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Roscoe and Italy

The Reception of Italian Renaissance History and Culture
in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Edited by **Stella Fletcher**

In 1795 William Roscoe (1753–1831) published a biography of Lorenzo de' Medici, which proved so popular that it prompted claims that Roscoe had effectively invented the Italian Renaissance as it has been known by subsequent generations of readers in the English-speaking world. Despite such enthusiastic assertions, however, this collection of essays is the first systematic attempt to examine Roscoe and his contribution towards modern conceptions of the Renaissance. Covering a range of subjects from art history and literature, to politics and culture, the volume provides a fascinating picture both of Roscoe and his historical legacy.

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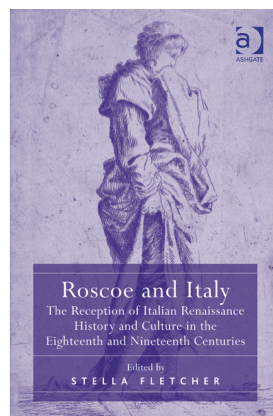
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Chapter 1

Between History and Art History: Roscoe's Medici Lives

Emanuele Pellegrini

'The patronage of the family of the Medici is almost contemporary with the commencement of the art': thus William Roscoe declared his opinion about the intimate relationship between the Medici family and the Italian – indeed, European – cultural phenomenon which has become known as the Renaissance.¹ By the word 'art', Roscoe, like many eighteenth-century *savants*, understood all creations that we define as culture, especially literature and the visual arts. The connection he established between Medicean patronage and the revival of art provides an important clue to understanding his entire *oeuvre*. He did not engage in an artistic debate, nor did he compare particular art-historical sources. The aim of his writing was not to tell us about the visual arts in fifteenth-century Florence *per se*, but they nevertheless assumed a leading role in his cultural reconstruction of the period. Although Roscoe never published exclusively on the visual arts, he wrote on them at length in a wealth of writings that he left in manuscript. It is also possible to find in his published works, and especially in his two major publications – the lives of Lorenzo the Magnificent and Leo X – numerous pages relating to *beaux arts*. They are not simple references, but extended digressions, almost independent essays, which become a fundamental feature of his entire historical vision. Thus Roscoe created a new way to look at the arts, their role in society and their development over time. His aim was not to collect an ensemble of artistic biographies, nor to create a technical treatise, but to place the narration of artistic facts inside a general view of a certain historical period, in which the arts become a key to understanding contemporary events.

Roscoe demonstrated his deep interest in the visual arts both by collecting and by writing. It would be a mistake not to appreciate the intimate connection between the two, because a common plan is perceptible behind his acquisitions of works of art (especially etchings, drawings and paintings, but also some

¹ W. Roscoe, *The Life of Lorenzo de' Medici, Called the Magnificent* (2 vols, London, 1796), vol. 2, p. 182.

sculptures) and in his writings about certain periods of art history or certain interpretations of some notable artists.² He bought works of art in order to form a coherent collection, one in which most of the leading European schools and acknowledged masters from Cimabue to Fuseli were to be represented, and by which the evolution of art was to be illustrated.³

It is possible to trace Roscoe's interest in visual art from the time of his youth. In one of his first poems, *Mount Pleasant*, he refers to the arts and their significance in enhancing the quality of life of an entire community. In another 'juvenile' poem, *The Origin of Engraving* (dated to the mid-1780s), we can perceive his initial interest in Lorenzo de' Medici. It is therefore not surprising that his *Life of Lorenzo* contains some lengthy digressions on the visual arts: an entire chapter is dedicated to them, and there are many other references to artists and their creations throughout the text. Lorenzo's career invited his biographer to treat of both politics and culture, two spheres in whose harmonious union Roscoe recognized the engine for the betterment of society.⁴ In this he followed most of the eighteenth-century literature on academies of art.⁵ Lorenzo therefore provided an excellent opportunity to explain in a single work both cultural history and political culture: biography was the right medium – as it remained with the life of Leo X – to study this duality and to analyse the cultural parallel of a political narrative. Roscoe stated that he did not wish 'to confine himself merely to the relation of the life of an individual, however illustrious': instead he wished to reconstruct an historical period, illustrated not only by battles and political machinations but also by cultural evidence.⁶ Herein lies the principal reason why Roscoe chose not to undertake a straightforward translation of Angelo Fabroni's biographies of Cosimo, Lorenzo and Giovanni de' Medici:

² For Roscoe as collector, see the chapters by Xanthe Brooke and Andrea M. Gáldy in this volume.

³ See Henry Roscoe, *The Life of William Roscoe* (2 vols, London, 1833), vol. 1, p. 67; J.R. Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance* (4th edn, Malden, MA, Oxford and Carlton, 2005), pp. 63–4.

⁴ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 1, pp. v–vi. For Lorenzo's significance as a biographical subject, see P. Pastori, 'La leggenda laurenziana. Momenti di un mito politico fra XVI e XIX secolo', in P. Pirolò (ed.), *Lorenzo dopo Lorenzo: La fortuna storica di Lorenzo il Magnifico* (Florence, 1992), p. 121.

⁵ On artistic academies there is a huge bibliography. N. Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (Cambridge, 1940) is always useful. For Roscoe's part in the creation of such cultural milieux in Liverpool, see A. Wilson, *William Roscoe: Commerce and Culture* (Liverpool, 2008).

⁶ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 1, pp. vii–viii, xviii–xix. See also A. Quondam, 'William Roscoe e l'invenzione del Rinascimento', in M. Fantoni (ed.), *Gli Anglo-americani a Firenze. Idea e costruzione del Rinascimento* (Rome, 2000), pp. 249–338.

they were dedicated exclusively to political history.⁷ In the light of his abiding interest in poetry, Roscoe was inspired by the work of the earliest historian of Italian literature, Girolamo Tiraboschi, whose *magnum opus* originally appeared in ten volumes in Modena between 1772 and 1782: this first edition quickly became celebrated, being reprinted several times in Florence and Naples starting from 1774, and so did the new edition licensed by the author in 1787. Tiraboschi's concept of culture was inclusive, and thus was Roscoe inspired to include literature, the visual arts and public affairs in one cultural whole.⁸

