Creating a Biography for Dürer: Heinrich Arend, *Memorial to the Honor of One of the Most Refined Artists of his Own and All Subsequent Times, Albrecht Dürer* (1728)

Abstract

Written in honor of the bicentennial of Dürer's death, *Memorial to the Honor…* was one of the first monographs about a single artist. The author, Heinrich Conrad Arend, was a Lutheran pastor who had closely examined numerous Dürer prints housed in the ducal library of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, now known as the Herzog-August Bibliothek. In addition to his own first-hand knowledge, Arend drew primarily on Sandrart's biography, which, in turn, had been informed by Neudörffer's *Nachrichten* and unpublished works by Dürer himself. This source is therefore significant for its place in the history of art. It also demonstrates how Dürer continued to be immortalized as a "great man" in the history of German art for centuries after his death.

Source

Memorial to the honor of one of the most refined artists of his own and all subsequent times, Albrecht Dürer, written around the time when he himself had departed this world around 200 years ago with particular appreciation for his service, by Heinrich Conrad Arend, preacher of the Free Communion Bergstadt Grund. Schottelius descript. Germ. p. 1164

This German man, Albrecht Dürer, has in many aspects never been equaled or surpassed in this world, as far as one can read or hear, but rather he was and remains the most incomparable in this respect. Goslar, by Joh. Christ His Majesty's Bookseller in the year of Christ 1728

§. 1.
It seems reasonable to me to consider virtue the center point of an individual, so that a whole life is drawn around it like a compass, so that those whose lives begin with an honorable birth have their natural end in the context of proper virtues in a blessed death, and thus the entire circumference of such a circle cannot be other than fortunate and good. I would hardly dare begin the present work with such an image—borrowed as it is from the realm of mathematics and resolved as I am to describe the most deserved honorable memory of one of the most refined artists of his own and all subsequent times—were it not for the fact that he himself whose life I take up here showed a particular inclination to mathematical sciences and thus makes the image appropriate. These thoughts carry me even further, however, and give me occasion not to examine but to imitate the attempts of some artists to fit the curve of a compass inside a proper square. If I were to contain the extensive contents of the short life to be described here—the circle around the center point of virtue—inside a proper square, the four sides would be designated: innate dexterity, ceaseless diligence, a honed sense of perception, and magnanimous sincerity. The preceding title page of the present work will have already revealed to the attentive reader the subject of my current study and thus relieved me of the need to declare that I wish to describe the life of Albrecht Dürer. It would have been fully adequate to give his name alone, for this itself is enough to attract the attention of admirers of his countless achievements. Nevertheless, I will add that he is one of the most refined artists of his own and all

subsequent times,[1] and, with that, I think I have mentioned everything, including that he was a painter, a maker of woodcuts, an engraver, and a sculptor and architect, as well as a minter of coins and a mathematician.

§. 2.

