

daar noodzakelijk een rol bij gespeeld hoeft te hebben. De auteur had ook de reikwijdte van zijn bevindingen kunnen vergroten door in de conclusie een expliciete vergelijking te trekken met de periode van de Republiek. Kwamen de meest ingrijpende veranderingen in de rivierhandel pas na de Opstand of toch niet? Het zou interessant zijn geweest om daarover de visie van de auteur te horen.

En ten slotte: waarom staat in dit boek niet meer dan één kaart, die bovendien maar een hele globale indruk geeft van het rivierengebied? In een studie over de rivierhandel in de late middeleeuwen zou de lezer meer in detail willen weten over de situatie en de gesteldheid van de rivieren zelf en de typische problemen die daarmee gepaard gingen. Vereiste de scheepvaart over de Rijn, Waal of IJssel in deze periode bijvoorbeeld zoveel plaatselijke kennis dat schippers uit andere regio's er niet gemakkelijk thuis raakten? Deze paar kritische noten nemen overigens niet weg dat Weststrate over het geheel genomen een mooie en degelijke studie heeft geschreven.

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Decker, John R., *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen tot Sint Jans* (Visual Culture in Early Modernity; Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, VIII + 166 blz., ISBN 978 0 7546 6453 6).

This book is the first in a series that promotes new models of inquiry and new narratives of early modern art and its history. Decker claims to have developed a method that will give a more 'nuanced view of lay piety and the use of visual culture in the Catholic Church in Northern Europe' than is currently customary (5). He approaches images 'through the terms and concepts employed by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Christians' (3). He considers the quest for salvation as the

essential feature of late-medieval religiosity and, consequently, uses moralistic tracts as his frame of reference. At the same time, he assumes that a calculated form of religiosity was predominant at the time. Individual acts of piety would – according to the medieval adage 'God does not deny grace to anyone who does what he can' – lead to salvation. Thus he developed the concept of the *Technology of Salvation*. He ascribes a dominant role in this process to art.

To illustrate the workings of this *Technology* Decker limits himself to five paintings attributed to by Geertgen tot Sint Jans. Two of them, the panels in Edinburg and Rotterdam, once formed a diptych. Geertgen (c.1460-c.1495) was a lay brother of the Haarlem Hospitallers of St. John, for whom he painted the high altar. But he did not work exclusively for his own congregation. The provenance of most of his paintings is not clear, however.

Decker presents his selection as the four subsequent stages in the upward path, although he specifically admits that this is an artificial construction. The Edinburgh-Rotterdam diptych promises salvation and consolation, which causes people to wonder and reflect. Thus they start the meditative path. Subsequently the *Man of Sorrows* (Utrecht) calls for compassion, the *Night Nativity* (London) for humbleness and obedience, and *St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness* (Berlin) for meditation.

Could these paintings really have worked in this way? They are all rather small in size, which would indicate they were made for private use. Yet Decker assumes they all hung in public rooms in the Haarlem convent. But according to the convent's inventory lists, as published by Truus van Bueren (*Tot Lof van Haarlem* (1993) 185, nt. 77), only two of the paintings may have hung there, the *Man of Sorrows* in a private room and 'St. John' in the so-called church chamber. The two panels – now in Vienna – that had actually been part of the main altar piece are – oddly enough – not dealt with in this book.

Each chapter starts with a subtle and well-observed description of the painting. Then the author proceeds to connect the essentials he observes, to a wide selection of moral tracts. Two methodological flaws can be detected in this approach. First of all, he does not question whether Geertgen could be acquainted with moral tracts like the ones he presents. And, secondly, can such informants call for anything but the necessity of 'perfection'? Decker does not use sources that could contradict or falsify his assumptions. It is therefore not surprising that his descriptions do often not transcend the common appreciations of these paintings. But his interpretation of *St. John in the Wilderness* is strikingly amiss: this painting is about unavoidable suffering. This may indeed lead to meditation, but the necessity of trimming the inner wilderness is a bit of a leap, which he needs, though, to fit the painting in his scheme.

Decker assumes that medieval Christians would meditate everyday (127, 136, 137, 149), but this assumption ignores the many daily chores people had to face. This even goes for the Hospitallers of St. John, although Decker presents them as a contemplative order (114, 123, 140). But they were not: most of the time they lived according to their rank and wealth. And besides: the Hospitallers of St. John had taken the Rule of St. Augustine, which gave them freedom to administer their goods, perform pastoral duties, take care of guests and *proveniers*, and defend Christianity against the Turks. But Decker does not ponder upon questions like these.

One thing is certain: Decker takes his literary sources too literally. One cannot deduce from the exhortations of preachers and moralistic writers that people were actually and persistently engaged in soul searching activities. Moreover: did not these teachers rather react against the growing materialism they observed around them? Worldly and timely aspects are thoroughly missing in Decker's analysis, although he acknowledges that works of art 'provided statements of wealth and social status, and acted as indications of the

owner's respectability' (20). But he leaves it to his followers to pursue this track (148).

