

B KULTURWISSENSCHAFTEN

Bild

Popularisierung

AUFSATZSAMMLUNG

- 26-1** *Populäre Bildkulturen der Vormoderne* : Prozesse der Produktion, Distribution und Rezeption / hrsg. von Ekaterini Kepetzi und Maria Männig. - Berlin ; Boston : De Gruyter, 2024. - VIII, 366 S. : Ill. ; 25 cm. - ISBN 978-3-11-117128-9 : EUR 99.95
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For decades scholars have been grappling with finding an adequate description or understanding of pre-modern popular culture. One's focus and understanding of what constitutes popular culture has long been, and will continue to be, determined by one's academic discipline and one's homeland. What someone from an Anglo-American tradition understands by "popular" may not be exactly the same as for a German, who sees a distinction between "populär" and "volkstümlich". As the editors readily recognize, there is no single sense of what popular culture is, for it is simply too wide-ranging. Even if one discounts inherent differences, there is still an insurmountable problem: a dearth of written evidence by common people from the pre-modern period. What has come down to us in written form is almost entirely from official records or from the writings of members of the political and ecclesiastical elites.

We are left with having to look at specific examples that may help to illuminate trends or underscore general connections, which taken together may give us a deeper understanding of pre-modern popular culture. This is the approach taken by the editors of the present volume, which is a collection of ten case studies spanning the period from antiquity to the late eighteenth century.¹ To their credit, the contributors to the volume have expanded not only the time frame but also the type of artefacts under investigation: there are fragments of Greek vase paintings, Roman sculptures and coins, medieval coins, religious statuary of the Renaissance, and early modern woodblocks used for printing.

A little over half of the book is devoted, however, to the study of prints. This is as it should be, for prints were the most widely disseminated popular artifacts of the pre-modern period. Popular prints have been a core component of our attempt to understand the world of common people in the early modern period, yet all too frequently scholars, schooled in the study of "high art", have long focused their attention predominantly on the artistic works of lead-

¹ Table of contents: <https://d-nb.info/1306931657/04>

ing printmakers such as Dürer, Rembrandt, and Van Dyck. This prejudice is to some extent understandable, for many prints aimed at an uneducated audience, especially those of religious content, have had a very low rate of survival. There were many publishers who made an adequate living for decades in a highly competitive market, yet now we have but a handful of prints as evidence of their existence.

The contributors in this volume are interested in a range of prints to illuminate their arguments. Some of these focus on historical events – the partial destruction of the Catholic citadel in Antwerp in 1577 and the surrender of Breda to the Marquis Spinola in 1625 – whereas others focus on comets, decorative prints from Augsburg, and the social commentary of William Hogarth's prints. It is a potpourri, but that then is actually the essence of popular culture, for it draws on a wide range of ephemeral interests, which at times, however, may continue to be of interest internationally for decades. In summary, this volume contains an interesting collection of essays focusing on pre-modern popular visual culture. As with all such studies, however, a clear understanding of what is "popular" remains elusive. Nevertheless, each attempt broadens our understanding. The volume is nicely illustrated, sometimes in color, and contains a wealth of useful bibliographical references for further detailed study.

John Roger Paas

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