the growth of public interest in painting in Italy, Germany and France*, and examined in detail in this dissertation, revealed the intrinsic link between art and art literature and, above all, highlighted how the public's interest in art and painting was strongly linked to the nature and means of disseminating art historical knowledge.

Hope's research is admirable not only for its rigorous methodology in analysing the required documentary and literary sources, but also for the originality and innovation of the very subject of the essay, which focuses not so much on art history in the academic sense of the term, but rather on how art history itself came to be widely communicated to the public.

The three levels of artistic knowledge discussed in the first chapter of the dissertation are particularly illustrative of the starting and ending points of this inquiry²³⁶.

Before the emergence of museums, galleries and art literature, the general public's knowledge of art and painting was extremely limited, precisely because there were no means of disseminating these notions. Knowing the names of artists and their styles, and being able to place them in the correct art historical context, was impossible for the non-expert public of the art world, as demonstrated here by the analysis of pre-Vasarian sources which sometimes only mentioned the names of artists without going into any further depth. This same study has shown that the circulation of information in the field of art has always been linked to literature as a means of disseminating information, and that, especially in the 14th and 15th centuries, the barriers of illiteracy and the scarcity of written knowledge did not encourage the public to develop an

²³⁶ Cfr. *Chapter 1* of this dissertation, pp. 17-19.

interest in art, which is why the growth of public interest was a slow and uneven process.

Thanks to the pivotal figure of Giorgio Vasari, who defined the model of the artist's biography that was followed and developed by later art historians, art history and art literature began to develop, leading to the publication of the first guidebooks, treatises and pamphlets on art in Italy, the first written sources produced for a public that provided information, albeit limited, on both works of art and topographical aspects. With the increase in the number of guidebooks, public interest in art and the demand for this type of writing emerged for the first time, confirming that the growth of public interest always went hand in hand with the publication of art literature.

In the 17th century, interest in art and painting was no longer confined to Italy, but spread throughout Europe, giving rise to the first art tourism by the public. And it was outside Italy, in France and Germany in particular as has been previously discussed, that the first catalogues of European art galleries were published, exhibiting the collections of noble and royal families: this was an extremely important step, which has been the subject of detailed study in this thesis, because it represented the first systematisation of paintings - albeit not according to art historical criteria - in venues with an overtly expositional intent, with the aim of presenting magnificent works of art to the public.

Then, it was showed how the content, structure and style of catalogues evolved over time, both in terms of the audiences for which they were produced - the case of luxury productions being an example - and also in relation to the changing artistic tastes of the public and of art historians themselves.

Furthermore, it is worth reflecting on the role that the display has played in the dissemination of art history to the public, especially the non-expert public, given the centrality of this particular aspect in the concluding stage of this dissertation. The arrangement of the paintings was, and still is, the quintessential tool for guiding the public in their visit to an art museum. Complementing the catalogue, which is the written guide to art and an invaluable source of specific information, the art-historical, chronological and critical display allowed - and still allows today - the general public to grasp and understand paintings, artists, and art history in its entirety.

The subject of this dissertation proved to be stimulating from numerous points of view, due to its intrinsic interdisciplinarity. In the course of this research, numerous facets of the art and museological field have been touched upon: elements of the history of collecting, the history of art literature, the study of art historical research methodology by early historians, aspects of museology related to the first picture galleries and museums, the changing artistic tastes of the public and art historians, and a thousand other aspects of the artistic field.

It is acknowledged that the research carried out for this thesis cannot be completely exhaustive, considering how many other factors can be addressed and further explored. The complexity of the relationship between the public and art literature allows for countless other interesting, stimulating, and innovative connections.

Lastly, it is appropriate to dwell on the value of the careful analysis of documentary sources that proved necessary to produce as comprehensive a study as possible: the critical reading of Renaissance manuscripts, first editions in the original language and works of great artistic and historical value has made it possible to produce a unified, careful and sufficiently comprehensive work that could serve as a guide for in-depth studies and future developments on the educational role of artistic literature.

APPENDIX OF ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1:

Frontispiece of Foresti, Jacobus Philippus, *Supplementum Supplementi de le Chroniche Vulgare*, Venice, 1520.

nella Arismetrica che e labaco & anchora in Astrologia per tutto el mondo per homo precia rissimo fu nominato: & compose certe opere in quelle faculta mirabile: i modo tale che cõ certi instrumenti da lui ordinati al presente si ha piena noticia de tutte le misure de li cieli.

¶ Zoto Fiorentino nella pictura celeberrimo & singulare: non solo in questi tempi ma p molti anni inanzi: per laqual cosa essendo per tutto el mondo famoso fu chiamato da Benedetto in questa eta papa che andasse ad Vignone per dipingerli le historie de martiri: & fu conducto con grandissimo pretio: doue infermandosi poi che hebe principiato mori & lasso tal opera totalmente imperfecta.

¶ Papa. 106.

Clemente papa. 106.

Clemente sexto nato in Lione: gia monacho: el cui proprio nome fu Pietro: sendo Arcieuescouo de Rothano in Franzia fu electo papa questo anno dopo la morte de Benedetto. xi. & tenne el pontificato dexe anni. 6. mesi & 8. di. Costui fu liberale humano elo quente & docto: nel primo anno del pontificato creò. x. Cardinali: fra liquali fu uno monacho del ordine gia suo: & uno suo nepote nato de la propria sorella: & riduxe l'anno del lubileo ordi nato da Bonifacio octauo ogni ceto anni al numero de cinquãta anni: considerando che pochi o nessuno uenerebbe a quel numero de cento anni: & questo prefato numero de cinquãta anni e el proprio & uero lubileo secondo che si legge nella sacra scriptura. Dapoi uededo tutta la Italia in arme & discordia p la priuatiõ de lo Imperatore Lodouico facta da Clemente quinto & da Benedetto. xi. confirmo gli Vicarii de la chiesa in Milano come haueua anchora facta el suo predecessore Benedetto: Luchino & Ioanne suo fratello Arcieuescouo. Essendo uenuto Lodouico prefato gia inanzia Trento per intrare in Italia: haueua lassato anchora lui in molte citta de la chiesa suoi Vicarii che le tenesseno in nome del imperio: come pienamente fu di

1343

6142

Figure 2:

Foresti, Jacobus Philippus, *Supplementum Supplementi de le Chroniche Vulgare*, Venice, 1520, p. 258^v. Mention of Giotto as « Zoto Fiorentino ».

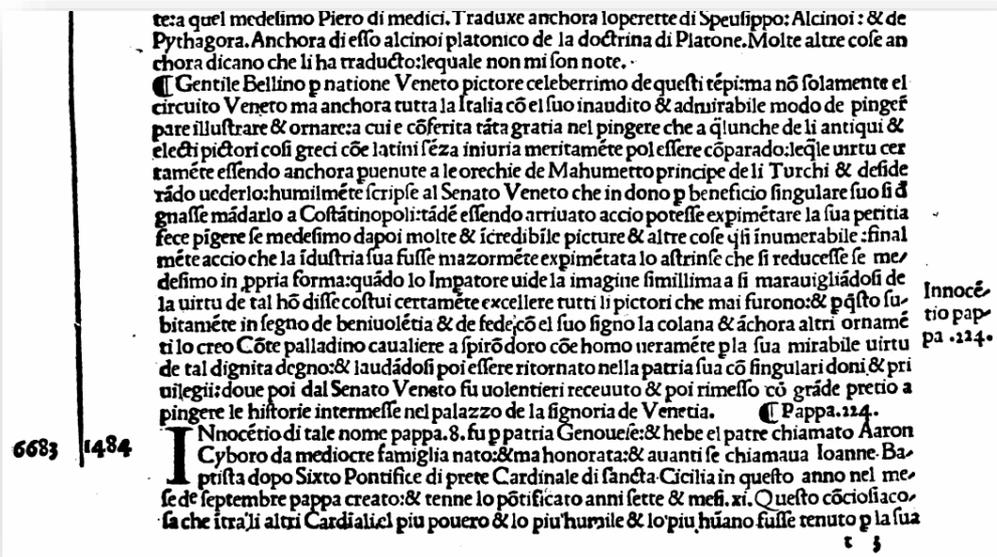


Figure 3:

Foresti, Jacobus Philippus, *Supplementum Supplementi de le Chroniche Vulgare*, Venice, 1520, p. 329^r. Mention of « Gentile Bellino ».

MEMORIALE
DI
MOLTE STATUE E PITTURE

DELLA CITTÀ DI FIRENZE

FATTO

DA FRANCESCO ALBERTINI PRETE

A BACCIO DA MONTELUPO SCULTORE

E STAMPATO DA ANTONIO TUBINI NEL 1510

RIPUBBLICATO

PER RICORDO DELLE NOZZE

DEL CAV. PROF. LUIGI MUSSINI

CON LA SIGNORA LUISA PIAGGIO

NELL'APRILE DEL 1863

IN FIRENZE

COI TORCHI DI M. CELLINI E C.

ALLA GALILEIANA

1863

Figure 4:

Frontispiece of Albertini, Francesco, *Memoriale di Molte Statue et Picture sono nella Inclita Cipta di Florentia*, republished in 1863 in Florence.

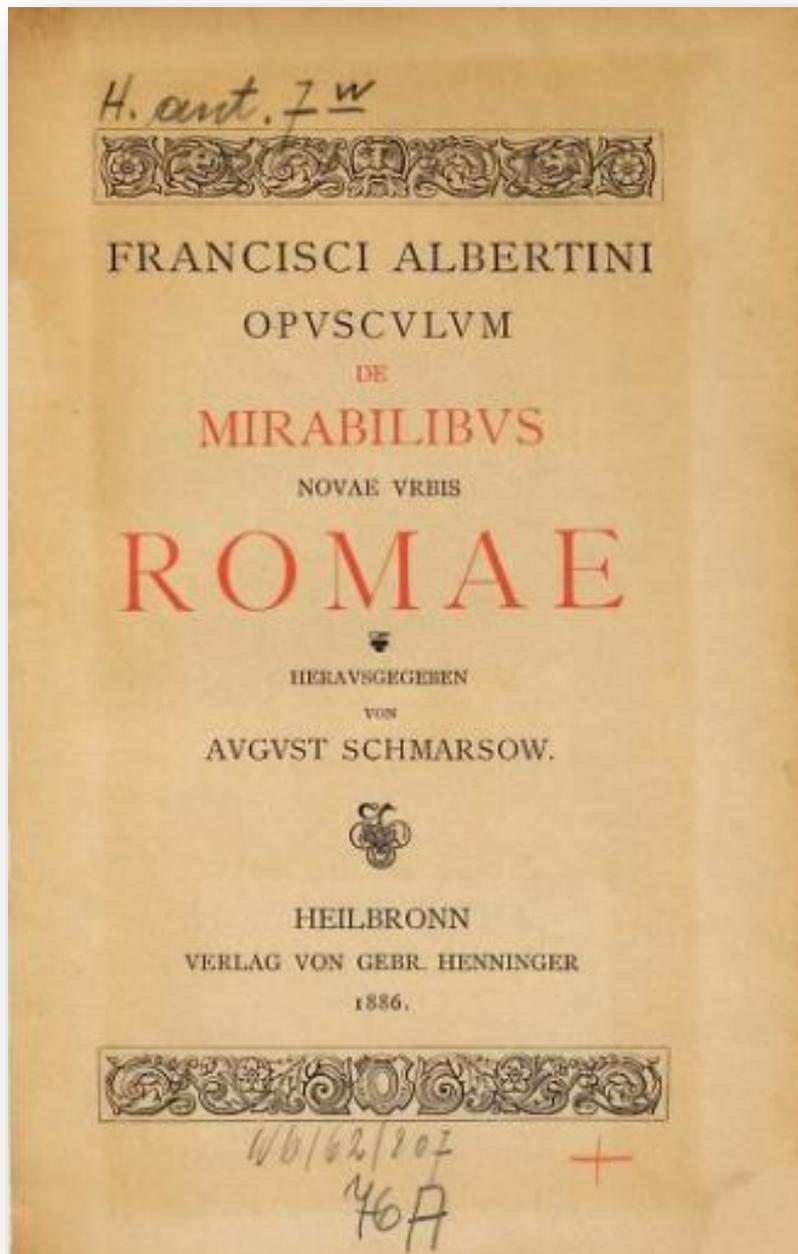


Figure 5:

Frontispiece of Albertini, Francesco, *Opusculum de Mirabilibus Novae & Veteris Urbis Romae*, republished in Heilbronn, Germany, in 1886.