Does his mental matrix add to our understanding of the paintings? No. His descriptions are in line with Panofsky's concept of *Andachtsbild* (for that is what all Geertgen's paintings are, literally, categorically and functionally) and the iconographic approach, in spite of the fact that Decker dismisses these predecessors in four sentences (4-5). Even contemporaries like Albrecht Dürer and later Karel van Mander (*Schilder-boeck*, 1604) had – in his opinion – not understood Geertgen correctly (28). But Decker's selection of epistemological notions is often arbitrary, taken from whatever place and time suit him best. It is remarkable that he does not refer to Thomas à Kempis, the best-selling author of Geertgen's time, with his down to earth approach to everyday religion.

Another example of Decker's presumptuousness: Geertgen is said to have died around 1495. Yet Decker prefers him to have lived longer. Then the *Man of Sorrows*, which is generally dated between 1485 and 1495, could have been painted around 1500, when the Hospitallers published a list of indulgences. This painting (that actually hung in a private room) would then have been commissioned to serve 'as a tool for preparing the souls of those seeking relief from Purgatory' (68). 'The most likely scenario is that as the parishioner [sic] knelt in preparation for, or perhaps during confession, he positioned himself within inches of the painting's surface and came face-to-face with Christ and his retinue' (69). As if this was common practice. Luckily enough, Decker found a reference to a Haarlem painter named Ghaerbrant (†1517) who lived on Kruisstraat and was buried at St. John's. In Decker's opinion, this man could well be Geertgen. He is so sure, that he proposes to take 1517 henceforth as the year of Geertgen's death (18). Overwhelmed by all the new 'intriguing possibilities' this construction offers, Decker does not pause to ask, for instance, whether dendrochronological research substantiates his

claim. Experts in this field such as prof. dr. Molly Faries and dr. Micha Leeflang unhesitatingly repudiate this late a death date for Geertgen.

This book does not meet academic standards. Decker never enters into a dialogue with colleagues. His command of Dutch is poor (24, where he reads *bedrieger* [deceiver] as *bedreiger* [threatener]; page 50, where he makes huge mistakes in his translation of Dirc van Delf). Besides, he does not seem to be sufficiently acquainted with Roman Catholic liturgy and pastoral care (69, 79). His view on late medieval religiosity shifts from calculating religiosity to over occupation with salvation. What is the importance of these contradictory perspectives? In late-medieval Utrecht, my field of specialization, most people liked to live a decent, honourable and prosperous life. They were not over religious. As one Utrecht priest (c.1369-1454) repeatedly said: 'Think well, speak well, do well, and you will be well'. Late-medieval religious art greatly satisfied this desire: it was beautiful, touched the hearts and minds and may have led to introspection. Art and words, whether written or spoken, can do no more.

John Decker claims to have established a new approach, but his virtual reconstruction will not do: pasting bits of paintings and books together. In my view he has overemphasised the theological frame of reference even further than is already customary. As if religiosity and theology can be equated. It is time to systematically turn to the people who commissioned art, and investigate their reasons for doing so, not only at an individual but also at a social level. For Geertgen's paintings such a reconstruction is unfortunately not possible.

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Duke, Alistair, *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries*, J. Pollmann en A. Spicer (eds.) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, XIII + 320 blz., ISBN 978 0 7546 5679 1).

Van Alastair Duke verscheen een fraaie bundel met opstellen over de Lage Landen net voor en tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand. De serie artikelen geeft inzicht in de groeiende onrust aan de vooravond van de Opstand, de manier waarop deze onrust door de propaganda werd aangewakkerd en in enkele intrigerende gebeurtenissen tijdens die Opstand. Centrale thema van de bundel is 'identiteit'. In zijn opstellen beschrijft Duke hoe een nationale identiteit ontstaat, hoe groepsidentiteiten zich ontwikkelen en hoe de stormachtige ontwikkelingen van de zestiende eeuw persoonlijke identiteiten beïnvloeden. Het resultaat is een waardevol mozaïek van grote en kleine geschiedenis.

In het eerste deel beschrijft Duke hoe De Nederlanden vorm kregen. Zo beschrijft hij in het eerste hoofdstuk de zestiende-eeuwse middelpuntvliedende krachten en laat zien hoe Karel V bewust en onbewust bijdroeg aan het ontstaan van een gevoel van eenheid. In het tweede deel van zijn boek stelt Duke de religieuze identiteit van specifieke groepen centraal. In dit deel zet Duke uitvoerig uiteen hoe het repressieve klimaat de identiteit van dissidente groepen beïnvloedde. De aanwezigheid van een vervolgingsapparaat stempelde hun organisatie en de polemiek tegen de zogenaamde 'Spaanse inquisitie' werd nagenoeg een onderdeel van hun identiteit. Duke beperkt zich in deze hoofdstukken tot een beschrijving van de invloed die de repressie had op de organisatie van de *dissenters* en laat een analyse van de invloed op de religieuze identiteit van deze groepen achterwege. In martelaarsbundels bijvoorbeeld werd het martelaarschap voorgesteld als de meest letterlijke vorm van navolging van Christus. Martelaarschap werd een keurmerk van echte navolging. Aandacht voor dit element van identiteit ontbreekt echter. In het derde deel van de bundel staat Duke stil bij de