It is not difficult to find support for this assertion in Roscoe's unpublished manuscripts: we need only have a look at the one entitled 'On the Origin of Taste'. The parallel between art and literature occurs many times throughout this composition, and sometimes Roscoe declares that the development of the visual arts preceded the flourishing of literature: 'the literature of the Greeks in its introduction into Italy was accompanied or perhaps preceded by that of the plastic art'. Literature and the visual arts are:

founded on the same natural principles and directed by the same laws, they have always accompanied and assisted each other and have flourished and declined at the same time and under the same circumstances. In truth their end is precisely the same, and the only difference between them is in the means they employ for its accomplishment.¹⁰

Roscoe supports this statement with extensive digressions on Cicero and Latin literature, which include notes on works of art collected by various Roman patricians.¹¹

What is most important for our purpose is Roscoe's consciousness of the novelty of his *Life of Lorenzo*, compared to his subject's previous biographies, especially that of Fabroni. Passages concerning the visual arts appear throughout all three of Fabroni's Medicean biographies, but they occur within a continuous

⁷ A. Fabroni, *Laurentii Medicis vita* (2 vols, Pisa, 1784); A. Fabroni, *Magni Cosmi Medicei vita* (2 vols, Pisa, 1788–9); A. Fabroni, *Leonis X pontificis maximi vita* (Pisa, 1797). On Fabroni, see U. Baldini, 'Angelo Fabroni', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 44 (Rome, 1994), pp. 2–12; M. Ghelardi, *La scoperta del Rinascimento. L'«età di Raffaello» di Jacob Burckhardt* (Turin, 1991), pp. 104–5.

⁸ G. Tiraboschi, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (10 vols, Modena, 1772–82); M.S. Sapegno, 'Storia della letteratura italiana di Girolamo Tiraboschi', in A. Asor Rosa (ed.), *Letteratura italiana*, vol. 8, *Letà moderna. Le opere 1580-1800* (Turin, 2007), pp. 693–740.

⁹ Liverpool Record Office, Liverpool Libraries (hereafter LVRO) 920 ROS 5545, I, 26r.

¹⁰ LVRO 920 ROS 5545, II (pages unnumbered).

¹¹ LVRO 920 ROS 5545, I, 37r–46r, at 53r–v. Within this text there is substantial quotation from Tiraboschi's *Storia della letteratura*.

narrative stream that has no divisions into paragraphs or chapters, and thus tend to be absorbed in the general argument. Alongside politicians, warriors, kings or popes, artists are presented as one more group among those who gravitated around the Medici. With regard to the visual arts there are certain themes that occur in Fabroni's works and then recur in Roscoe's: some passages the Englishman took up and adapted; others he radically revised or cancelled. An example is their treatment of the so-called garden of S. Marco and its alleged association with the painters Giuliano Bugiardini and Francesco Granacci, the sculptor Pietro Torrigiani and, most notably, the young Michelangelo: a semi-mythical place, the very existence of which was based mainly on the testimony of Giorgio Vasari.¹² In an act heavily criticized by Fabroni and then by Roscoe, the garden was destroyed during the political upheavals of 1494. A second parallel can be seen in the authors' treatment of Cosimo and Lorenzo as collectors of antiquities. For Fabroni, this was a significant means of conveying Cosimo's personality and greatness: he adorned his palace with '*librorum copia, vasa magnifice et pretiose caelata, gemmae, lapides affabre incise, antiquitatis monumenta ..., statucae, opera anglyptica, tabulae et multa, quae artifices esperitissimi pingendi, fingendi scalpendique, quorum tum plurimi Florentiae erant, elaboraverant*'; and Lorenzo '*omniaque signa, tabulas pictas, omne caelatum argentum, aurum, gemmas coemeret, iisque domum suam sic ornaret, ut haec non domino magis quam civitatis esset ornamento ...*' [an abundance of books, magnificent and finely chased vessels, precious stones, artfully incised stones, monuments of antiquity ..., statues, bas-reliefs, paintings and many other things executed by the workers expert in painting, sculpting and moulding who were very numerous in Florence at that time].¹³ This is confirmed by Roscoe in many passages, including the following: 'Cosmo indulged his taste in ornamenting [his palace] with the most precious remains of ancient art; and in the purchase of vases, statues, busts, gems, and medals, expended no inconsiderable sum.'¹⁴ The two biographers also agree that collecting was not a matter of personal indulgence, but undertaken for the benefit of Florence. Of Lorenzo, Fabroni wrote that '*omniaque signa, tabulas pictas, omne caelatum argentum, aurum, gemmas coemeret, iisque domum suam sic ornaret, ut haec non domino magis quam civitatis esset ornamento ...*' [acquired and collected every image, painting, incised piece of silver gold and gemstone, and adorned his own palace with them in such a way that they honoured their owner no more than the city of Florence ...].¹⁵ In Roscoe's version the 'true

¹² G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (3 vols, Florence, 1568), vol. 2, pp. 52–3; now also available online at www.memofonte.it.

¹³ Fabroni, *Magni Cosmi Medicei vita*, vol. 1, p. 153.

¹⁴ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 1, p. 62.

¹⁵ Fabroni, *Laurentii Medicis vita*, vol. 1, p. 145.

purpose' behind Lorenzo's collecting was thoroughly educational, being to inspire 'in his countrymen a correct and genuine taste for the arts'.¹⁶

Unsurprisingly, Vasari was Fabroni's main source of art-historical material, just as he became for Roscoe. Neither biographer read Vasari in order to provide a critique of the visual arts in fifteenth-century Italy. Their interest was entirely focused on Lorenzo and any clues to his character that could be derived from his dealings with artists. Fabroni's reliance on his readers' familiarity with Vasari is even more apparent in his life of Cosimo. In this case, digressions on the arts are more elaborate and the artists are not discussed solely in terms of their relationships with their patron, but studied as historical actors in their own right. Along the lines that the author had already established with regard to Lorenzo, Cosimo's cultural patronage is presented as being for the benefit of Florence, rather than for any personal motive. Fabroni did not divide his work into chapters corresponding to individual subjects (for example, literature or the visual arts), but tended to concentrate certain themes in particular parts of the narrative. The part devoted to architecture places a Vasarian emphasis on Brunelleschi and Michelozzo and relies on several direct quotations from the *Lives of the Artists*. More interesting is the discourse on painting, because Fabroni does not limit himself to a mere list of individual artists or to advancing the names of some excellent practitioners of the time. Cosimo's cultural significance emerges from his capacity to attract artists, and to encourage 'revolutionary' figures, not least Masaccio, whose greatness is confirmed by the appreciation of Michelangelo and Raphael.¹⁷ Fabroni places artists on a precise scale of artistic merit, the painter Filippo Lippi ranking behind Masaccio '*sed longo intervallus, tamen proximus*' [next, but after a large gap].¹⁸ In the realm of sculpture, Fabroni makes a point of comparing Donatello and his fellow Florentine Lorenzo Ghiberti: '*par, aut fortasse superior erat Donatello ille Laurentius Ghibertus*' [Donatello was equal or perhaps superior to Lorenzo Ghiberti].¹⁹ On the other hand, the nature of the work means that Fabroni concentrates on Donatello's Florentine career, including his relationship with Cosimo, while ignoring his not insignificant work in Padua. Thus Fabroni's approach, being polarized around a single Medicean life, provides a somewhat limited approach to the study of fifteenth-century Florentine art, but nevertheless attempts to break away from the biographical format by beginning to explore the artists' relationships not only with their patron but also with one another.

