

Tremors of the Renaissance

An enquiry into the lasting aftermath of one of the most iconic cultural movements of the world

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I. INTRODUCTION

While bearing great historic weight as a movement that changed the scope of the scientific advancement available to humans at the time, and characterised keenly by various advancements in realms like art, writing and sculpture, the term “Renaissance” however it a bit of a bottleneck that attempts to put paradigm-shifting advancements and major changes in the way popular thought as dictated into too narrow a box.

On the surface, one can attribute the time period from 1300-1600 as a period of ‘rebirth’ and reawakening of the much-revered Greek and Roman cultures that lay dormant till then. However, there is more to the process of rebirth than just an awakening. As with most other processes in history, this ‘rebirth’ or awakening also is a result of roughly half a century worth of cultural and social progressions which resulted in the same. The idea of ‘Renaissance Men’ being the “firstborns among the sons of modern Europe”¹ was one that could be seen not only among more modern writers, but also among pioneers of the time like Petrarch and Machiavelli to name a few.

This, however, warrants the question along the lines of whether the knowledge gained during this period began with an outright rediscovery of Greek and Roman knowledge or not; and even if so, then how and why was something that was present throughout get so lost that it needed rediscovery? As wonderful of a segue this is, into the debate around whether the so-called “Dark Ages” were indeed a period of degeneracy and decline, or was there advancement during this time too, but at a much slower and less ground-breaking magnitude? Progression in medieval studies have made scholarly endorsement for the latter very clear, and the fact that some scholars even argue that these processes were taking place in continuity, thus rendering terminology like “Dark Ages” and “Renaissance” mere hollow wording. That being said, factors like the collapse of the Western Roman Empire; and the overt presence of the all-controlling church that clamped down on exploration of new subjects, as well as circulation of knowledge aligning with clerical beliefs were among the key reasons used to stand by this nomenclature.

This temporal period, where discovery was taboo and blind adherence to the word of the Church became maxim might have been what led for a declaration of the middle ages as “Dark” by key literary figures like Petrarch. Furthermore, discovery of the self, distance from the clergy, booming economies in Italian city-states as well as the omnipresent system of patronages are key among the forces that led people to inquire further into the nature of society in the antiquity; and what was it that made civilisations like Greece and Rome achieve the level of greatness that they did. Thanks to this, and scholars’ newly acquired ability to now read languages like Greek and Coptic, original versions of texts like the New Testament could be read, and this allowed for two major breakthroughs:

- 1) They could juxtapose the original texts with what they were handed down from the Church and gauge how modified and convoluted the text had gotten along the way.
- 2) They could read the texts in entirety and realise that there was a critical flaw in the way these texts were used, wherein certain sections of the texts were used to substantiate certain claims, without any regard to the author, context or surrounding parts of the text.

Now equipped with an updated sense of critical thinking, these thinkers and writers were at a crossroads of whether to call for a society modelled after the old, or to use the values that held those societies together and create something new altogether². Reaffirming that the age they were born in was an age of decline, debauchery and degeneracy, they decided that a reorganisation of social order was much needed during

the time. The need of the hour was not something that carried over the same dogmatic processes of old, but something that was built for the changing times, and a model that was that was more universal in ways that it held a common set of values at its core and discarded practices like the despotism of the church, and disabled a single player (like the church) from obtaining absolute control over society. To these effects, institutions like the 'signoria' were put into place.

The effect of this learning was also threefold:

The first realm where the same could be felt was at the very top of the social hierarchy, wherein the paradigm shift from the word of God being the ultimate path to self-discovery. Using a combination of knowledge gained from both the ancients as well as one's own life and experiences allowed rulers to undertake measures that would ensure the area under them received acclaim far and wide, for both its economic prosperity as well as its intellectual prowess. This liberated them from a lot of restrictions that they would have faced under the church and allowed them more of a free hand at providing patronage to arts, literature and crafts.

Secondly, the effect of this departure from traditional notions was rather well received by were the actual scholars themselves. Humanist masters were now sought after for their wisdom and received employment at the highest levels of court where it was felt that their knowledge of the ancients and their own theorisations, combined, could help uphold a new kind of social order.