As a result, it shall surely be well worth the effort to collect trustworthy, reliable accounts of his origins, the many laudable achievements and artistic masterpieces, as well as other circumstances, and even more so considering how we Germans have been chided by other peoples for our negligence in not having described at length the life of such a great artist[2] and how little we have been able to find in our language on the subject aside from the passage in the incomparable work that flowed from the quill of the art lover Joachim Sandrart, which he calls *Teutsche Academie der edlen bau-bild- und mahlerey-kunst*[3] [*German Academy of the Fine Arts of Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting*]. Since this work, however, is so rare and expensive due to its copperplate engravings, which aim to do justice to a masterpiece by each of those artists most famous at the time, and is therefore accessible only to a hundred art aficionados, I shall content myself with the honor of setting my name under the biography of such a great artist, just as a stagecoach driver and a footman take pride in the reflected glory of having driven an important lord. We must, however, pursue the most important and prominent track, for which reason I refrain from any further elaboration and begin without ado, by relating the fact that our Albrecht first saw the light of this world[4] on May 20, 1471,[5] and it was the renowned town of Nuremberg[6] that was graced by the birth of this man who would go on to become equally renowned himself. The father of this accomplished child, who likewise bore the name Albrecht, was originally from upper Hungary, where his father Anton earned his living raising livestock and farming the land in the village of Eytas [Ajtós], not far from the small town of Eula [Gyula][7] and the city of Wardein [Oradea in present-day Romania].[8] When Anton observed, however, how the rural lifestyle was degenerating due to the lack of discipline of children, he resolved to remove his children from this unbridled life in the village while they were still of a delicate age. His oldest son, Albrecht, the father of our Albrecht,[9] was the first to test his father's strategy when he was sent to serve as apprentice to a goldsmith in the aforementioned town [i.e., Gyula]. Lasse, the second son, became a saddler, and Johannes, the youngest, by virtue of his academic studies, became a pastor in the aforementioned city of Wardein, where he famously worked for some thirty years.[10] The senior Albrecht, when he had learned everything he could from his master, believed that one could grow further in new surroundings, much like how coral reefs become harder out of the water and acquire new, more attractive shapes. It was in hopes of doing just this that he approached German soil in 1455, and, in the end, [reached] that workshop of all the entertaining and useful arts and handicrafts, namely, the city of Nuremberg,[11] which at the time was for artists what Athens had once been for scholars. Before setting out into this foreign air, he had decided for himself, during his planned travel, to give his heart to God, keep his eyes open and his wits about him at the annual trade fair, and so his business there could not develop other than in a productive and positive way: indeed, in the person of Hieronymus Haller [Holper], a renowned goldsmith, he [Dürer the Elder] found more than he had sought and expected in the aforementioned Nuremberg, for, having served as a journeyman in Holper's service for a long, but undetermined period, his services were rewarded with no less of an honor than [marriage to] Holper's daughter, Barbara. And although he was initially concerned that Barbara would seek to speak quickly with him using technical goldsmith jargon, in fact his sketches turned out so well that the conveyance of his title as master craftsman sounded very sweet to his ears. Our Albrecht [Dürer the Younger] was a witness that this marriage was as happy as it was fruitful, for, although there were two other witnesses before and fifteen after him,[12] it seems that nature here, as well, was subject to the saying that the truth is in the mouths of two or three adults, for of all eighteen children, only three lived, of which Albrecht was the eldest, as explicit evidence that nature, although it had deprived him of the privilege of being the firstborn, tried to make up for this omission as well as possible.

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NOTES

[1] Honorificentius quam omnes fere cæteri de hoc Alberto iudicat Isa. Bullart Academie des feiences et des arts T. II. L. 6. p. 383 vbi testator quod obtinuerit de soy mesme une connoissance si exacte de tout ce qui peut illustrer le crayon, le burin, et le pinceau, qu' il na pas feulement egale'les Romains, mais mesme les a furpossez en aucunes de ces chofes.
[2] Cui sane nemo Germanici Apellis nomen derogabit. Vnde Erasmus I. infra citando arbitrator: si nunc viueret Apelles, Alberto nostro quod cessurus sit huius palmæ gloriam.
[3] Antiquitatum hic atque elegantiarum technicarum promus condus fidelissimus prodire hunc librum fecit duobus magnis voluminibus, quorum primum Nurnb. prodiit 1675, postremum vero 1697.
[4] Turpiter ergo errat auctor libri gallici, quem inseripsit: Abrege le la vie des peintres, p. 347. editionis Parisiensis, quando temere scribit, die parasceves Durerum natum Suisse.
[5] Melch. Adami in Vitis Germ. Philos. p. m. 66 edit. Francos. in 8v.
[6] Turpiter ergo fallit Ge. Vasari vite de pittori P. III. p. 300. Antverpiam patriam statuens, & cum eo omnes, qui Flandriam appellant.
[7] alii Jula, alii Gula.
[8] Voradium, Bayle Dictionaire critique p. 1094. not. A. putat, Varadium scribe oportere.
[9] Ziegler in Schauplatz der Zeit p. 352. § 4. confundit patrem cum filio.
[10] Hæc omnia debeo Sandrart l. c. P. II. L. III. c. 3. p. 226 fqq. quem semel nominasse sufficiat.
[11] Gratulari sibi merito Noriberga debet de natiuitate tanti viri, id quod etiam Baldus hoc disticho insinuauit: Circulus Alberti solo carbone notatus Annulus est digitis, Norica Virgo, tuis.
[12] Omnes octodecim liberos nominat, et recenset alias huc spectantes circumstantias Sandrart l. c. p. 226. sqq.

Source: Heinrich Arend, *Das gedechtniß der ehren eines derer vollkom*[*m*]*nesten künstler seiner und aller nachfolgenden zeiten, Albrecht Dürers: uem eben die zeit, als er vor 200. jahren die welt verlaßen, aus besonderer verehrung vor deßen verdinste ans licht gestellet*. Goßlar: König, 1728, 5 [unpaginated]. Available online at: http://www.mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn=urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10915242-4

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