Fabroni's Medicean triptych concludes with his biography of Leo X, published in 1797, when Roscoe's *Life of Lorenzo* had already been translated

¹⁶ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 1, p. 199.

¹⁷ Fabroni, *Magni Cosmi Medicei vita*, vol. 1, p. 156.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 159.

into Italian on Fabroni's initiative.²⁰ Fabroni's *Leonis X* does not seem to be influenced by Roscoe's work, because he continues with the pattern established in his two previous biographies. His coverage of art remains consistent with what had gone before, echoing Vasari: Raphael, the unsurpassed painter, and Michelangelo, the universal artist, together appear as symbols of a golden age. Single references are made to Giuliano and Antonio da Sangallo, Peruzzi, Sodoma and Sebastiano del Piombo. Mention is also made of artisans, including gem carvers and engravers, above all Albrecht Dürer, an artist able to take this art '*ad magnam altitudinem*' [to a great height].²¹ This is not a critical appraisal of art and artists but nor is it a mere list of names, because there is an element of selection. Two features of Fabroni's account certainly recur in Roscoe's *Life of Leo*. First, the emphasis on triumphal entries into cities, in which Fabroni never fails to pay attention to artists' skills in organizing the ephemeral equipment.²² Secondly, Fabroni has difficulty in accepting Leonardo da Vinci as an artist on a par with Michelangelo and Raphael. '*Michael Angelo aemulus, vel potius inimicus*' [a rival or, rather, an enemy], Leonardo is presented as more of an alchemist and not an artist as canonically understood.²³ Roscoe duly took that 'difficulty' to extremes and thereby inspired the wrath of Italian historians of art, most notably Leopoldo Cicognara, author of the first history of Italian sculpture.²⁴

²⁰ The first Italian translation of the *Life of Lorenzo* was made by Gaetano Mecherini, under the supervision of Fabroni: *Vita di Lorenzo de' Medici detto il magnifico del dottore Guglielmo Roscoe, versione dall'inglese* (4 vols, Pisa, 1799). This translation had been censored by Mecherini in several places, as Roscoe complained to Fabroni in a letter of 23 July 1802: LVRO 920 ROS 1470. Writing from Pisa, Fabroni responded on this matter on 5 October 1802: LVRO 920 ROS 1471. In 1816 a new Italian translation was published, again by Mecherini, in which the censored passages were restored: *Vita di Lorenzo de' Medici detto il magnifico del dottore Guglielmo Roscoe, versione dall'inglese del cavalier Gaetano Mecherini, seconda edizione con correzioni e aggiunte* (4 vols, Pisa, 1816).

²¹ Fabroni, *Leonis X*, pp. 215–24.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²³ Fabroni, *Leonis X*, p. 219.

²⁴ L. Cicognara, *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia fino al secolo di Canova per servire di continuazione all'opera di Winckelmann e D'Agincourt* (7 vols, Prato, 1824–26), ed. F. Leone, B. Steindl, G. Venturi (Bassano del Grappa, 2007), vol. 5, pp. 75–83, at p. 78, n. 1. See also *Vita e pontificato di Leone X: Ornata del ritratto di Leone X e di molte medaglie incise in rame di Guglielmo Roscoe autore della vita di Lorenzo de' Medici; tradotta e corredata di annotazioni e di alcuni documenti inediti dal conte Luigi Bossi* (12 vols, Milan, 1816–17), vol. 1, pp. 143–5, n. (a), and also vol. 9, p. 105; *Scritti d'arte della Antologia di G.P. Vieusseux*, ed. P. Barocchi (5 vols, Florence, 1975), vol. 2, pp. 94–5; see also the exhibition catalogue *Il genio e le passioni. Leonardo e il Cenacolo. Precedenti, innovazioni, riflessi di un capolavoro*, ed. P.C. Marani (Milan, 2001), pp. 409–15.

This digression on Fabroni's biographies provides essential background for Roscoe's publications. The difference between the two authors and their treatment of Lorenzo can be understood through the medium of Roscoe's unpublished thoughts 'On the Origin of Taste':

It is true, the taste is cultivated by different means; but as they all apply to the same sense, and depend upon the same causes, there is no impropriety in considering them under one point of view; at the same time it is evident that any branch of art may be treated on distinctly, and that poetry, sculpture or painting may each form a proper subject of enquiry. Of this immense outline of human knowledge it is surprizing how little a portion has been attempted to be filled up. History has been almost wholly devoted to one portion of the first part only – the conduct of mankind in their associated and relative connections; with wars, treatises, conquests, revolutions and the rise and fall of states. But when the subject shall be more deeply enquired into, it will appear that there are many departments, if not equally striking and impressive, at least equally interesting, and perhaps more useful in their results. For instance, the history of theology; or of the principle of religion, as found in different nations, deduced thro' different periods, as compared with each other. The history of improvement or degradation of the moral sense, demonstrating what are the causes that have contributed to his exaltation, or depression. The history of civil and political liberty; its rise, progress, vicissitudes and corruptions. Its connections with, and bearings on other parts of the moral system. In thus classing the different objects of the human faculties, and considering each in a distinct point of view, it is evident we should attain some useful knowledge; while the mere relation of the political transactions of a country, is in general little more than a tale of blood and desolation, over which human nature mourns, but from the record of which it is not often easy to derive any beneficial result. Of this immense mass it is only of the last portion that we have undertaken to sketch the outline. To fill up even that, would require the labour of a life. Large and valuable fragments are formed in every department. Poetry, oratory, sculpture, architecture, painting, have each been separately illustrated. Our object is to combine these fragments in one point of view. To shew what has been done, in order to demonstrate what is yet wanted.²⁵

Roscoe's account of the 'fortunate circumstances' which facilitated the production of art and letters in the age of Lorenzo included a decidedly partial view of political history: 'The freedom of the Italian governments, and particularly that of Florence, gave to the human faculties their full energies.'²⁶ With hindsight, it

²⁵ LVRO 920 ROS 5545: the manuscript consists of various versions of Roscoe's study 'On the Origin of Taste'; the pagination is irregular; the citation is taken from a group of loose papers included in the second fascicle.