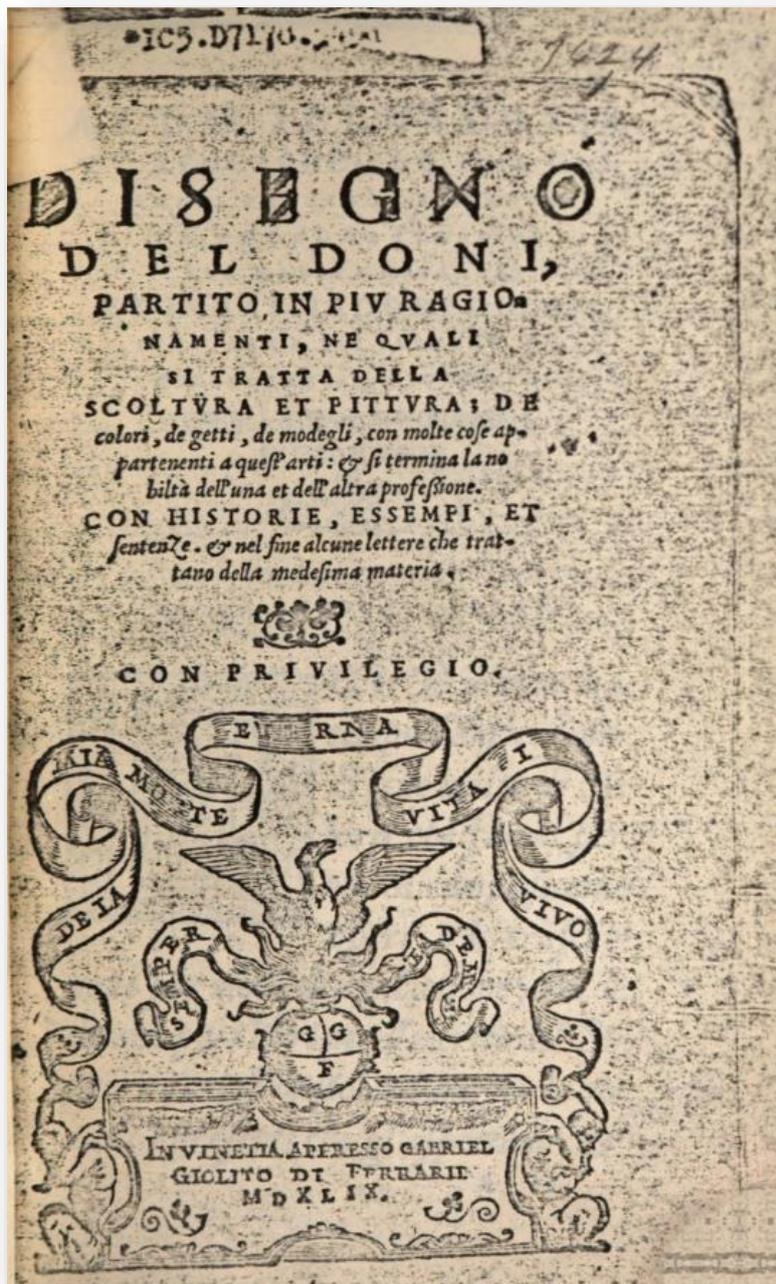
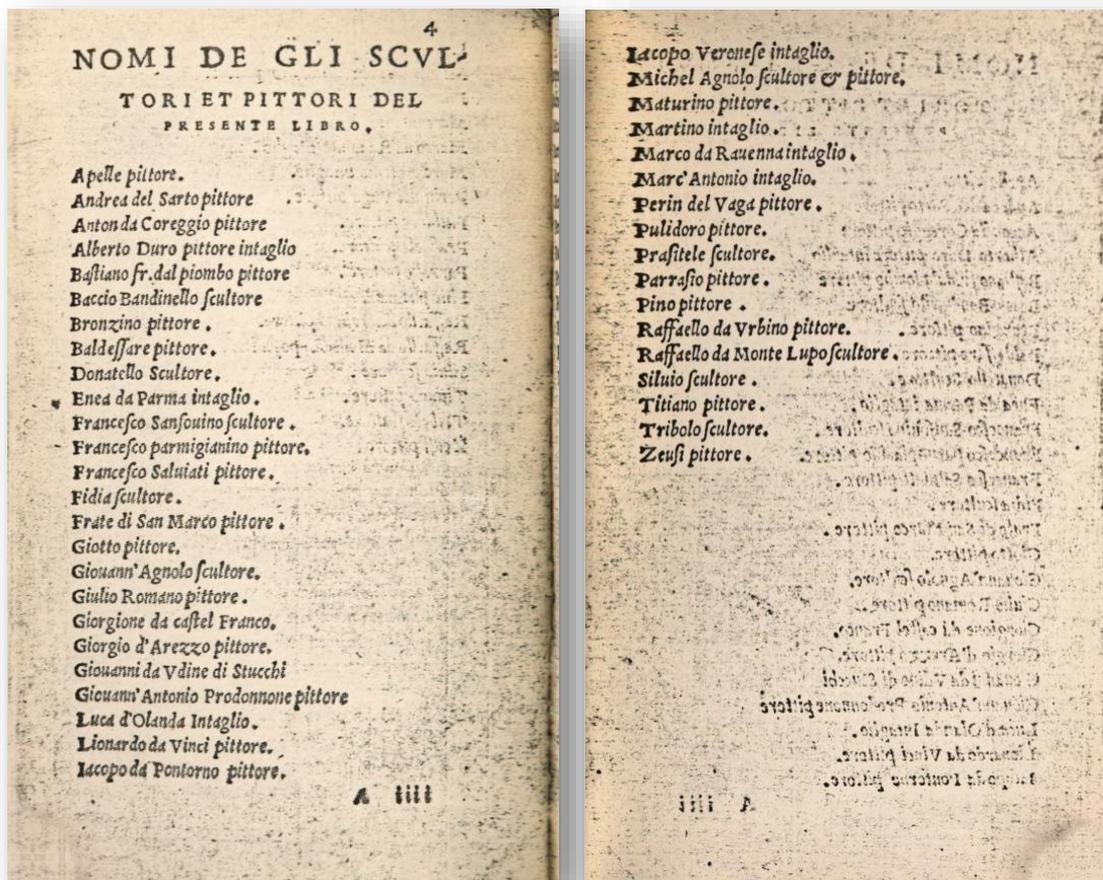


Figure 6:

Frontispiece of Doni, Anton Francesco, *Disegno (del Doni, partito in piv ragionamenti, ne qvali si tratta della scoltvra et pittvra; de colori, de getti, de modegli, con molte cose appartenenti a quest' arti: si termina la nobiltà dell'una et dell'altra professione. Con historie, essempi, et sentenze. Nel fine alcune lettere che trattano della medesima materia)*, published by Gabriel Giolito di Ferrari, Venice, 1549.



Figures 7-8:

Two-page index *Nomi de gli scultori et pittori del presente libro* in Doni, Anton Francesco, *Disegno*, published by Gabriel Giolito di Ferrari, Venice, 1549, pp. 4 *recto* and *verso*.

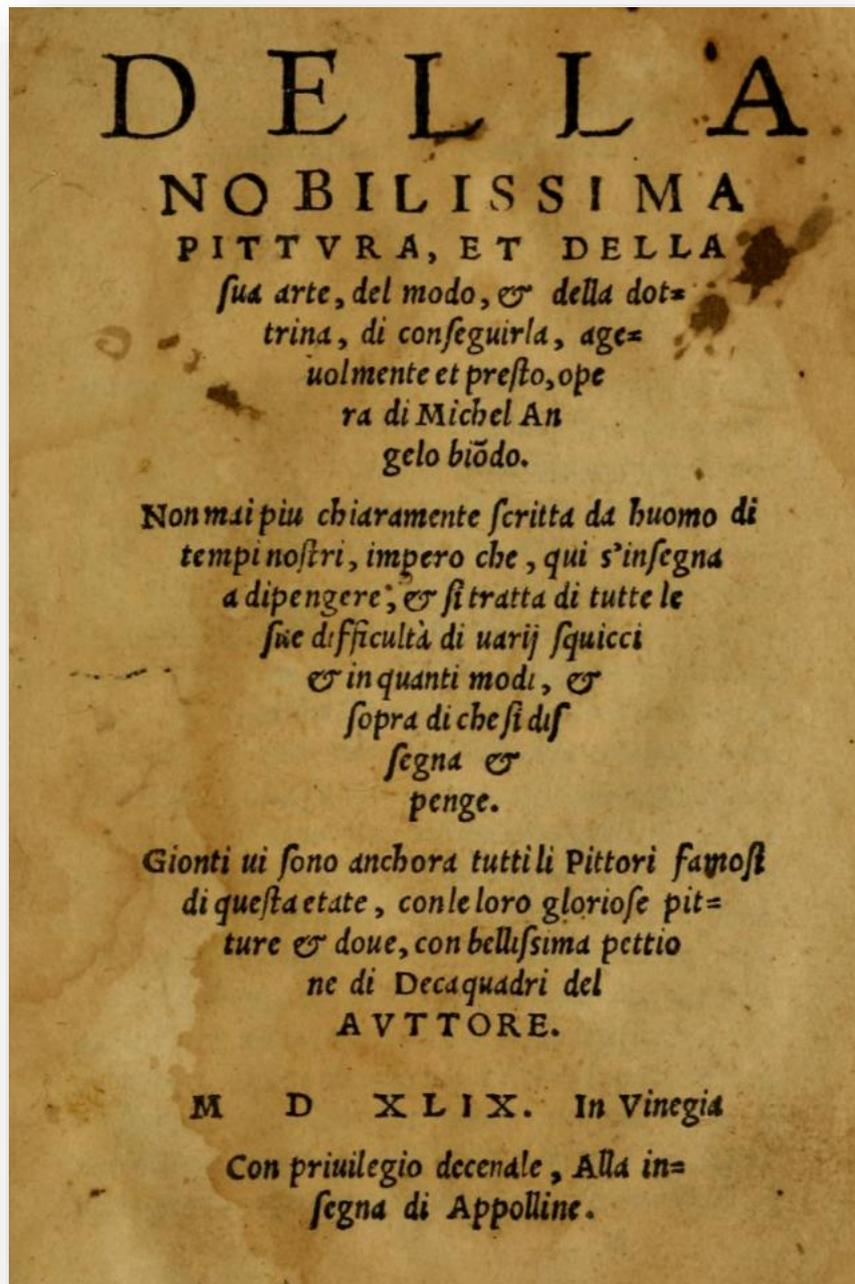


Figure 9:

Frontispiece of Biondo, Michelangelo, *Della Nobilissima Pittura (et della sua arte, del modo; della dottrina, di conseguirla, agevolmente et presto, opera di Michel Angelo Biondo)*, Venice, 1549.