Finally, the impact of this widespread dissemination of knowledge was also felt by the general populace. With humanism going from being a wave to a legitimate school of thought with mass endorsement, it was also believed that withholding knowledge (like the church used to do) was wrong. That, combined with the advent of large-scale printing which was unprecedented at the time, made sure that through some way or the other, the masses had access to this literature, in translated or simplified forms if not the original texts. Moreover, people also published pamphlets that aired their personal opinions on social issues of the time. What this did was that it generated a multiplicity in the cross currents of information being circulated.

This circulation of knowledge, combined with the strategic location of the major Italian city states ensured that the trade networks flourished. The money coming in as profits from the various items Italy imported, as well as the money received as embargo payments from ports ensured that local economies of most major city-states flourished. This led to a surge in the availability of money, and by extension, a lot of items previously regarded as luxuries, were now available to the masses. Once people bought up these items of luxury, the next item on the agenda was being seen as people of culture. And this led to not just the ruling and financial elite, but also the demographic that we would term today as the "middle classes" investing in art and music. In a situation where supply meets demand, there was a steady crop of talented artists too, who now began pushing the envelope now that they had the creative freedom and means to ensure survival.

The result of all these processes was that at their peak, and amidst emergence of Italian universities in places like Padua and Bologna, the culture of Italy, (now termed as the culture of High Renaissance) gained acclaim far and wide. People from places as far away as Germany now began to slowly migrate to Italy. Initially they made the move for educational purposes, wherein their goal was to obtain advanced degrees in fields like medicine and law. However, being in Italy, and exposure to humanism and the learning associated with it broadened their worldview and introduced them to art, literature and forms of expression that they could not fathom existed. What this did is that it compelled them to stay, pursue their vocation and also dabble in art either by way of paying for commissioned pieces, or trying their hand at it themselves.

On this, a lot of scholars also claim that while revival of ancient knowledge was also a factor; a key factor that led to this diversity in art, and advancements in the aesthetic styles and sensibilities was also as simple as supply meeting an increased demand. The market for art was one that was relatively untapped, yet held a lot of promise. For the variety of reasons discussed above, there was a lot of money to be made from not just the wealthy, aristocratic sections, but also broader cross-sections of society. Therefore, one can also say that the monetary promise of an established artist making a comfortable living, and the sheer act of exhibiting something new in an already saturated market could also be among the reasons for a boom in the art market and artistic advancements as a whole.

The conversation about art gaining further recognition and diversity in terms of style and technique brings us to two paintings that will warrant a closer look at for separate reasons. The first is Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria; which was a commission awarded to Gentile Bellini, but completed by his brother Giovanni post his untimely demise, and the second is The Ambassadors, by Hans Holbein the Younger.

While the former keeps cultural reconciliation between the west and the east at its crux, and then also exhibits a canonical reverence to Saint Mark; which is, in some ways central to debunking the idea that the period of Renaissance was a period of rejection or straying away from god, or as some say, paganism.

Whereas, the latter looks at the aspect of renaissance that was characterised by an upsurge in scientific and technological advancement, and also brings the achievements of man to the foreground. A practice that was condemned by the church earlier as the word of god was considered supreme, and any form of scientific

advancement that did not conform or align with theology was condemned and the people who pioneered these advancements persecuted.

The purpose of selecting these two paintings was that they highlight two distinct sides of the movement that took place, and is an attempt to document both sides the “rebirth” or “awakening” that was the renaissance.

S A I N T M A R K P R E A C H I N G I N A L E X



Saint Mark preaching in Alexandria, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, 1505)

Awarded initially to Gentile Bellini, the commission of this piece fell to his brother Giovanni post Gentile’s sudden demise. Commissioned by the Confederacy of Saint Mark, this painting is first and foremost, a homage to Saint Mark himself, who is regarded as the patron saint of the city of Venice. But on a deeper level, this is also a nod to the city of Alexandria itself as an important centre of learning, and also a city with a prevalent culture of knowledge, tolerance and syncretism. The first indicator of this peaceful coexistence of a number of sects and identities is the congregation itself. At first glance itself, one notices people of three different beliefs, based solely on their attire, dividing the congregation into three broad sections.