²⁶ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 2, p. 192.

is easy to contrast Roscoe's definition of freedom with that duly expressed by Sismondi, but Roscoe acknowledged that it derived from the writings of Anton Raphael Mengs, the German painter whose literary works Roscoe owned in the Italian edition of Carlo Fea.²⁷ Roscoe's idea of freedom does not conflict with a tyrannical form of government, such as that of the Medici.²⁸ It was the liberty from any external tyrant that Cosimo de' Medici could celebrate by commissioning the symbolic figure of Judith from Donatello, even if that statue was later moved from the Palazzo Medici to the Palazzo della Signoria as a sign of Florence's liberation from Medicean 'tyranny' in 1494. Effectively free from both imperial and papal overlordship, states such as Florence took their political and therefore cultural cue from the city-states of Antiquity, a point illustrated by Roscoe in the parallel between Laurentian Florence and Periclean Athens. It is no coincidence that Roscoe emphasizes the numerous collections of antiquities made by fifteenth-century Florentines, including those of Poggio Bracciolini, Niccolò Niccoli, Cosimo de' Medici's brother Lorenzo, and that of Cosimo himself.²⁹

It is in the context of Cosimo's cultural achievements towards the end of the opening chapter that Roscoe places his concise survey of the visual arts in Florence and introduces their leading practitioners. In the realm of architecture he rates Michelozzo as a 'man of talents', but Brunelleschi as a 'genius'. With regard to painting, the unstated presence of Vasari determines Roscoe's account of the evolution from the 'cold and formal manner of Giotto' to 'more natural and expressive composition' associated with Masaccio, and the completion of this evolutionary process in the person of Michelangelo. Unsurprisingly, Donatello and Ghiberti represent Florentine achievement in the third of the major arts.³⁰ Lorenzo's public career occupies chapters 2–8 and is continued in chapter 10, throughout all of which the political narrative is interspersed – and enlivened? – with the literary productions of Lorenzo and his associates. The visual arts rarely intervene, but the account of Galeazzo Maria Sforza's visit to Florence in 1471 nevertheless provides the occasion for a lengthy digression on Lorenzo as a collector of *objets d'art*:

Galeazzo observed with admiration the extensive collection of the finest remains of ancient art, which had been selected throughout all Italy for a long course of years, with

²⁷ *Opere di Antonio Raffaello Mengs primo pittore della maestà del re cattolico Carlo III pubblicate dal cavalier don Nicola d'Azara e in questa seconda edizione corette ed aumentate dall'avvocato Carlo Fea* (2 vols, Rome, 1787), vol. 1, p. 228.

²⁸ The concept of freedom in relationship to the arts was not completely new in Britain, as may be seen in G. Turnbull, *A Treatise on Ancient Painting* (London, 1740).

²⁹ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 2, pp. 194–9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 63.

equal assiduity and expense. He examined, with apparent pleasure, the great variety of statues, vases, gems, and intaglios, with which the palace of Lorenzo was ornamented, and in which the value of the materials was often excelled by the exquisite skill of the workmanship; but he was more particularly gratified by the paintings, the productions of the best masters of the times, and owned that he had seen a greater number of excellent pictures in that place, than he had found throughout the rest of Italy.³¹

Rather than weaving the visual arts into the wider narrative, Roscoe devotes an entire chapter – the ninth – to this subject; in so doing he breaks quite decisively with the model provided by Fabroni. In its basic layout, this brief art history adheres closely to Vasari, with the same emphasis on biographical concatenation (Cimabue, Giotto, Masaccio and so on). In addition to Vasari, the most frequently cited text is the *Etruria pittrice* of Marco Lastri, the first volume of which was published in 1791, the second in 1795. For Roscoe, a relatively sedentary scholar, the value of *Etruria pittrice* lay in its numerous reproductions of paintings, though he declares that it could be ‘much more valuable if greater attention had been paid to the engravings.’³² Lastri’s examples begin in the tenth century and, in Roscoe’s opinion, ‘bear conclusive evidence of the barbarism of the times, and although they certainly aim at picturesque representation, yet they may with justice be considered as rather perverse distortions of nature, than as the commencement of an elegant art.’³³ The reproduction of Guido da Siena’s *Virgin and Child* triggers Roscoe’s comment that it was not Cimabue who brought about a revival of painting, even if it is to Cimabue that we have to accord an extraordinary pictorial quality. Roscoe is fond of these clues: his aim is not to describe works of art but to show their development up to the age of Lorenzo, as a consequence of whose patronage the major arts attained perfection. Nevertheless, Roscoe has a very definite concept of art history. Stating the enthusiasm of the Florentines for Cimabue’s *Rucellai Madonna*, he relates some of Vasari’s passages and says:

but excellence is merely relative, and it is a sufficient cause of approbation, if the merit of the performance exceed the standard of the age. Those productions which, compared with the works of a Raffaello, or a Titian, may be of little esteem, when

³¹ Ibid., pp. 138–9.

³² Ibid., p. 176, n. (b); pp. 180–81 n. (b); p. 203, n. (b). The same critical note on the quality of Lastri’s etchings (in particular about Michelangelo’s *Battle of Cascina*, an ‘imperfect sketch’) was made by Fuseli: J. Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (3 vols, London, 1831), vol. 2, p. 83.