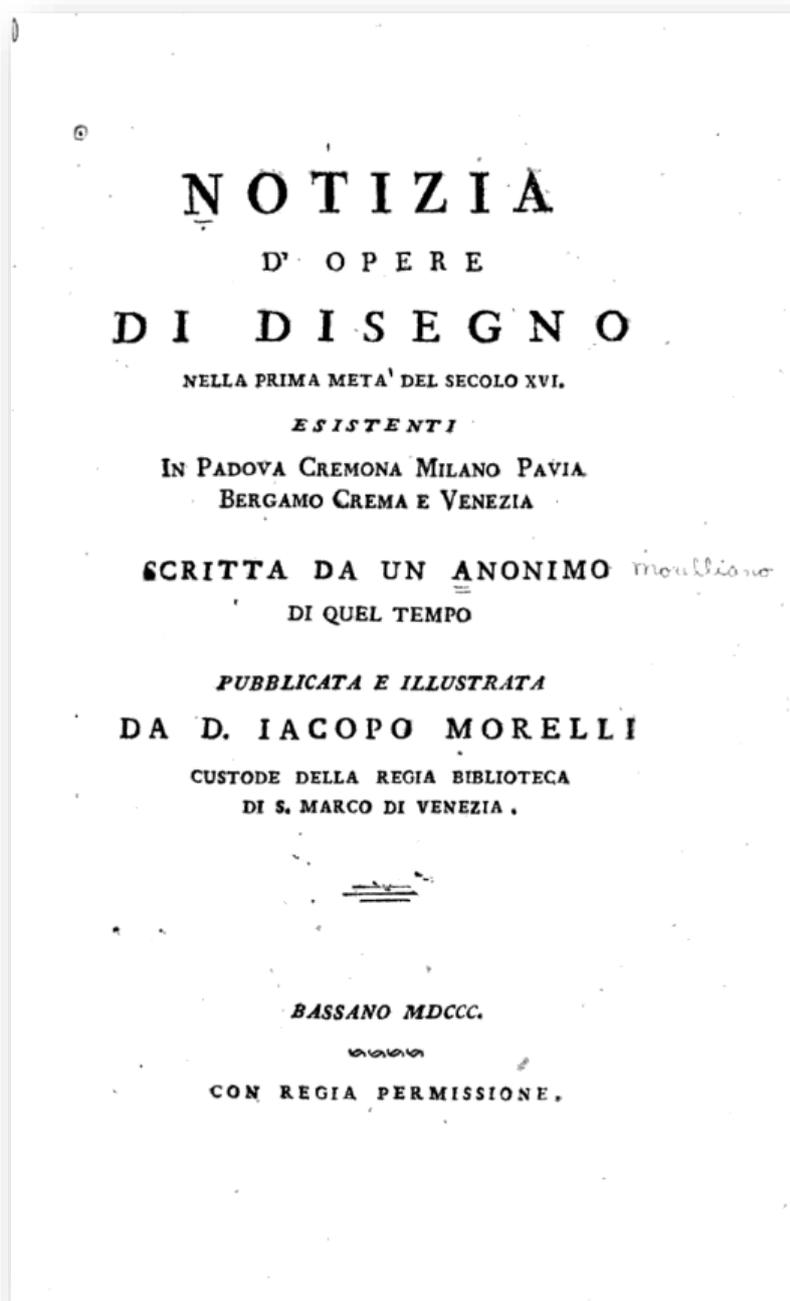


Figure 10:

Frontispiece of Michiel, Marcantonio (edited and published by Iacopo Morelli), *Notizia d'opere di disegno (nella prima metà del secolo XVI. Esistenti in Padova, Cremona, Milano, Pavia, Bergamo, Crema e Venezia. Scritta da un Anonimo in quel tempo. Pubblicata e illustrata da D. Iacopo Morelli)*, Bassano del Grappa, Remondini editor, 1800.

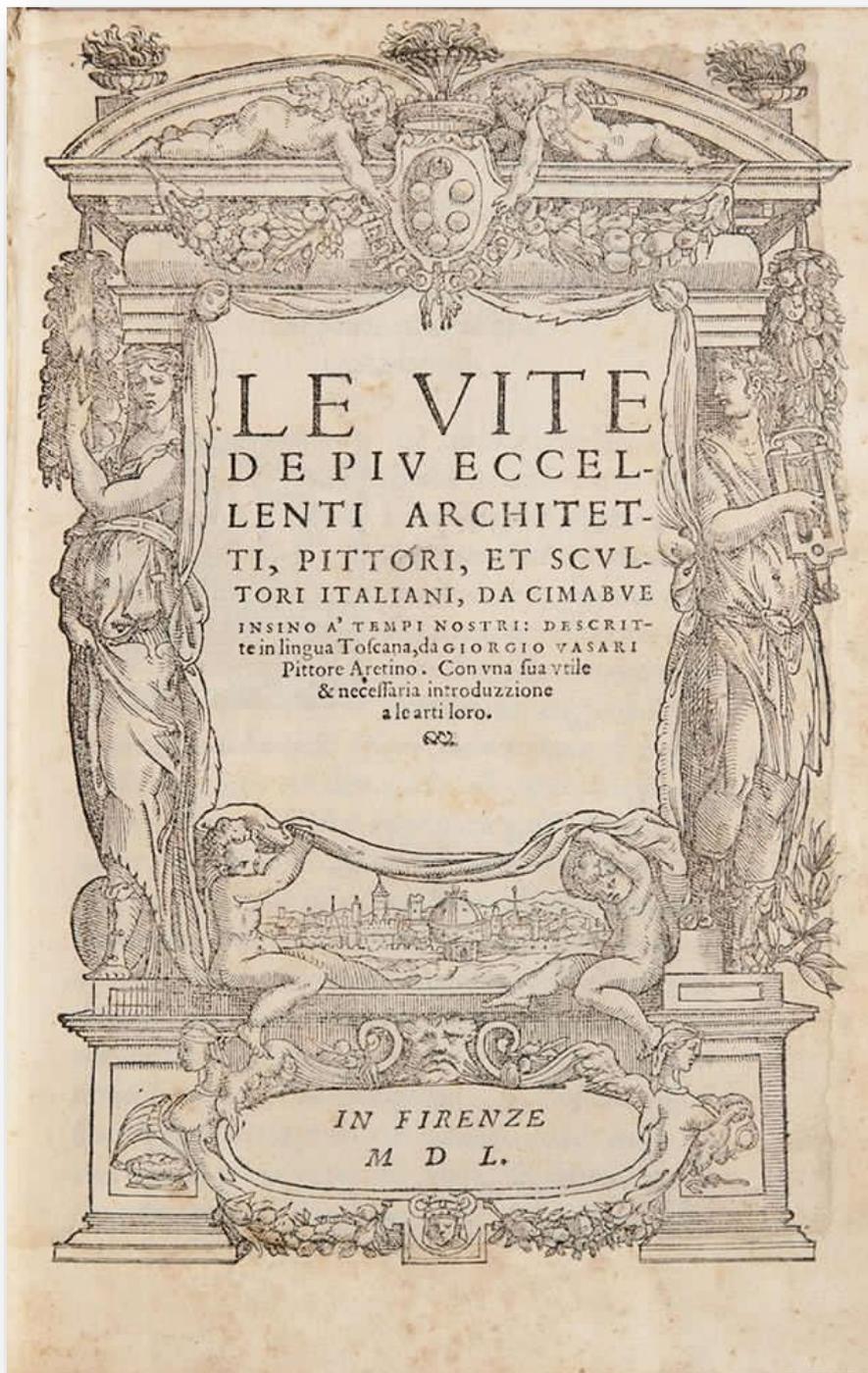


Figure 11:

Frontispiece of the first edition of Vasari, Giorgio, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori (da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri: descritte in lingua Toscana da Giorgio Vasari pittore Aretino, con una sua utile et necessaria introduzione alle arti loro)*, Firenze, Torrentino Editore, 1550.

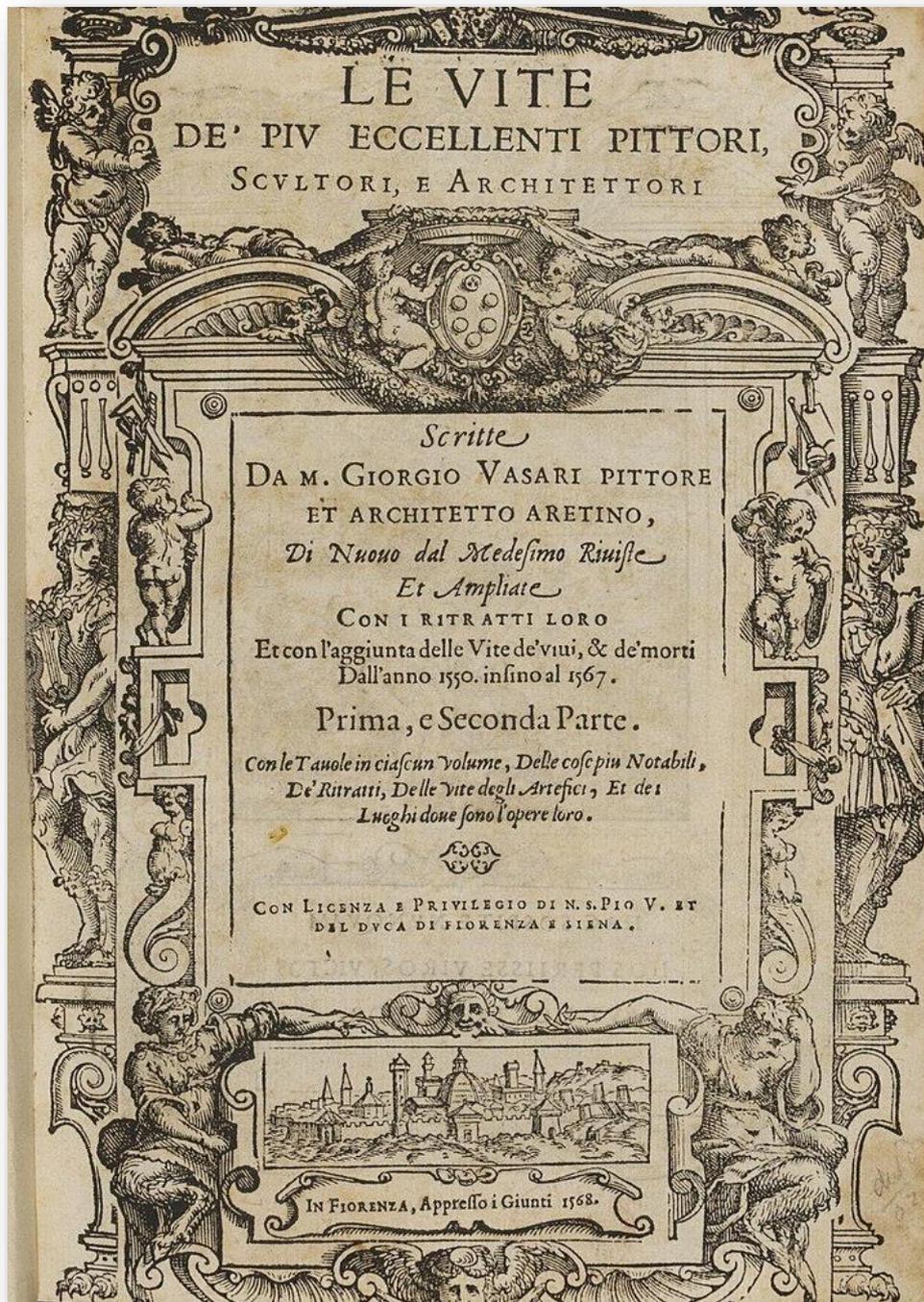


Figure 12:

Frontispiece of the second edition of Vasari, Giorgio, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, Firenze, Giunti Editore, 1568.

I L
MICROCOSMO
D E L L A
P I T T U R A,

Ouero Trattato diuiso in due Libri.

Nel primo spettante alla Theorica si discorre delle grandezze d'essa Pittura, delle parti principali, de' veri primi, e più degni Maestri, e delle tre maggiori Scuole de' moderni, dandosi parimente a conoscere con autoreuoli ragioni varie mancanze de gli Scrittori della Professione.

Nel secondo, che in ordine al primo dimostra la pratica, s'additano l'opere diuerse più famose, ed eccellenti, le quali hora viuono alla vista de' virtuosi, come ornamento particolare dell' Italia.

DI FRANCESCO SCANNELLI DA FORLI'.

ALL'ALTEZZA SERENISSIMA DI
FRANCESCO I. D'ESTE
DVCA DI MODANA.

Don Carlo Bonini Capost. Abbate d. S. Crispin



In **CESENA**, Peril Neri. M DC LVII:

Con licenza de' Superiori.

Figure 13:

Frontispiece of the first edition of Scannelli, Francesco, *Il Microcosmo della Pittura (Ovvero Trattato diuiso in due Libri. Nel primo spettante alla Theorica si discorre delle grandezze d'essa Pittura, delle parti principali, de' veri primi, e più degni Maestri, e delle tre maggiori Scuole de' moderni, dandosi parimenti a conoscere con autoreuoli ragioni varie mancanze degli Scrittori della Professione. Nel Secondo, che in ordine al primo dimostra la pratica, s'additano l'opere diverse più famose, ed eccellenti, le quali hora viuono alla vista de' virtuosi, come ornamento particolare dell'Italia)*,

Cesena, Neri editore, 1657.

TAVOLA
DI QUELLE CITTA;
E LUOGHI DELL'ITALIA
 Doue si ritrouano le Pitture nominate nel Libro.

Prima personalmente riconosciute dall'Autore in buona parte
 massime le più degne de' migliori Maestri, e poicia come
 tali proposte alla virtuosa offeruatione.