Another noteworthy aspect of this particular painting is the layering of it. While a lot of paintings are composed, traditionally in a way where there is a foreground and a background; there is a much more nuanced pattern of layering that can be seen. The first layer is the congregation itself, then there is what appears of be a group of people going about their lives behind it. Then there are a few people walking exotic animals like giraffes, camels and horses. Then there is the three-domed structure, then the buildings that wrap around from behind the structure and extend all the way till the backs of the congregated. Furthest from perspective are what appear to be lighthouses, and behind them are a series of mountains.



(Three distinct groups in the crowd; Saint Mark preaching in Alexandria, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, 1505)

Going from left to right, the first section can easily be made out to be members of the Christian clergy on the basis of their clothing. More specifically, looking at some individuals, it can also be inferred that their garb is possibly Venetian or Florentine as juxtaposed from paintings and renders of important people of that era. The second section, arguably the one that brings forth some very divisive opinions could be constituted of women, presumably following Islam, judging by their veiled garb. However, a deeper inspection reveals that this group of women are not indeed followers of Islam. They are, however, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The square-topped veil-like garment is not the kind prescribed by Islam, many argue that it is a secular

garment (somewhat like a toga) made out of white wool, that could be worn over one's clothes for some added protection, and to loosely cover one's face.

The third section becomes incredibly obvious by way of the fact that their garb is very easily identifiable as Ottoman Muslims by way of their turbans and beards.

Along with showing that St. Mark was a greatly revered scholar, and people across social strata congregated to hear him speak, it also exhibits an aspect of interconnectedness that one typically associates with the Renaissance. With Italy being very forthcoming to trade with many distant lands, there were many connections formed with these lands. While mostly commercial, these links also fostered a broader cultural exchange that cut across borders. A key example of the same is how Gentile Bellini himself was sent by his Italian masters to the court of Sultan Mehmet II on loan, to produce artworks for the sultan. While Italy prided itself on these links, they were also highly beneficial for her. These very connections helped Italians gain a reputation, as well as allowed them to expand the basket of goods available to them via imports and also allowed for the banks and money houses to flourish from these movements of goods. Therefore, one can say that the connection to the East was as crucial to Italy as it was for the Easterners in terms of access to advanced financial and trading services. And this painting is often seen as an embodiment of that spirit of mutual respect and consideration. And amidst this, the Venetians were among the first Italians who sympathised with and opened up these links, and therefore, through the portrayal of St. Mark himself, and of the Venetian clergy, Venice is implied to be the bridge between the west and the east.

This becomes all the more important when we also consider the chain of events surrounding the death of St. Mark. Since the goal of an evangelist is to spread Christianity as far and wide as possible, Mark embarked on the same goal; however, the rulers of Alexandria resented his attempts to sway the people from the worship of their own gods and bring them under the light of Christ. It was then that he was executed by being dragged around the city, till he died. A jarring reminder of the same is a dark-robed figure standing beneath the pedestal, armed with multiple swords, heavy enough for decapitation. What adds to the canonical reverence of St. Mark is how calm he looks, possibly while preaching his last words.



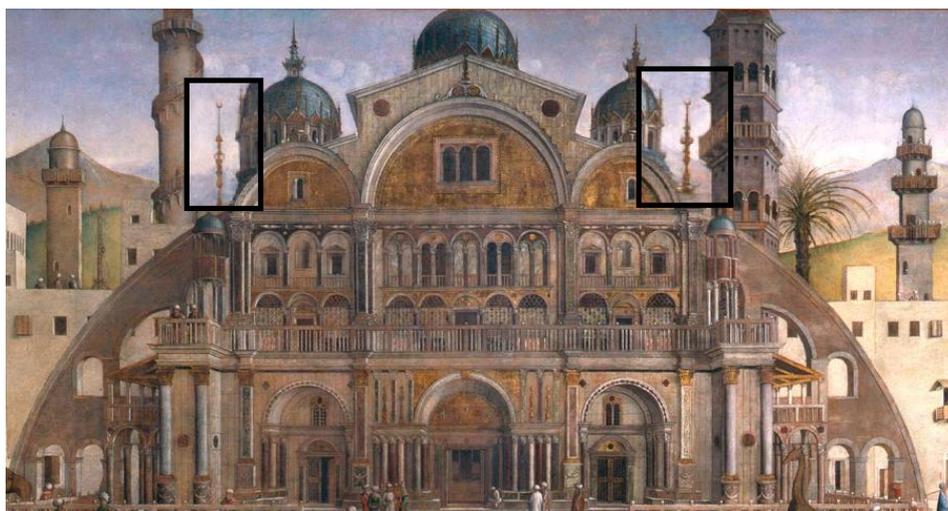
(The executioner of St. Mark; Saint Mark preaching in Alexandria, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, 1505)