³³ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 2, p. 176.

considered with reference to the times that gave them birth, may justly be entitled to no small share of applause.³⁴

Roscoe identifies the masters with reference to their particular talents. Thus Masaccio embodies the ‘study of nature and actual observation’ and Paolo Uccello that of perspective; Filippo Lippi gives human figures ‘a boldness and a grandeur’ previously unknown, while Antonio Pollaiuolo focuses on the study of anatomy; Alessio Baldovinetti ‘excelled in portraits, which he frequently introduced in his historical subject’, and Andrea del Castagno was skilled in oil painting (but did not, as Roscoe claims, introduce it to Tuscany); Filippino Lippi gives ‘energy and animations to his productions’, and so on, up to Luca Signorelli, in whom ‘the most important excellencies’ are joined together.³⁵ Mechel and Lessing were Roscoe’s authorities on oil painting, but otherwise his assessments are supported by references to the works of Vasari and Filippo Baldinucci, both of which had recently appeared in new editions. There were two new editions of Baldinucci, one edited by Domenico Maria Manni and used by Roscoe, and the other by Giuseppe Piacenza. Also in evidence is Roscoe’s reliance on Lastrì in choosing which artists and works to feature: Lastrì, for example, had published the etching representing the *Eucharist* by Luca Signorelli in the cathedral of Cortona, which is mentioned by Roscoe.³⁶ However, Roscoe adheres to the scheme constructed by Vasari, in which Michelangelo is considered as the culmination of artistic development. Roscoe emphasizes his ‘*terribilità*’ with a corollary of references ranging from Richardson to Falconet and Mengs.

The final part of this chapter is devoted to the decorative arts. Roscoe traces the history of mosaic and Lorenzo’s failure to reintroduce it in quattrocento Florence. Then he turns to engraving, featuring Maso Finiguerra, Mantegna, Antonio Pollaiuolo and Marcantonio Raimondi, the greatest Italian engraver of the period. It is as an engraver that Botticelli makes his sole appearance, for Roscoe certainly did not anticipate that Botticelli mania which emerged in later nineteenth-century Britain. In addition to his own extensive collection of prints, his enthusiasm for this art had previously been expressed in a contribution to the

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 177–8.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 182–8.

³⁶ *Notizie de’ professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua per le quali si dimostra come e per chi le belle arti di pittura, scultura e architettura, lasciata la rozzezza delle maniere greca e gotica, si siano in questi secoli ridotte all’antica loro perfezione opera di Filippo Baldinucci fiorentino distinta in secoli e decennali. Edizione accresciuta di annotazioni del signor Domenico Maria Manni* (11 vols, Florence, 1767–74); *Notizie de’ professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua opera di Filippo Baldinucci fiorentino accademico della Crusca nuovamente data alle stampe con varie dissertazioni, note ed aggiunte da Giuseppe Piacenza architetto torinese* (6 vols, Turin, 1768–1820).

Dictionary of Engravers, edited by Joseph Strutt.³⁷ Finally, Roscoe addresses the 'revival of engraving on gems and stones'.³⁸

However, it is by reading Vasari that we can understand how Roscoe builds his overall picture of the visual arts. He certainly did not rate Vasari as a painter, but readily acknowledged the supreme value of the *Lives of Artists* as the most important source in studying artists of the relevant era: 'The early painters are fortunate in possessing an historian, who, without envy, spleen, or arrogance, and with as little prejudice or partiality as the imperfection of human nature will allow, had distributed to each of his characters his due portion of applause ...'; and if Vasari's favouritism for Michelangelo distorts the work as a whole, 'an excess of admiration for this great man will scarcely be imputed to him as a fault'.³⁹ From Vasari's *Lives* Roscoe not only retrieves information about artists, but also the exciting sense of relative proximity to his subject matter. The case of Andrea del Castagno clearly shows Roscoe's employment of Vasari, many paragraphs of whose biography of this artist document the attitude of the Florentine Signoria towards those who participated in the anti-Medicean Pazzi conspiracy in 1478. Thus Roscoe creates a narrative device which binds together the historical action and artistic production: 'the skill of the Florentine artists was exerted in soothing the feelings, and gratifying the curiosity of the public, by perpetuating the remembrance of the dangers which Lorenzo had escaped'. Roscoe then provides a discussion of works of art inspired by the conspiracy, thereby connecting the cultural and political facets of his subject's career. Still following Vasari, he recalls the wax figures of Lorenzo designed by Verrocchio and shaped by 'Orsini', together with the commemorative

³⁷ *A Biographical Dictionary Containing an Historical Account of all the Engravers, from the Earliest Period of the Art of Engraving to the Present Time ...* (2 vols, London, 1785–86; reprinted Geneva, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 1–3. See also LVRO 920 ROS 4732, Strutt to Roscoe, 8 October 1784.

³⁸ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 2, pp. 220–7. The paragraph on mosaic was duly quoted in the third edition of Luigi Lanzi's *Storia pittorica* (1809): 'Guglielmo Roscoe nella vita di Lorenzo de' Medici (t. IV, p. 49 ediz. pisana) racconta che questi si era prevalso di Gherardo Miniatore e di Domenico Ghirlandaio per lavorare mosaici nella cappella di San Zenobi, ma quel lavoro cominciato egregiamente restò in tronco per la morte dello stesso Lorenzo; così i suoi tentativi, riflette l'istorico, "riuscirono in qualche modo vani"; e quella gloria parve riserbata a Venezia': L. Lanzi, *Storia pittorica dell'Italia dal risorgimento delle belle arti fin presso al fine del XVIII secolo*, ed. M. Capucci (3 vols, Florence, 1968–74), vol. 2, p. 118, n. 1.

³⁹ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 2, pp. 180–81, n. (b). According to John Gibson, Roscoe declared: 'No one can be a greater admirer of Michel Angelo than I am; but, if you are to be a sculptor, I must remind you that there is but one road to excellence, and that is the road trodden for you by the Greeks, who carried the art to the highest perfection. Michel Angelo with all his powerful genius missed the purity of the Greeks': Lady Eastlake (ed.), *Life of John Gibson, R.A., Sculptor* (London, 1870), p. 34.

medals made by Antonio Pollaiuolo and reproduced in engraving at the beginning of the chapter. Closing this digression on artistic reactions to the *congiura*, Roscoe interprets the iconography represented on Pollaiuolo's medals: 'the conspirators are all represented naked, not merely for the purpose of displaying the knowledge of the artist in the human figure, in which he excelled above all his contemporaries, but, as some have conjectured, as being characteristic of the flagitious act in which they were engaged'.⁴⁰

If Vasari was the older source that Roscoe quoted most, among contemporary writers this role was filled by Henry Fuseli. Fuseli was bound to Roscoe by a close friendship: their correspondence was regular and enduring. Writing to Roscoe in February 1795, Fuseli reported that he had just completed a full reading of Vasari's *Lives*, highlighting those passages concerning Lorenzo. He went on to publish his personal views on the artistic content presented in Roscoe's biography, in two articles which appeared in the *Analytical Review* in April and December 1796.⁴¹ It is important to emphasize the role of Fuseli, because he played an integral part in creating Roscoe's art-historical analysis: as a 'dilettante' who wrote on visual arts without being able to practise them, Roscoe could not have ventured judgements on technical skill or artistic value, but his statements could appear much more solid if based on those of a 'professor' as highly regarded as Fuseli was in England at that time.