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		<i>Fran-</i>

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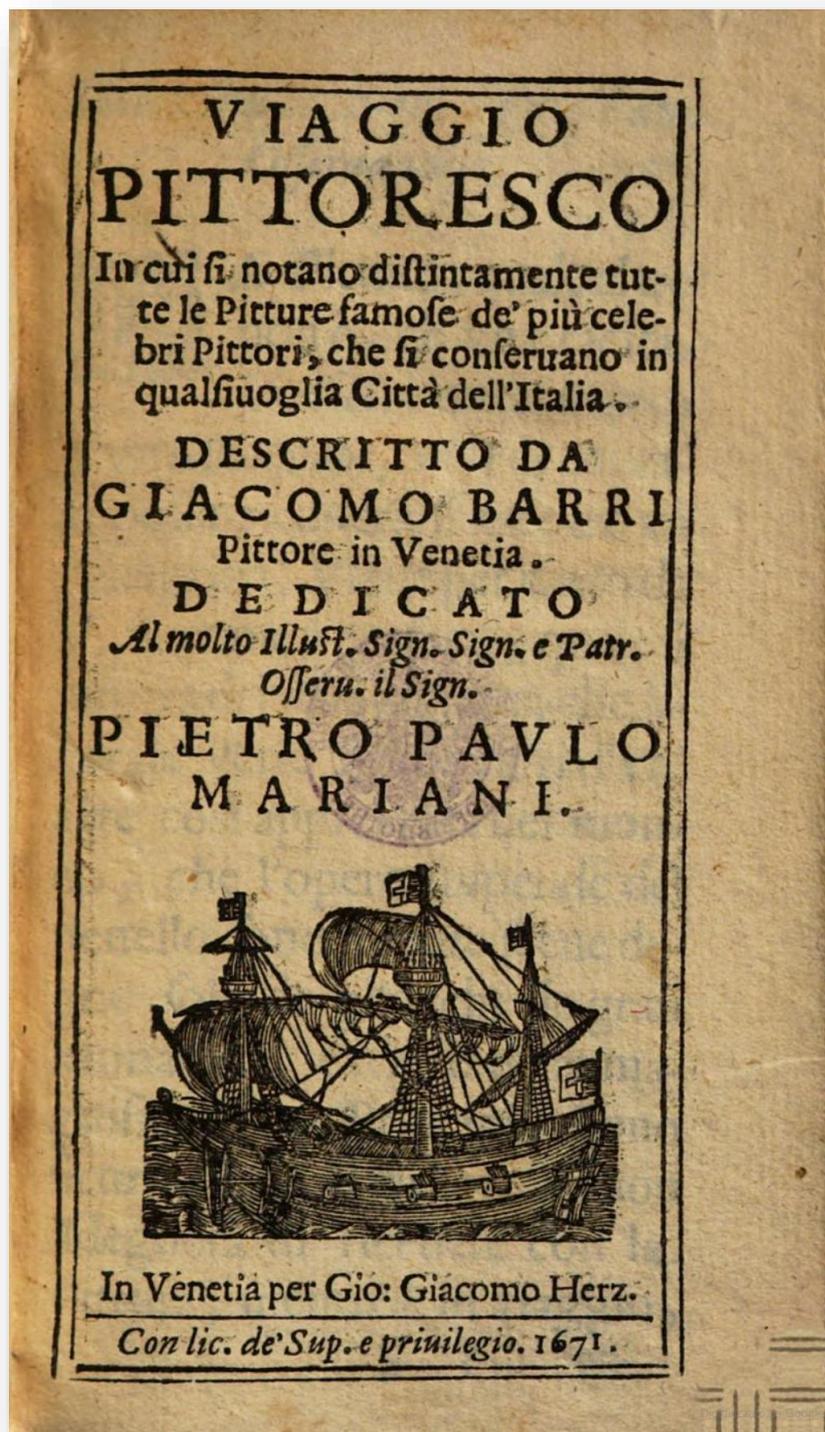


Figure 15:

Frontispiece of the first edition of Barri, Giacomo, *Viaggio Pittoreesco in cui si notano distintamente tutte le pitture famose de' più celebri pittori, che si conservano in qualsivoglia città d'Italia*, Venice, Giacomo Herz editore, Venice, 1671.

LE
BELLEZZE
DELLA CITTA
DI FIORENZA,

*Dove à pieno di Pittura, di Scultura, di sacri
Tempij di Palazzi i più notabili artifizij,
& più preziosi si contengono.*

Scritte da M. Francesco Bocchi.

CON PRIVILEGIO.

*San Tommaso Angeli, Artista
Composto in Firenze il 24 Gen:
Ano 1597 deli. 28 Martij*



IN FIORENZA.
M D X C I.

Figure 16:

Frontispiece of the first edition of Bocchi, Francesco, *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza (dove à pieno di Pittura, di Scultura, di Sacri Tempij, di palazzi i più notabili artifizii & più preziosi si contengono)*, Florence, 1591.

DELLE
COSE NOTABILI
CHE SONO
IN VENETIA

✱
LIBRI DVE

*Ne quali ampiamente, e con ogni ve-
rità, si contengono*

Vfanze antiche.	Principi e vita loro.
Habiti & vestiti.	Tutti i Patriarchi.
Officii e Magistrati.	Mufici di piu forti.
Vittorie illustri.	Fabriche e Palazzi.
Senatori famosi.	Scultori e loro opere.
Huomini letterati.	Pittori & pitture.

*Con la sua tauola da trouar le materie, e le
historie con ogni commodità.*

H. I. V. La Corgoff



IN VENETIA

Per Comin da Trino di Monferrato

M D L X I.

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Frontispiece of the first edition of Sansovino, Francesco, *Delle Cose Notabili che sono in Venetia libri due*, Venice, 1561.

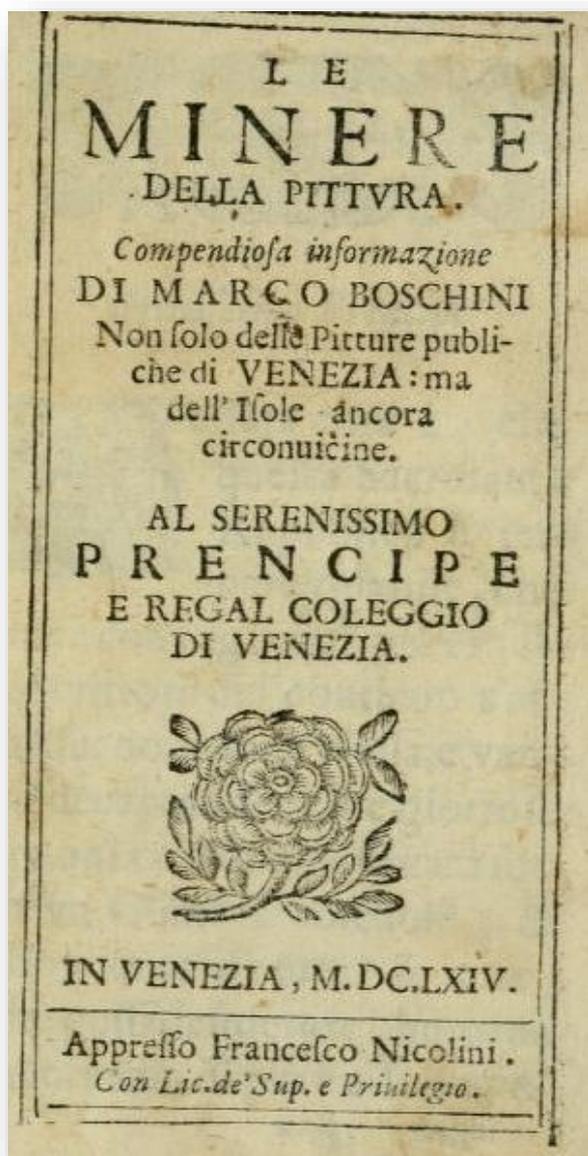


Figure 18:

Frontispiece of the first edition of Boschini, Marco, *Le Minere della Pittura*. (*Compendiosa informazione di Marco Boschini. Non solo delle Pitture pubbliche di Venezia: ma dell' Isole ancor circonvicine*), Venice, Francesco Nicolini editor, 1664.

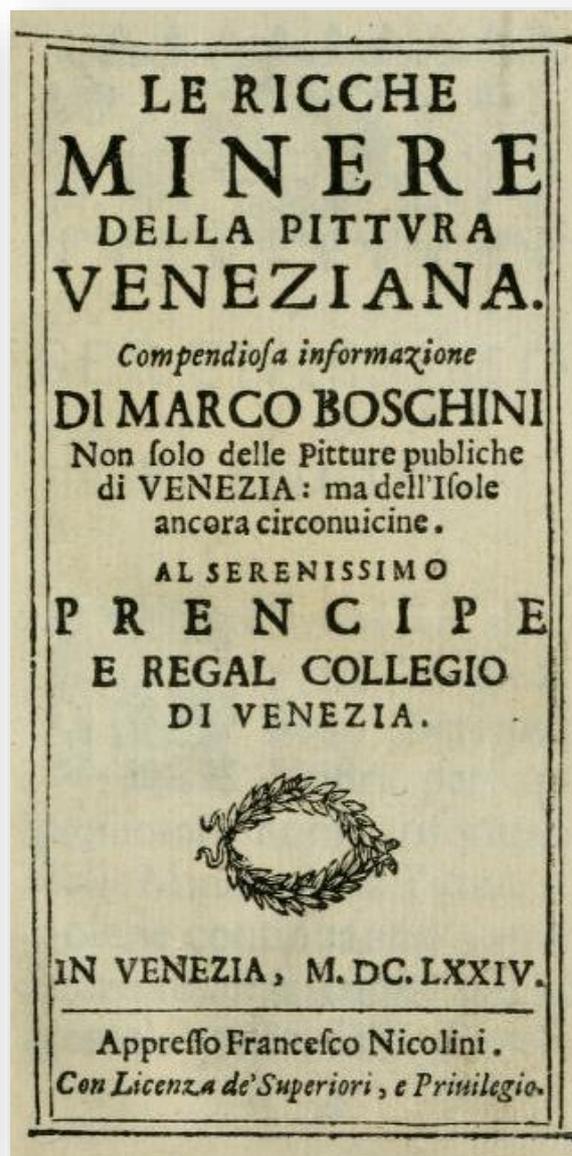


Figure 19:

Frontispiece of the first edition of Marco Boschini, *Le Ricche Miniere della Pittura Veneziana* (*Compendiosa informazione di Marco Boschini. Non solo delle Pitture pubbliche di Venezia: ma dell' Isole ancor circonvicine*), Venice, Francesco Nicolini editor, 1674.

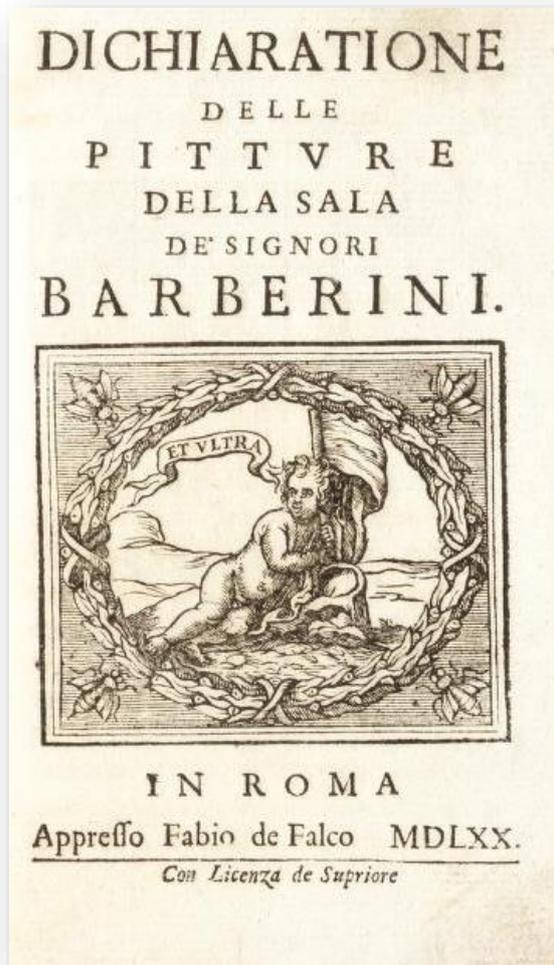


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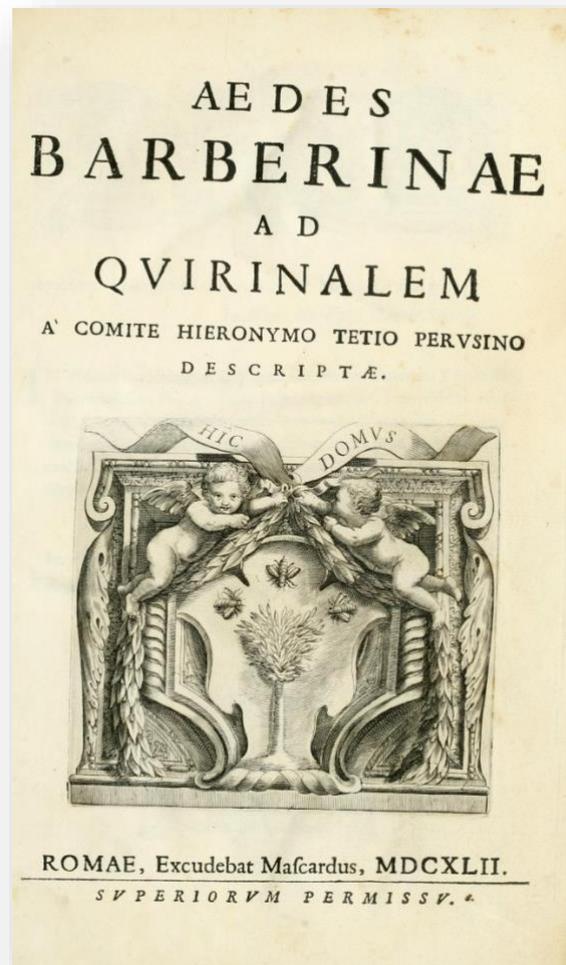