Slowly moving behind layers of the painting, now turning our attention behind the actual congregation, the portico of the domed structure, here we are presented with a varied number of scattered groups of people, who seem to be bearing no interest in the actual congregation. They seem to be engaged in their own activities within these sparse groups. While nothing special, this connotes that in the city of Alexandria, being as cosmopolitan as it was, sermons and speeches of this order by representatives of various sects and religious order was not as uncommon as one might think. Moreover, on a closer look, one also sees elements like camels, horses and a giraffe, that one might assume are being traded. Painted by an Italian, these items bear a very strong element of exoticism since all of these are sights that were highly novel in their own realm. Bellini(s) use these elements to reinforce the fact that the surroundings of the paintings were in fact foreign if people could not make that out. This might also be a nod to the widespread trade of items that was taking place during the time.



(Various 'exotic' animals; Saint Mark preaching in Alexandria, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, 1505)

Now coming to the actual structure, which occupies a significant amount of the viewer's perspective, on first thought, one might just assume it to be a mosque, due to the usage of domes that characterises Islamic architecture. However, on reading into it, multiple contradictions arise. Only with some surface level reading, what we come to see is that this use of domes can also be found in many other structures, churches of the eastern orthodoxy included. So, we are led to question, what indeed is this structure? Is it a mosque? Is it an eastern orthodox church? Is it a shrine dedicated to the many gods worshipped by the local polytheists? Some argue that the crescents next to the two outermost domes might be characteristic of Islam, however, others also argue that these could be symbolic of the gods of the Egyptian or Greek pantheon, both of which use the crescent symbol excessively.



(Structure with multiple visual and symbolic cues; Saint Mark preaching in Alexandria, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, 1505)

However, all that being said, the one very striking feature of this structure is that it bears an uncanny resemblance to St. Mark's Basilica that is located in Venice. While this is not, in any way a hint suggesting that the structure in the picture is, indeed a church, but it might be a means employed by the artist to induce some familiarity within the viewers and make them associate the structure to St. Mark in some capacity or the other. This was mostly speculated to be done because of the fact that most venetians would not have been familiar with the landscape of Alexandria, but however, would be able to place the church of St. Mark. Moreover, since the

commission was indeed made for the confederacy of saints that held St. Mark to be their patron, this visual nod feels more appropriate and well placed.

The next on the list of items that hold a lot of potential symbolism are an obelisk and a lighthouse. While in Alexandria, being a port city, a lighthouse would not be an uncommon sight, this specific lighthouse, however, bears special symbolism. The lighthouse (pictured below) is said to be a (albeit crude) reconstruction of the fabled Lighthouse of Alexandria. This specific lighthouse was said to be among the tallest structure built by man in the ancient world, and is often mentioned in a plethora of ancient texts and is also regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The much-fabled lighthouse was said to be a beacon of hope for a lot of seafarers who would be seeing some semblance of land after extended periods at sea. Built by the Ptolemaic king of Egypt, the lighthouse also serves as a symbol of reconciliation between Egyptian and Greek cultures. Also, to be noted is the tower-like minaret next to the lighthouse, which seems to be from a mosque and one of those towers from where the Muslim call to prayer is announced.

The obelisk, also built by Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III could be considered homage to the Egyptians as progenitors of much of the knowledge valued at the time, somewhat similar to the high regards held for the Greeks. Moreover, it too could be a symbol of the cultural fluidity and syncretism that characterised the spirit and people of the city of Alexandria



(L to R- Rendition of the Lighthouse of Alexandria, Call tower of Mosque, and obelisk made by Thutmose III; Saint Mark preaching in Alexandria, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, 1505)

The next interesting feature, although very subtle, also add to the element of exoticism or giving a sense of the ‘foreign’ to the viewers of the painting, who would be Venetians who knew nothing or next to nothing about the cities of the East and the way of life there. These would be the slatted window-covers that characterise a lot of architecture that can be found even today, in cities like Cairo and other Arab cities of the time. While these were for mostly cosmetic purposes, they also ensured that the windows were protected from the public eye and not a lot of people could see what was going on inside. While the detail is very subtle, and does not make a difference to the overall aesthetic sensibilities of the work, it nevertheless is a very nuanced touch that warrants a mention.