Thanks to the *Life of Lorenzo*, Roscoe enjoyed a pan-European reputation by the time he wrote his second Medicean biography and could count on numerous collaborators, including Italian correspondents such as Jacopo Morelli, librarian of the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice. The correspondence between Morelli and Roscoe conveys a sense of shared collaboration, but also reflects the pessimism of a time when Europe was fractured by war and international communications were particularly strained. After receiving Roscoe's *Life of Lorenzo* in 1803, when Venice was in Austrian hands, Morelli stated that such books can be written '*con più libertà fuor d'Italia, ma che non si possono affatto pienamente trattare senza grand'esame di biblioteche e di archivi d'Italia*' [with greater freedom outside Italy, but one cannot treat of it completely without extensive examination of its libraries and archives].⁴² By April 1804 the *abate's* lament was that '*l'Italia d'uomini eruditi sempre più diviene povera*' [Italy is becoming ever

⁴⁰ Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo*, vol. 1, pp. 199–200. Both medals were mentioned by Fabroni in his life of Lorenzo.

⁴¹ These essays were edited in Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, vol. 1, chap. 6, pp. 110–57. See also *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*, ed. D.H. Weinglass (Millwood, NY, 1982), *passim*, in particular Fuseli's letter to Roscoe, 15 January 1795, at p. 125.

⁴² LVRO 920 ROS 2744, Morelli to Roscoe, 10 August 1803.

more impoverished of scholars].⁴³ In August that year Morelli reflected at length on Roscoe's contribution to Italy's ailing scholarly community:

veggo il suo bell'animo nel dolore per la morte delli signori Bandini e Fabroni. Del secondo ora si vuole stampare un tomo postumo di Vitae italarum illustrium, e vi sarà aggiunta anche la sua, scritta dall'abate Lanzi autore della Storia della pittura in Italia; la qual opera pure ora si ristamperà con aggiunte copiose dell'autore. Peraltro, mio signore, si persuadea che gli studi di erudizione in Italia languiscono ... La sua storia di Leone X bene comprendo che ella la tratterà con imparzialità e con discernimento: ma è argomento astissimo, e che importa lettura di molti libri, e monumenti, quasi impossibile da essere veduti tutti, perché notizie singolari trovansi nascoste ne' manoscritti, o pure in epistolari, e libri di altro genere, che di storia ... Bramerei più ancora che tanta distanza non fosse tra noi, perché così le potrei comunicare molte più notizie le quali in mezzo a molte occupazioni, e senza aiutanti, io non posso né trascrivere né rintracciare.

[I perceive your sensibility in your sorrow on the deaths of the two gentlemen, Bandini and Fabroni. With regard to the latter, it is intended that a posthumous tome of *Vitae italarum illustrium* will be published, this to include his own life, written by Abbé Lanzi, author of the History of Painting in Italy; this work will now be reprinted with many additions written by Lanzi himself. Other than that, my dear sir, be it accepted by you that learned writings are perishing in Italy ... I am to understand that you will treat in an impartial manner and with discernment your life of Leo X; yet it is an argument of great import, that will require the reading of so many books, and inscriptions, that it will be almost impossible for you to see all of them, as curious notices are to be found in manuscripts, or in collections of letters, and in books on subjects other than history ... I dearly wish and most strongly that such a distance did not separate us, because I could then send you much more information which, in the midst of so much business, and without anyone to help me, I can neither transcribe nor trace.]⁴⁴

Though Fabroni had published his biography of Leo X in 1797, when Roscoe addressed the same subject he was much more independent of that model. Writing to John Johnson in 1802, he stated the goals of this new project:

⁴³ LVRO 920 ROS 2745.

⁴⁴ LVRO 920 ROS 2747, Morelli to Roscoe, 10 August 1804. One of Morelli's letters to Roscoe is published in *Illustrazioni storico-critiche di G. Roscoe alla sua Vita di Lorenzo de' Medici* (2 vols, Florence, 1823), vol. 2, pp. 113–14. See also Johnson's letters of 16 February 1803 and 22 March 1809: LVRO 920 ROS 2237 and 2238; H. Roscoe, *Life of Roscoe*, vol. 1, pp. 184–6.

With respect to the pontificate of Leo X everything that relates to it is of importance to me. Whether it concerns his political transactions and negotiations, his encouragement of literature and arts, his conduct both in public and in private life, in short whatever has any connection with his history or with that of any branch of his family.⁴⁵

The *Life of Leo* is a huge work that contains important material about the arts, most notably regarding the work of Raphael. The central role of this painter – and of the arts as a whole – is apparent in the engravings by Moses Haughton the younger, Fuseli's preferred engraver, which punctuate the earlier editions. The first depicts Leo X and is taken from a copy of Raphael's famous painting, 'late in the collection of Robert Udny', and considered to be by the master himself. Aldus Manutius, engraved from a painting by Bellini 'in the possession of Mr. Edwards of Pall Mall', opens the second volume. Martin Luther, from a sixteenth-century print by Heinrich Aldegrever, appears in the third volume. The fourth volume, which contains a lengthy digression on the visual arts, is introduced by an image of Raphael, derived from 'an original drawing in the collection of William Young Ottley'.⁴⁶ These four portraits illuminate the path of this long biography, which again takes the form of a history of Italy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, supplemented by a wealth of documentary material. However, Roscoe states in the preface that his new biography was not written merely:

to contain a very full and extensive account of the progress made during the pontificate of Leo X, in the departments of science, of literature, or of art; or of those very numerous and distinguished men, to whose writings and labours the reign of that pontiff is indebted for its principal lustre.⁴⁷

The centrality of the Medici family is still evident and provides obvious continuity with the Laurentian biography, as does Roscoe's treatment of the visual arts. Between the two works, he covers Italian history and culture during the period that duly became known as the 'Renaissance', and does so well before Michelet and Burckhardt. He pays little attention to works of art produced during the absence of the Medici from Florence between 1494 and 1512, even if they did include Michelangelo's *David* and the frescoes of the battles of Cascina and Anghiari commissioned from Michelangelo and Leonardo. The return of the Medici meant the revival of cultural patronage as Roscoe appreciated it, including

⁴⁵ LVRO 920 ROS 2236, Roscoe to Johnson, 1 November 1802.