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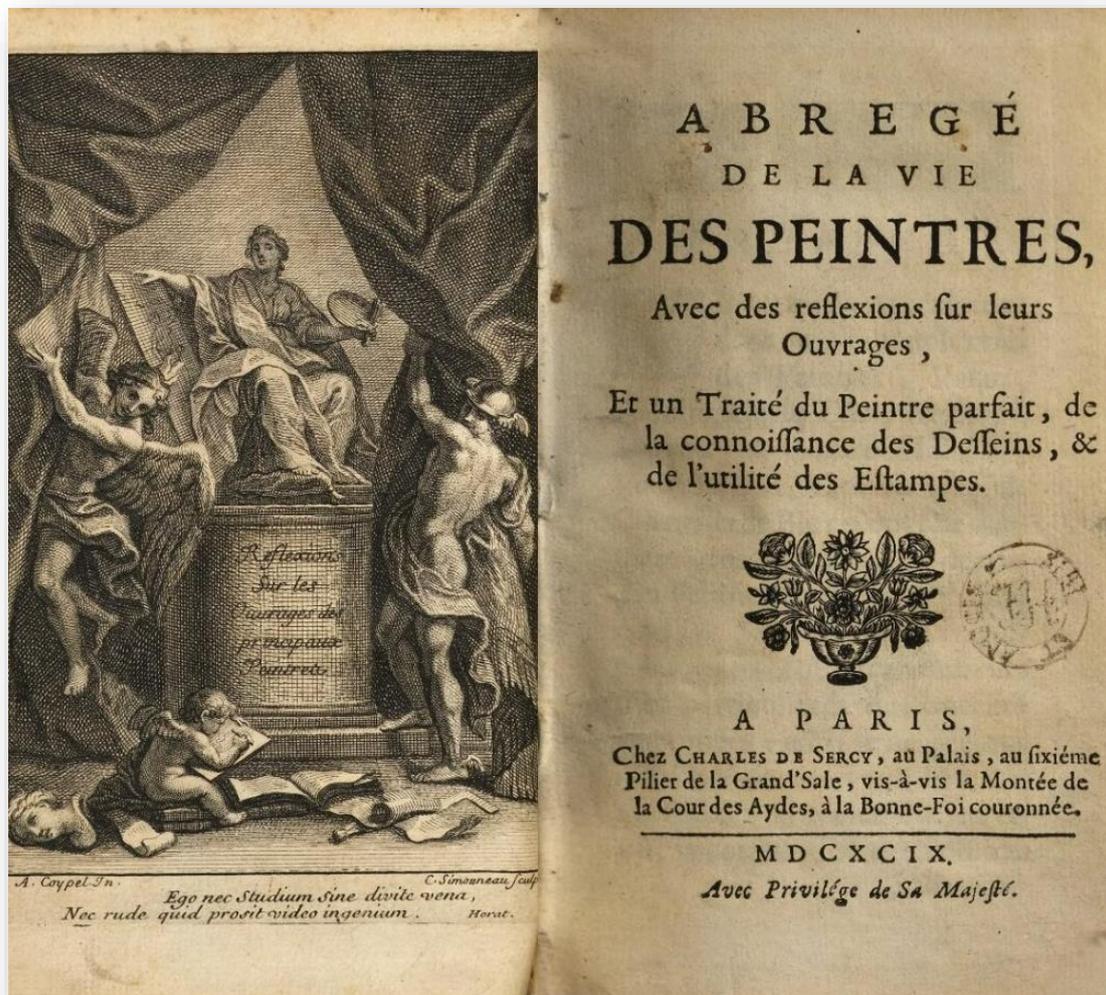


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T A B L E
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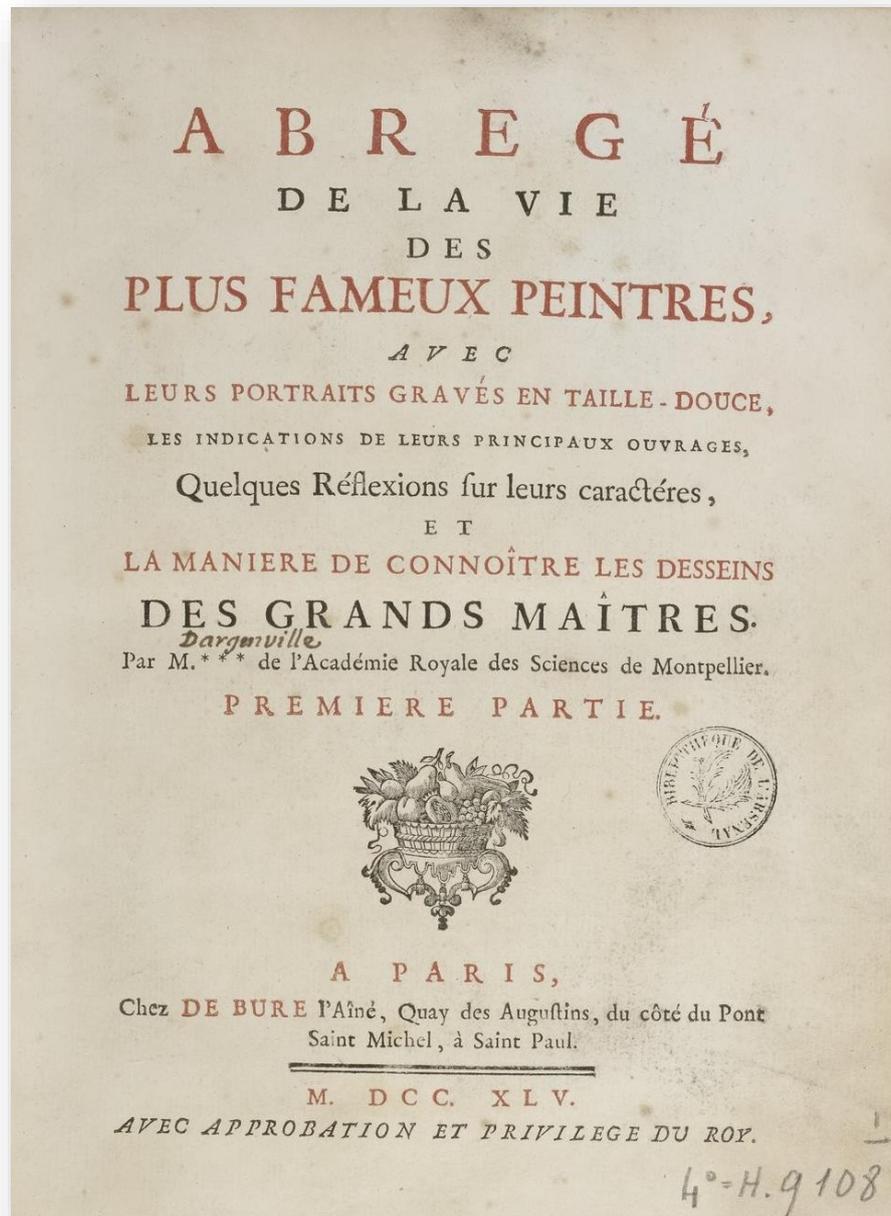


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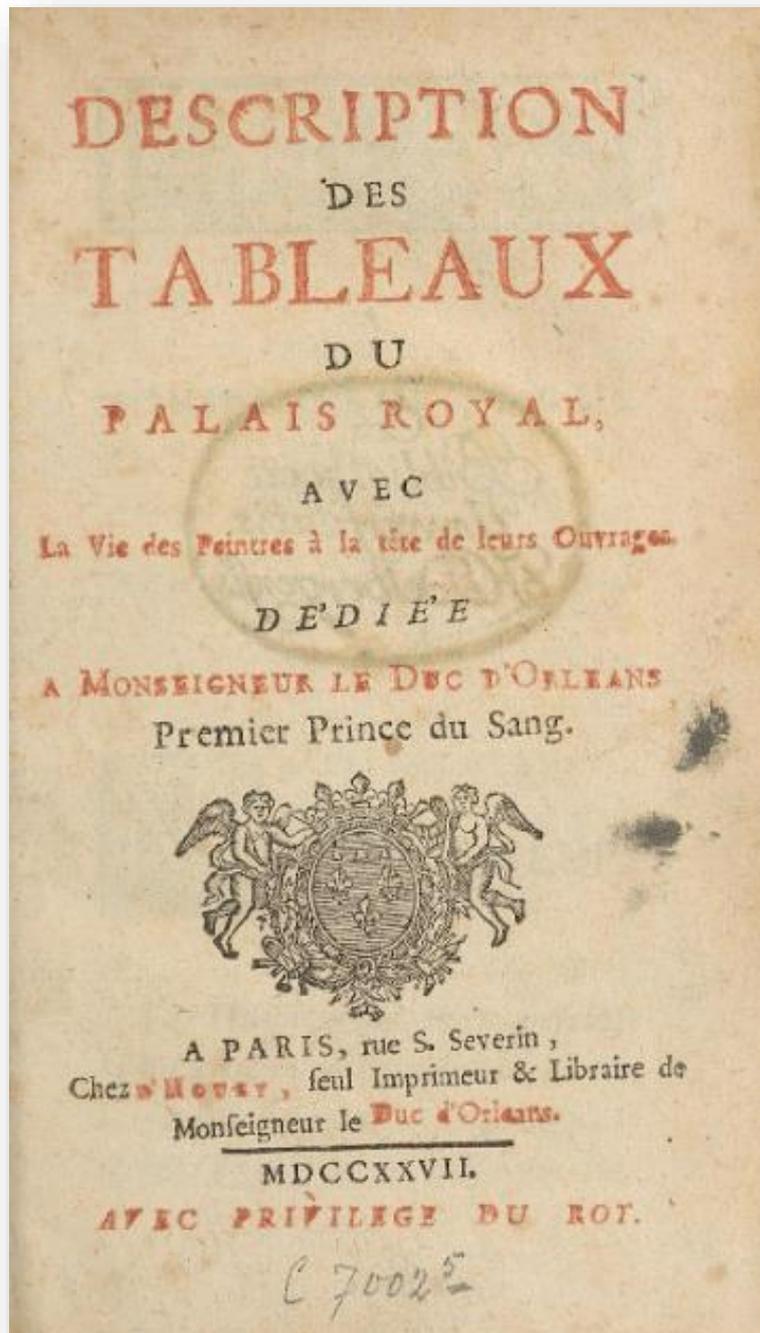
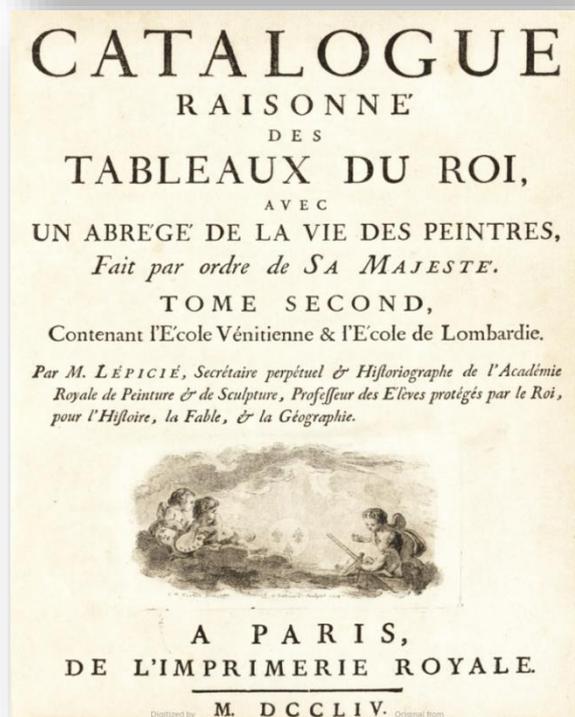
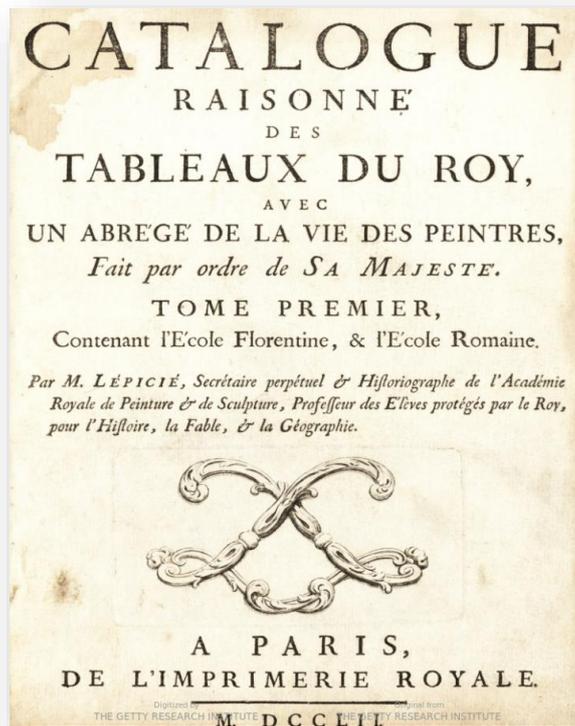