(Arabic-style latticed window covers; Saint Mark preaching in Alexandria, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, 1505)

The last bit, that would lead us to conclude the analysis of this painting would be the actual landscape. The farthest view from the centre, the bit beyond the skyline of the city: the mountains. While a lot of people might as well just accept the painting's perspective at face value, we however know that that is untrue. Being near the sea, the city of Alexandria was, indeed, located on a plain area and these flats did not have any mountains nearby. While some consider this a factual inaccuracy, many consider this as a means by the Bellini brothers to conjure up imagery of a new city. One that is neither Venice, nor Alexandria. One where everyone coexisted peacefully and cultural influences were fluid. One where everyone was respected for what they were. This technique of employing a dreamscape that fuses elements from real world locations and gives them a wholly new characteristic was relatively unknown during the time, but one that has seen a lot of use subsequently. Moreover, this can also be seen as a means of embodying the true renaissance spirit of cultural harmony and mutually beneficial interaction.

T H E A M B A S S A D O R S



The Ambassadors, Hans Holbein the Younger, 1533

On first glance this painting is just two men, looking rather grim, standing next to an array of items that represent a varied set of interests, or a scatter of random items. However, there is a lot more to the same than that. There are multiple levels to analyse this painting, and instead of following a method where it would serve a better purpose when separating the elements and individually analysing them; what we would attempt to do with

this painting is look at the whole of the same, with varying levels of scrutiny and a gaze where the level of detail and analysis of the same is stepped up with each progressing subsection.

I

At the very beginning, on a rudimentary look at the surroundings, and some moderate reading one gathers that the floor the two men are standing on, it is situated inside the Westminster Abbey, with the floor being a characteristic feature of this location. This tells us that the two characters were in England when the painting was made at the time. Also, on the floor is a smear, that has elicited much controversy. However, on changing perspective, the viewer comes to notice that this smear is indeed the anamorphic image of a skull and it can be viewed on looking from the right-most edge of the painting (pictured below).



(Anamorphic image of skull; The Ambassadors, Hans Holbein the Younger, 1533; National gallery, London)

This portrayal of a skull might also be considered a nod to a genre of paintings popular at the time called ‘memento mori’ that was characterised by a plethora of objects with a skull placed alongside. These paintings were supposed to be a reminder of the transience of human existence and a constant reminder of how imminent death was.

Moreover, the drapes behind the two men also seem to be heavy and lush, showing that the waiting room where they were allowed to be was one that was one that was richly decorated and meant for receiving important guests, also implying that these two men were men of importance and high rank.

To add to the background, we also see, to the top left corner, a crucifix that symbolises salvation. This, when seen with the anamorphic skull becomes a reminder to strive for salvation in the face of death. The crucifix also seems to serve as a reminder that death for all is inevitable; however, a life that is spent following the ways of and in service of the Lord is a life that is well spent and a life that people will remember, even after the person’s death. This serves as a direct contradiction to the memento mori element on the floor. Needless to say, this contradiction is only one among many that can be observed within the painting.

II

Moving on from the surroundings, now we can direct our focus our attention on the two men themselves.

On first glance itself what is revealed is that the man on the left is a man of riches and influence and is at some position of importance, as suggested by his more commanding posture and his attire, which is among the most expensive finery that money could buy at the time. He is also portrayed as a man of quick wit and a

man of action, as shown by his hand on resting on his dagger, ready for action. The pendant on his neck indicated that he belongs to an order of high-ranking French knights. The marking on the globe on Polisy (which was the home of the Dinteville family) reveals that he is Jean de Dinteville who was aged 29 at the time. By virtue of the chronology of the painting and the political situation in England at the time, it seems only logical that Dinteville was sent to England as an envoy of King Francis I of France to keep Henry VIII in check and to ensure that the annulment of his marriage to Queen Catherine did not materialise and the status quo of the time was kept intact.