⁴⁶ For Roscoe's correspondence with Haughton, see LVRO 920 ROS 1955–63. On 9 May 1812 both Roscoe and Ottley dined with Fuseli: *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*, p. 389.

⁴⁷ Roscoe, *Life of Leo*, vol. 1, pp. xii–xiii.

the organization of *fieste*: 'the vivacity and gaiety of the inhabitants returned, and the spectacles and amusements for which that city had formerly been remarkable, were revived'.⁴⁸ Roscoe explains: 'These exhibitions, first introduced by Lorenzo the Magnificent, were peculiar to that city and were intended to unite the charms of poetry with the most striking effects of picturesque representation' and were therefore usually inspired by episodes of ancient history. Again taking Vasari as his source, Roscoe describes in detail a Florentine *fiesta* of 1514:

Among those [artists] who distinguished themselves by the singularity of their inventions, was Piero di Cosimo, a Tuscan painter, who having made his preparations in secret, and engaged the necessary attendants, brought forth, in the midst of the public rejoicings of the city, 'The Triumph of Death.' This he represented by a car drawn by black oxen, and painted with imitations of bones and skulls, intermingled with white crosses. On the car stood a large figure of Death, armed with his scythe; and beneath, in the sides of the car, were openings representing sepulchres, from which, as often as the procession stopped, issued a troop of persons, who being clothed in black, and painted with white, so as to imitate the bones of the human body, appeared in the gloom of night like so many skeletons. These figures, seating themselves on the car, sung the verses written for the occasion by Antonio Alamanni ...⁴⁹

Then again, Roscoe is not blind to the political realities that effectively turned Florence into a police state in the second and third decades of the sixteenth century and acknowledges that 'festivals, triumphs, and exhibitions ... were doubtless intended to turn the attention of the people from the consideration of their new state of political degradation'.⁵⁰

Beyond Florence, the election in 1513 of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici as Leo X is presented by Roscoe in such a way that the feasts and triumphs with which it was celebrated provide a premonition of the splendour of his court:

the most beautiful works in painting and sculpture of which the city could boast, or which the ingenuity of talents of the Roman artists could produce, were exultingly displayed; and triumphal arches, with appropriate inscriptions, gave to the whole the appearance rather of the return of a Roman hero from conquest, than of the pacific procession of an ecclesiastical prince.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 146–7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 311.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 147.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 175.

Roscoe's treatment of the arts underlines the social function of artists. Not only were they men of genius, creators of celebrated paintings hanging in the main galleries of Europe; they doubled up as a sort of 'working class' in the life of Renaissance cities. It is clear that Roscoe's aim, as in the *Life of Lorenzo*, is to celebrate the extraordinary personality of his subject. From this pope, therefore, restorer of peace and promoter of the arts, comes the inspiration for a widespread revival in the quality of Rome's cultural patronage:

By the example of the supreme pontiff, who well knew how to unite magnificence with taste, the chiefs and princes of the Roman church emulated each other in the grandeur of their palaces, the sumptuousness of their apparel, the elegance of their entertainments, and the number and respectability of their attendants; nor can it be denied, that their wealth and influence were frequently devoted to the encouragement of the fine arts, and the remuneration of men of genius in every department of intellect. Soon after the creation of the new cardinals, such of them as resided in Rome were invited by the pontiff to a sumptuous entertainment in the apartments of the Vatican, which had then been recently ornamented by Raffaello d'Urbino, which have ever since been the theme of universal applause.⁵²

When Florentine and Roman traditions coincided on the occasion of Leo's triumphal entry into Florence in November 1515, Roscoe drew on Vasari to present it as a celebration of artists and their work:

At the entrance of the city was erected a triumphal arch, richly decorated with historical sculpture, the workmanship of Jacopo di Sandro, and Baccio da Montelupo. Another arch in the piazza di S. Felice was completed by Giuliano del Tasso; in which was placed the statue of Lorenzo the Magnificent ... The same artist also exhibited at the S. Trinità, a bust of Romulus and several beautiful statues, and erected in the Mercato nuovo a column resembling that of Trajan at Rome. Antonio da S. Gallo built, in Piazza de' Signori, an octangular temple, and Baccio Bandinelli placed in the Loggie a colossal figure of Hercules. Between the monastery and the palace a triumphal arch was erected by Francesco Granacci and Aristotile da S. Gallo; and another in the quarter of the Bischeri by Rosso Rossi, with great variety of ornaments and figures, and with appropriate inscriptions in honour of the pontiff. But the work which was chiefly admired was the front of the church of S. Maria del Fiore, which was covered with a temporary *façade*, from the design of Jacopo Sansovino, who decorated it with statues and *bassi rilievi*; in addition to which the pencil of Andrea del Sarto enriched it with historical subjects in *chiaro-scuro*, executed in such a manner as to produce a most striking effect; a mode

⁵² Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 138–9.

of ornament the invention of which is attributed, by Vasari, to Lorenzo, father of the pontiff, and which was highly commended by Leo X. who declared that the structure could not have appeared more beautiful if the whole had been built of marble. Many other works of art are commemorated by contemporary writers, some of which were executed from the designs of Baccio Bandinelli, and were displayed in such profusion as almost to fill the streets through which the pontiff had to pass.⁵³

As a non-Catholic, Roscoe could be suitably scathing about the papacy, but his criticism was more cultural than doctrinal: 'the papal power was, for a long course of years, almost uniformly devoted to destroy the remains of science, and the memorials of art, and to perpetuate among the nations of Europe, that ignorance to which superstition has ever been indebted for her security.'⁵⁴ Leo X was different. In Roscoe's interpretation, the collective benefit that came from Leo's cultural patronage influenced cardinals and citizens alike, generating well-being all round: in the golden age of the first Medici pope hunger was abolished, and the safety and happiness of his subjects secured.