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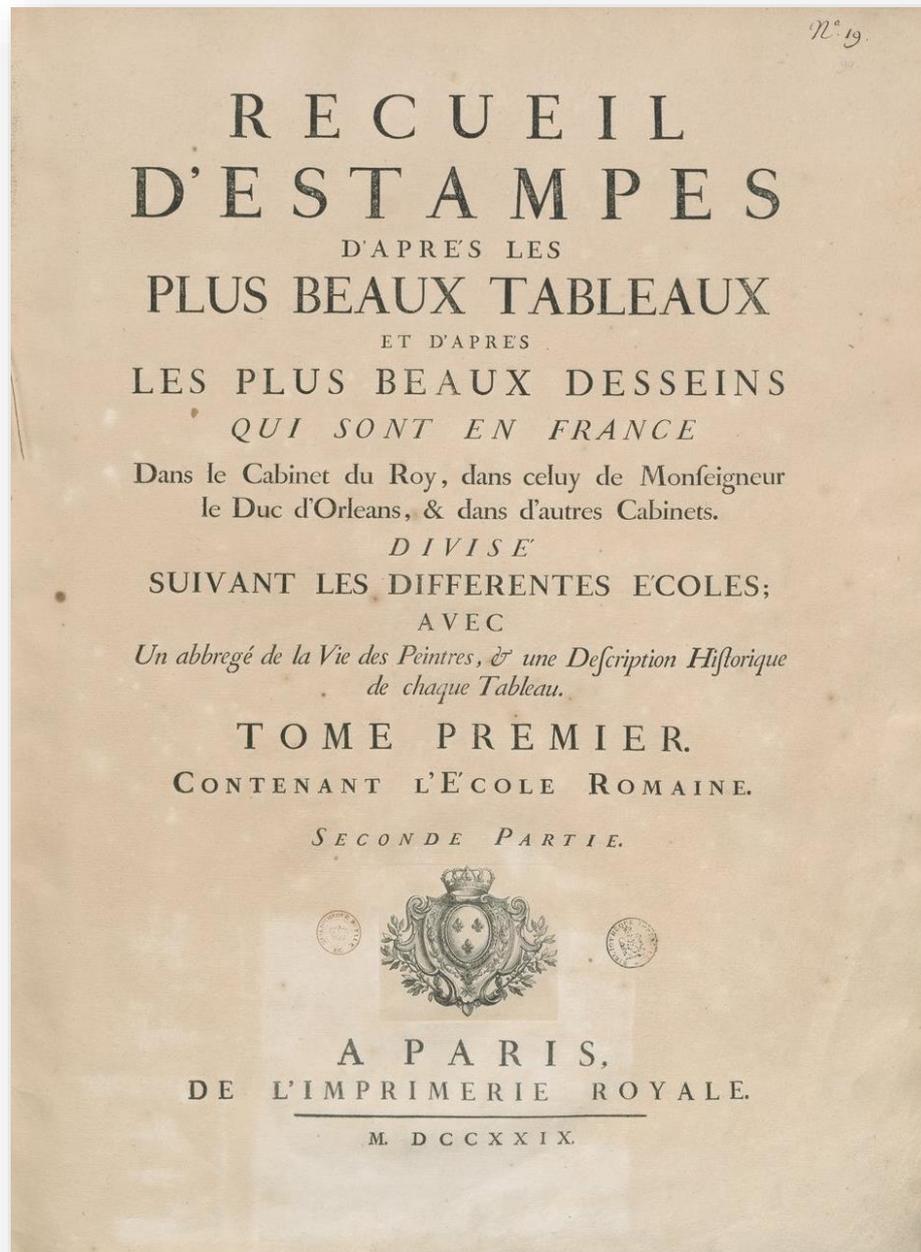


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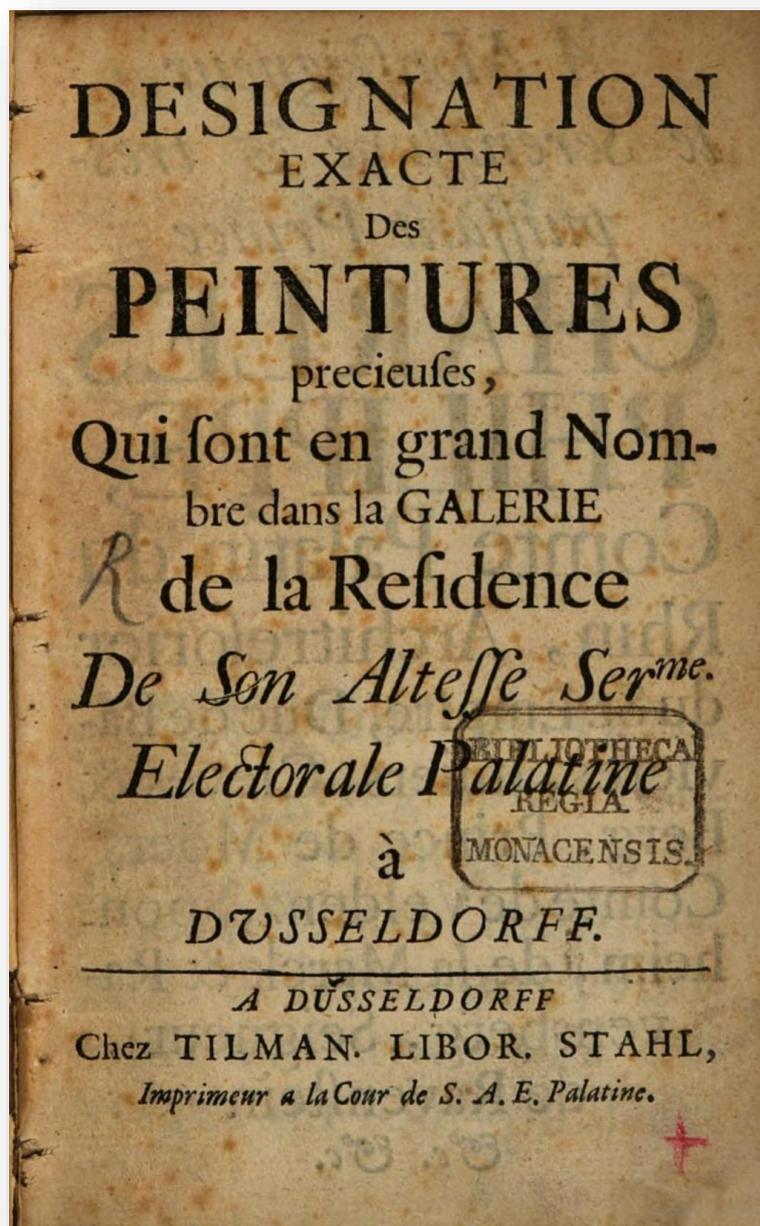
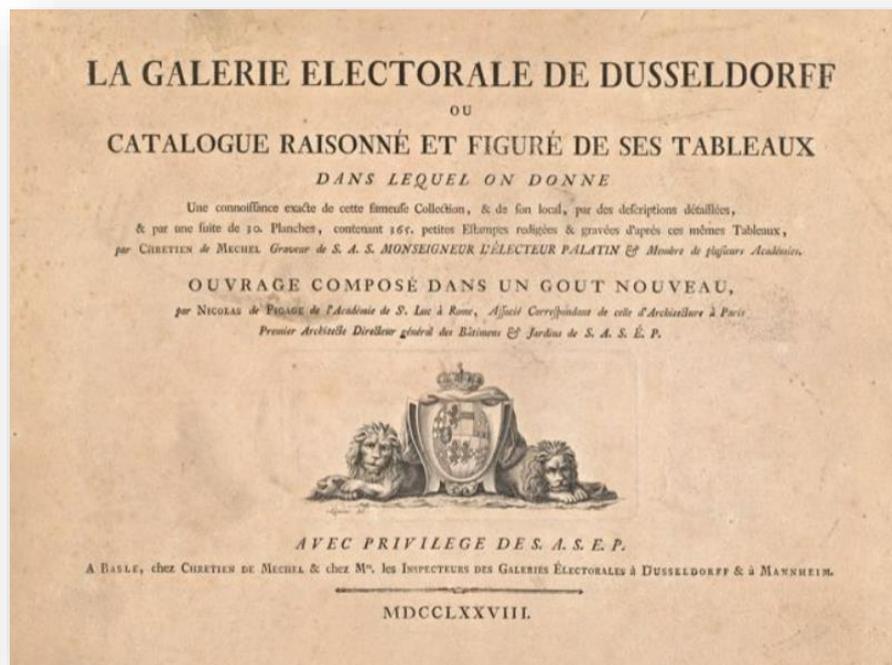


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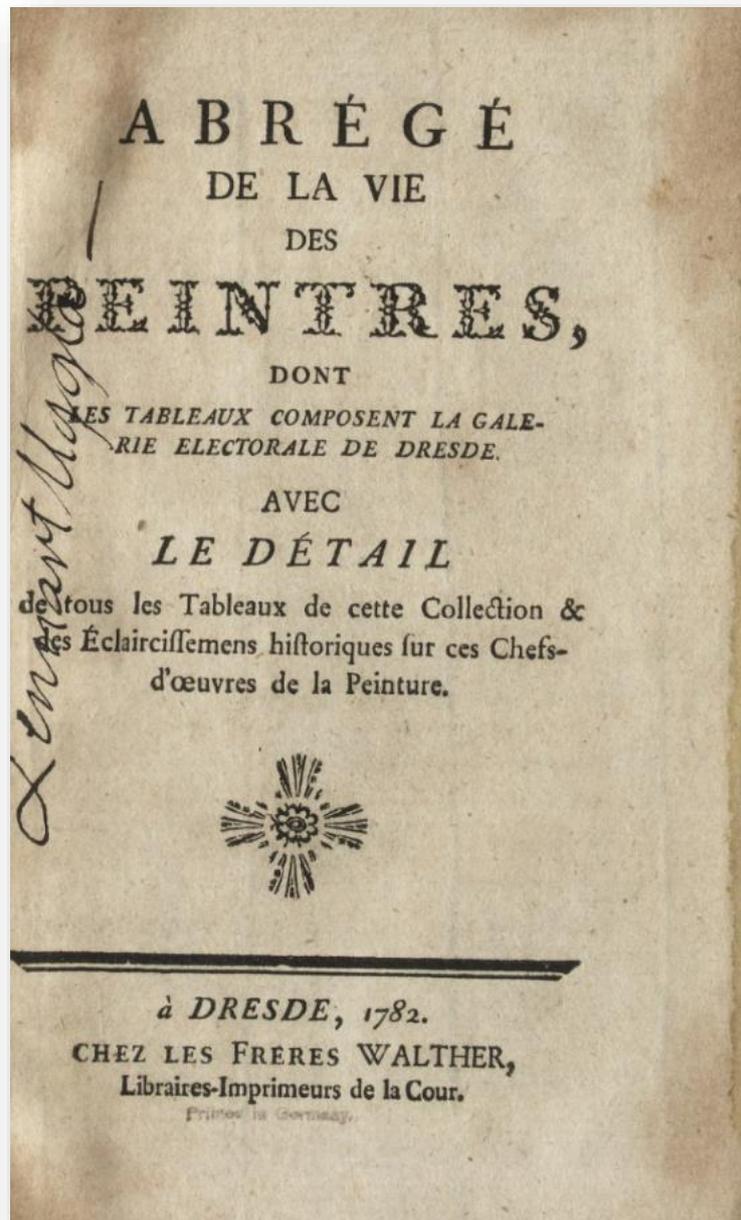


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Frontispiece of the first edition of Lehniger, Johann August, *Abrégé de la vie des peintres, dont les tableaux composent la Galerie Electorale de Dresde (avec le détail de tous les Tableaux de cette Collection & des Éclaircissemens historiques sur ces Chefs-d'œuvres de la peinture)*, Dresden, Libraires-Imprimeurs de la Cour, 1782.