As the engraving of Luther indicates, the Protestant reformers loom large in this work, with interesting implications for the visual arts. Although Roscoe was no papist, Leo's court is praised for providing the 'favourable concurrence of extraneous circumstances' necessary for the production of art, in contrast to which Roscoe sets the iconoclastic fury of Luther's more radical associate Andreas Karlstadt. Luther himself occupies the middle ground, battling unceasingly against sacred images but also mindful of the potential of the visual arts, especially in his employment of Lucas Cranach 'to satirize the Roman court in a set of figures representing the deeds of Christ, and of Antichrist; to which Luther himself wrote inscriptions.' Roscoe himself emerges as something of an Erasmian, condemning lewd and unseemly images, but interpreting the actions of the reformers 'not only as being an irreparable injury to the arts, but as depriving the people of one mode of instruction, not less calculated to interest their feeling and excite their piety, than that which is conveyed by means of speech.'⁵⁵

Following the model provided by the *Life of Lorenzo*, that of Leo contains a chapter specifically devoted to visual arts. It is the 22nd, placed after two

⁵³ Roscoe, *Life of Leo*, vol. 3, pp. 52–3. See also appendix, pp. 40–56, in particular Paride Grassi's notebook, Roscoe's publication of which followed the edition by his Florentine correspondent Domenico Moreni: *De ingressu summi pont. Leonis 10 Florentiam descriptio Paradisi de Grassi civis bononiensis pisauriensis episcopi ex cod. ms. nunc primo in luce edita et notis illustrata a Dominico Moreni* (Florence, 1793). I. Ciseri, *L'ingresso trionfale di Leone X a Firenze nel 1515* (Florence, 1990).

⁵⁴ Roscoe, *Life of Leo*, vol. 3, p. 139.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, all quotations at pp. 55–8.

chapters dedicated to literature, and identifies the first two decades of the sixteenth century as the chronological canvas on which so many distinguished artists made their mark:

The most illustrious period of the arts is that which commences with the return of Michel-Agnolo from Rome to Florence, about the year 1500, and terminates with the death of Leo X. in 1521. Within this period, almost all the great works in painting, in sculpture, and in architecture, which have been the admiration of future times, were produced.⁵⁶

Roscoe knew very well the limitations of a non-artist such as himself, and there is a very explicit note on the description of the Sistine Chapel in which he states: 'To describe this production in adequate language is the province of an artist only'.⁵⁷ Even so, he does not altogether avoid the relevant debates, such as that regarding the relationship between Michelangelo and Raphael and, in particular, how much the latter owed to the vision of the former. Demonstrating a confident grasp of the literature, Roscoe cites numerous authorities, including Vasari, Condivi, Giovanni Pietro Bellori's *Descrizione* of the Raphael Stanze, and the 'judicious' Lanzi, who writes 'with great judgment, but perhaps with too evident a partiality to Raffaello' in his *Storia pittorica nell'Italia* of 1792–96.⁵⁸ The significance of Luigi Lanzi for Roscoe is neatly underlined by the fact that the latter's son Thomas translated the work into English during his father's lifetime.⁵⁹ Roscoe also provides an ample quotation from Raphael's report on the antiquities of Rome, taken from the 1799 octavo edition of Daniele Francesconi, of which Morelli had informed him in a letter of 10 August 1804.⁶⁰ This, in turn, leads Roscoe into a broader discourse on the relationship of Raphael to the antique remains and his proposals for their preservation: 'These regulations were the means of preserving from destruction many remains of ancient art, which would otherwise undoubtedly have perished' and are obviously useful for Roscoe's demonstration of Leo's grandeur, even if ruins were sometimes reused in the construction of new churches in Rome, which is interpreted by Roscoe as a form of preservation.⁶¹ However, not even Leo entirely escapes censure, for Roscoe could not ignore his role in the destruction of

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 197–8.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 214, n. (a).

⁵⁸ G.P. Bellori, *Descrizione delle immagini dipinte de Raffaele d'Urbino nelle Camere del Palazzo Apostolico*, was first published in Rome, 1695.

⁵⁹ L. Lanzi, *The History of Painting in Italy: From the Period of the Revival of the Fine Arts to the end of the 18th Century*, trans. T. Roscoe (6 vols, London, 1828).

⁶⁰ LVRO 920 ROS 2747.

⁶¹ Roscoe, *Life of Leo*, vol. 4, p. 245.

old St Peter's: 'the ancient cathedral [sic] was demolished with an almost indecent rapidity, inasmuch, that many valuable remains of art, and representations and monuments of eminent men, were indiscriminately destroyed'.⁶²

As in the *Life of Lorenzo*, so in that of Leo X Roscoe arranges artists on a sort of biographical staircase, but in the second work he enters more deeply into the artistic debate of his age, especially the one deriving from Lanzi's *Storia pittorica* and classification of Italian artists by geographical schools (Roman, Florentine, Sienese and so on). Instead of merely listing these schools, he distinguishes the Roman as chief among them: 'without emulating the bold contours of the Florentine artists, or the splendid tints of the Venetians', the professors of the Roman school 'have united with chastity of design, an appropriate gravity of colouring, and displayed a grace, and a decorum, not less interesting than the more obtrusive excellencies of their rivals'.⁶³

His is a sensitive appreciation, behind which we can discern an eye trained in comparative observation, ready to recognize distinction beyond the qualities of a single master or a group of artists. This is evident in the general distinction drawn between Michelangelo and Raphael, in relation to which Roscoe inserts brief but precise digressions on Polidoro da Caravaggio, Giulio Romano, Sebastiano del Piombo and artists of lesser renown. Into this tapestry are woven Luca della Robbia and his technique of *terracotta invetriata*, Andrea Sansovino, and other masters, so that Roscoe gives us to understand that Leo was not seeking to establish a duopoly of Michelangelo and Raphael, but to create an environment of patronage from which all artists could derive benefit.⁶⁴ In two digressions about engraving technique such as *niello* and etching – which together constitute a brief history of engraving – Roscoe confirms his ability to read all types of art, always within a discourse of biographical reconstruction. For example, according to Roscoe, Andrea Mantegna 'gave stability and importance' to the art of etching, despite the distinctiveness of his style: 'All his prints are peculiarly distinguished by the shadows being formed by diagonal lines, which are always found in the same direction, and not crossed by other lines, as has since been practised'.⁶⁵

Roscoe's *oeuvre* was duly surpassed by other publications, above all Jacob Burckhardt's *Cicerone* (1854) and *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860), which signalled the opening of a new chapter in the study of cultural history. Though he was no connoisseur, Roscoe nevertheless made a unique contribution to establishing the position of art history in the wider realm of historical studies. His method of examining historical and artistic problems as part of an organic

⁶² Ibid., p. 205.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 234.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 253–7.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 261–2.