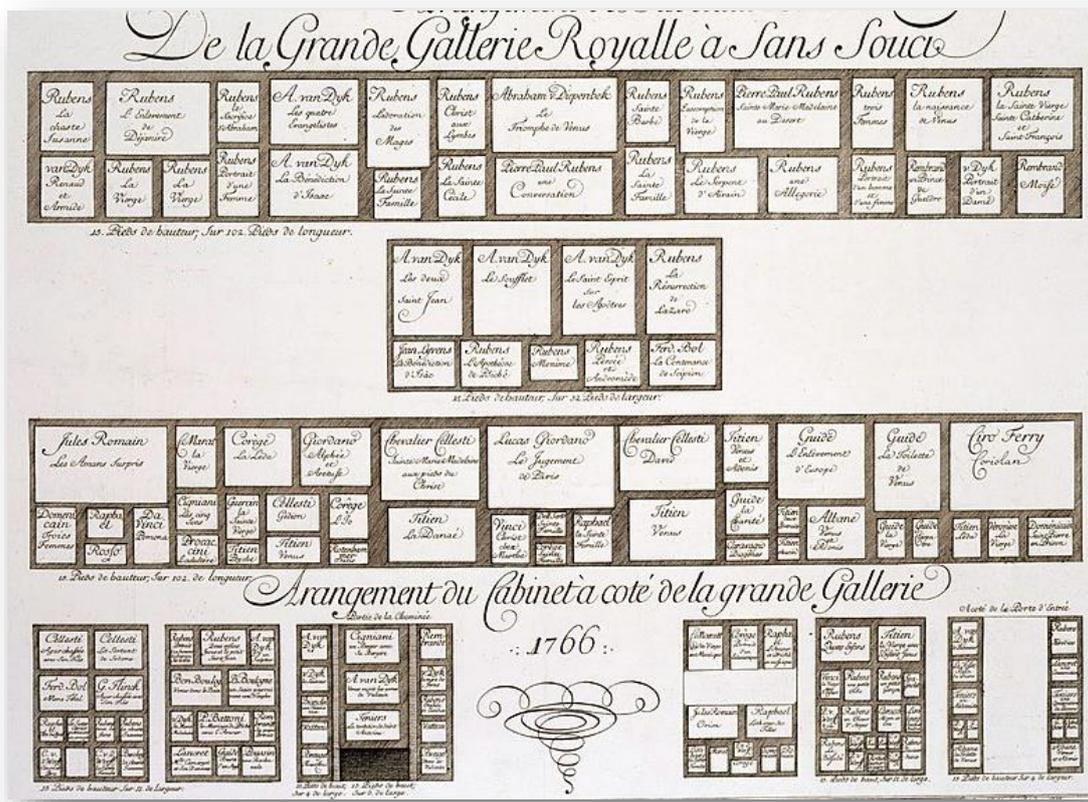


Figure 35 :

Arrangement des Tableaux de La Grande Gallerie Royale à Sans Souci, Matthias Oesterreich, 1766.

Printed plan for the Sanssouci Gallery in Potsdam, designed and produced for the public by the galerieinspector Matthias Oesterreich.

Beschreibung
der Königlichen
Bildergalerie
und
des Kabinetts
im Sans-Souci.



Zweite vermehrte und verbesserte Auflage.

Potsdam,
bey Christian Friedrich Vof, 1770.

Figure 36:

Frontispiece of Oesterreich, Matthias, *Beschreibung der Königlichen Bildergalerie und des Kabinetts im Sans-Souci*, Potsdam, 1770.

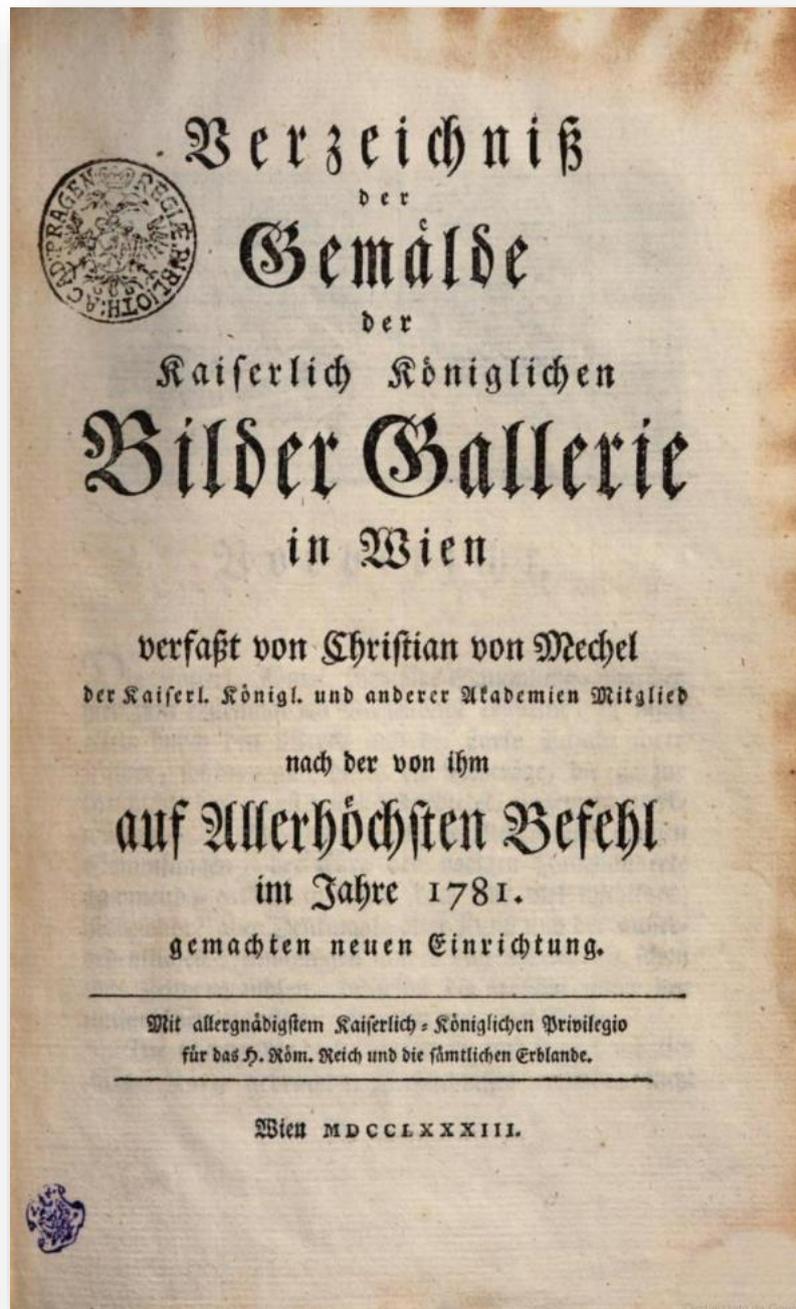


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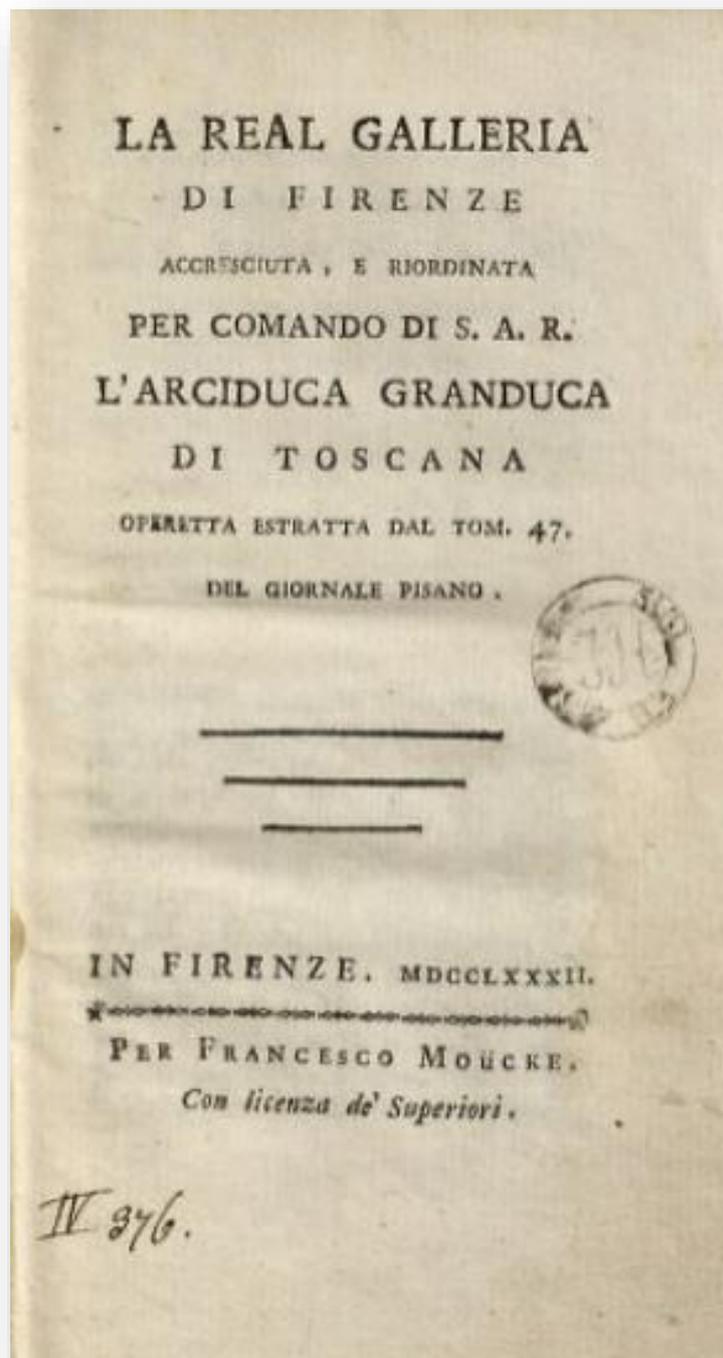


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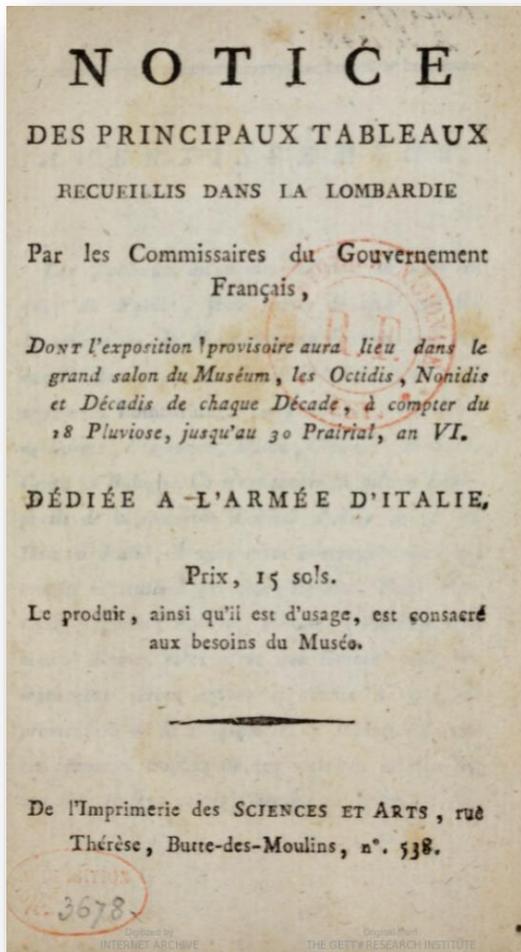


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Sciences et Arts, 1797.

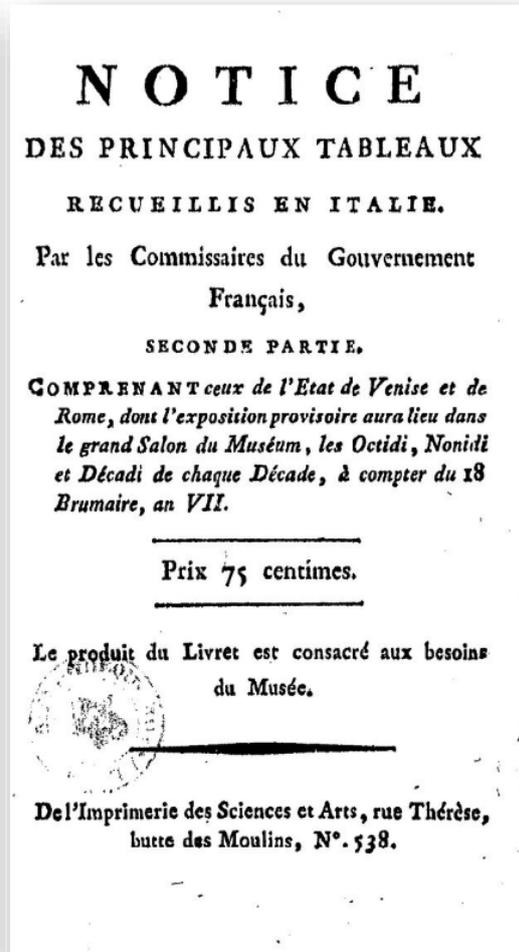


Figure 40:
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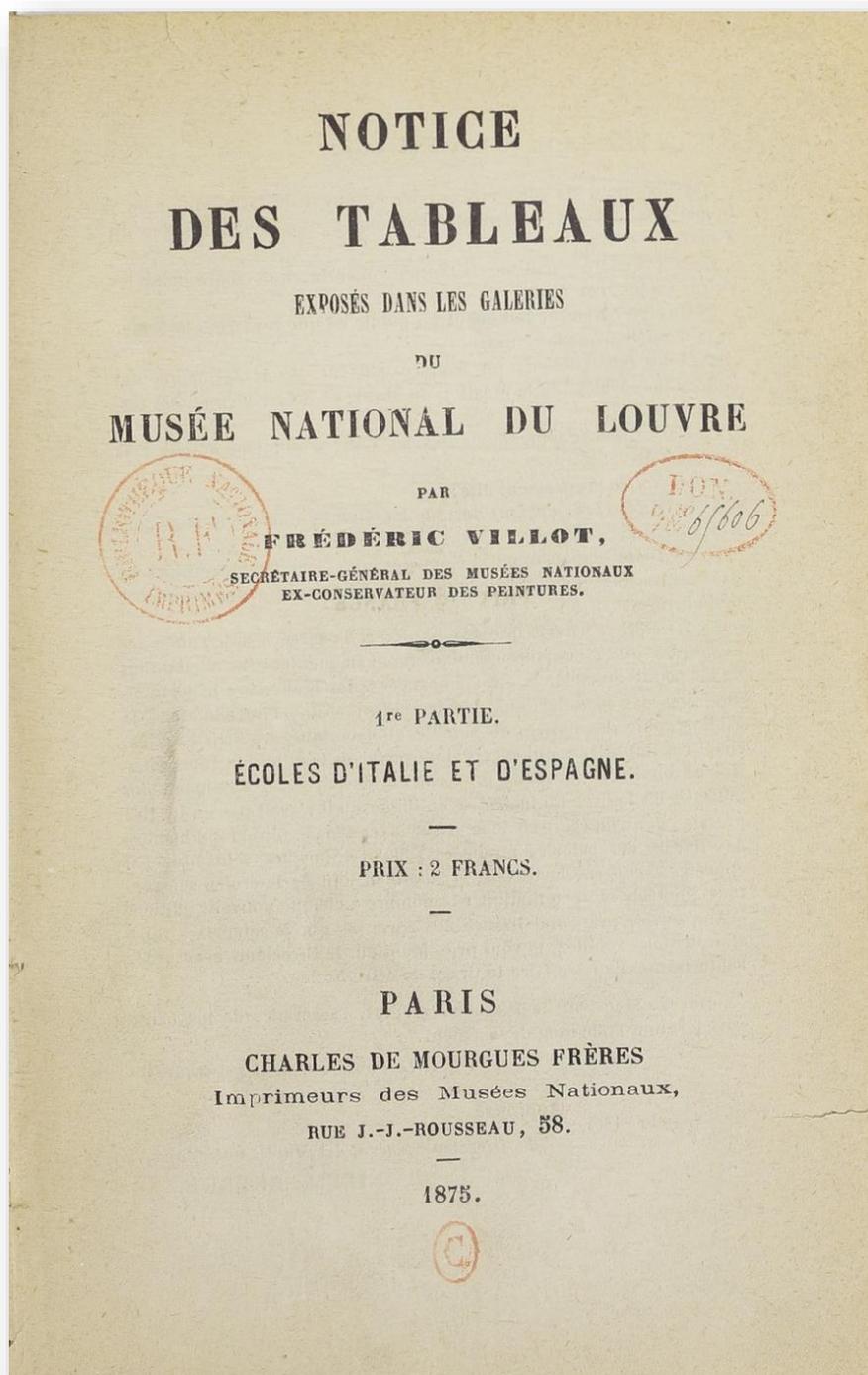


Figure 41:

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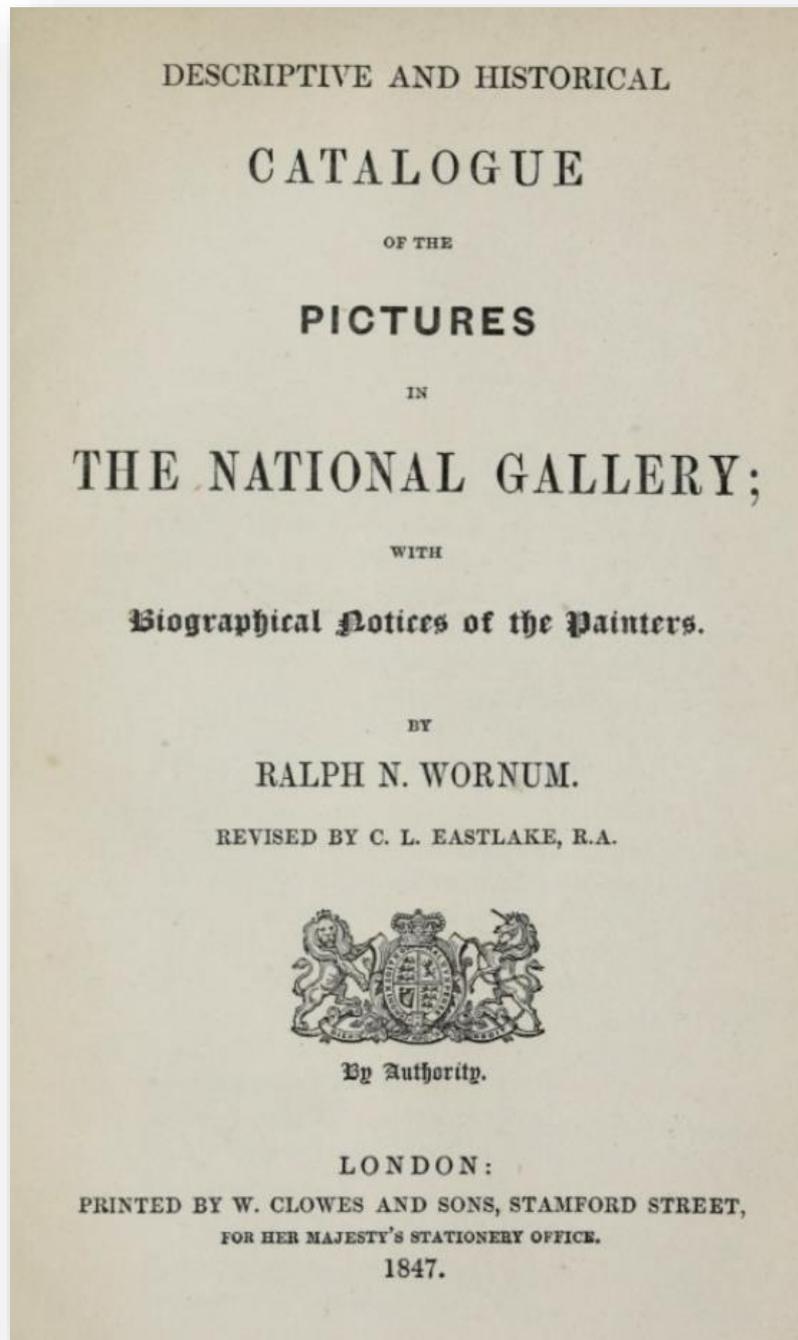


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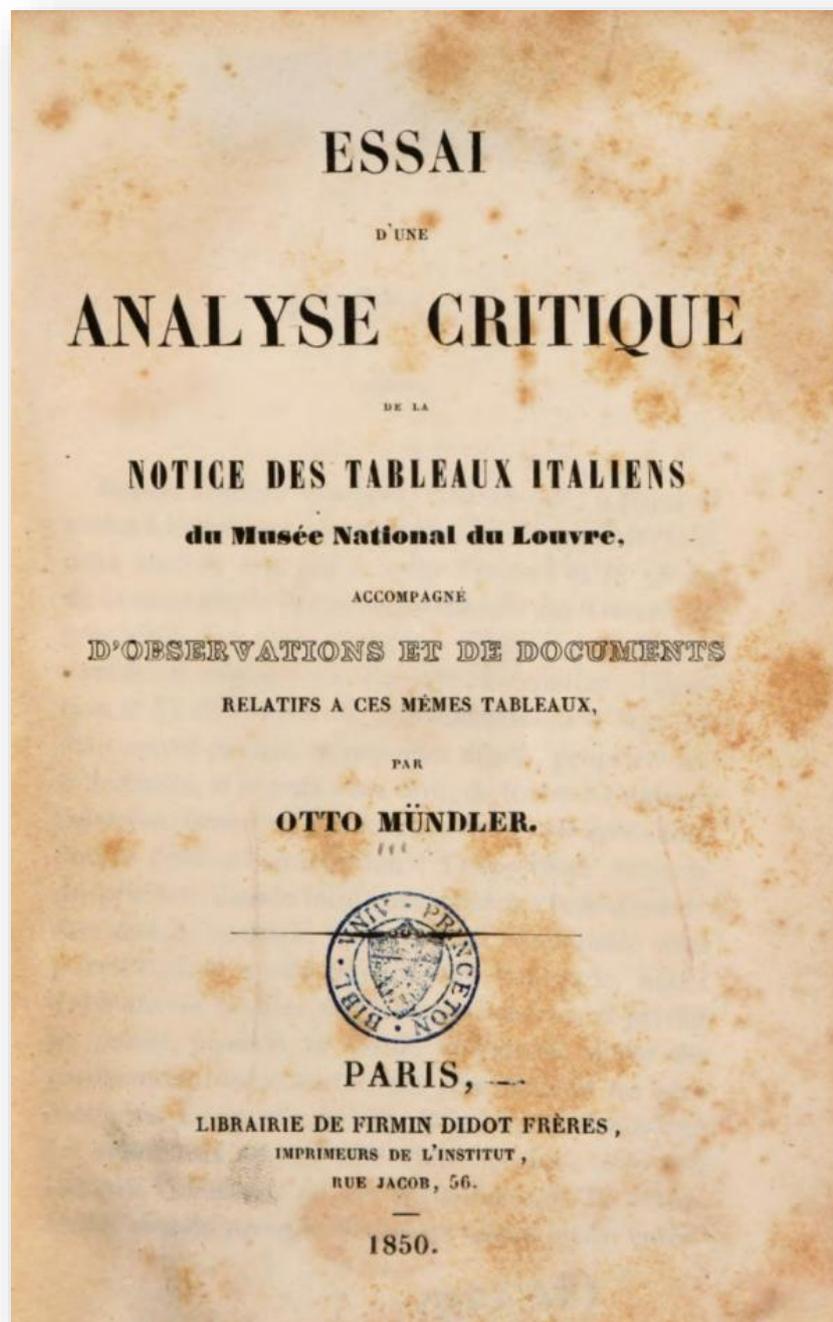


Figure 43:

Frontispiece of the first edition of Müндler, Otto, *Essai d'une analyse critique de la notice des tableaux italiens du Musée National du Louvre, accompagné d'observations et de documents relatifs à ces mêmes tableaux*, Paris, Librairie de Firmin Didot Frères, Imprimeurs de l'Institut, 1850.

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