The second man, is established to be Georges de Selve. Without even knowing much more about him, one can guess from his attire itself that he was a cleric. However, also being an occasional diplomat, de Selve occupied an important place in the church and was subsequently appointed as the Bishop of Levaux in France. What we can gather till here is that de Selve was also an envoy to England, but sent from the Vatican. What could be de Selve's goal was to spark some sort of reconciliation between Henry VIII and the Catholic Church, thereby either entirely preventing or severely reducing the impact of the religious schism that was accompanied by the leap to Protestantism. This could be entirely plausible too, considering how it was a large part of what de Selve did for the church, trying to stem the tide that was breaking away from the Catholic Church and embracing the newly popular Protestant values. From the picture itself, de Selve is shown to be a much more contemplative and thoughtful person, and not the man quick to action, like his friend Dinteville. That being said, his robes also reflect the degree of influence he held, as even though they are austere, the make and material of them is very fine and expensive.

III

Directing our attention to the actual array of items, what comes to immediate notice is the fact that the items are arranged in two tiers.



(Instruments showing man's attempt to chart the skies; The Ambassadors, Hans Holbein the Younger, 1533)

The top tier contains items that characterise more 'heavenly' pursuits. This set of items correlate directly with the effort of man to chart the skies and decode the mysteries around it. Items like the celestial globe, the sundial, the torquetum (an instrument used to measure horizontal, equatorial and elliptical coordinates) serve as a symbol of greater scientific enquiry and a thirst for knowledge that was at an unprecedented scale. All these items also are a symbol of man's renewed effort and the new knowledge that this effort brought forth. The purpose of this set of objects, as a whole is to bring to the forefront, the achievements of man and send out a twofold message: firstly that all these are just vanities of the human life before death takes us all away and secondly, and in contradiction, that these achievements will live on, despite the actual death of the person. All these celestial objects also symbolise the fact that scientific advancement has no limit, not even the sky.



(Instruments showing man's earthly pursuits; The Ambassadors, Hans Holbein the Younger, 1533)

The second set of objects indicate towards the 'earthlier' ventures of man. The terrestrial globe bears a lot of significance here, since it has Polisy marked on it, which in itself is a small chalet, however it also held a very important clue as to the identity of Jean de Dinteville as he had the location of his home marked on the globe. Moving on to the other element, there is a lute and a set of flutes, symbolic of the relationship between music and culture of the Renaissance. However, on looking closer at the same, one can see that one string of the lute is broken, and one flute from the flute case is missing. These subtleties could be interpreted as a symbol of discord setting in, and something being amiss. The open book seems to be a hymn-book that contains Lutheran hymns. This might be a nod by the painter to the wave of Protestantism that was slowly taking over Western Europe after Martin Luther and his ideas about how religion should be, were propagated. The other book is a math-book that contains mathematical sums, possibly something along the lines of double-entry bookkeeping, which was a method that was credited with singlehandedly changing the way accounts were kept. This second set of objects, then, appears to be the objects that man would use to bring order to his life on Earth, and characterise the earthly and more humble pursuits of man, like regulating finances, playing and listening to music, and his religious activities.

IV

The last perspective with which we look at the painting would be the from amidst the socio-political happenings of the time, in England. Post the Protestant wave gripping large areas of Western Europe, Henry VIII thought it would be a good idea to break away from the Catholic church in the Vatican and establish the Church of England, based on Protestant principles. This was also, in part due to the convenience that this shift would allow him to annul his current marriage and marry Anne Boleyn, solely because his present wife could not give him a male heir. This was a major trigger for the catholic church, for they had a lot of land in their name in England, and also owned a lot of the land upon which monasteries were built.

This ensured that there was a large influx of money into the papal coffers, coming in from England from tithes, revenues off these lands, and money generated by the monasteries. More importantly, the Church would lose a significant power that it could rally to its support when it needed. This is what made the presence of envoys like Dinteville and de Selve important, as they were sent to England to make sure that the rift between the Catholic church and the English monarchy does not take effect and that the damage is controlled without facing too much of a loss. Moreover, this role of being ambassadors can also go some ways in explaining their grim and nonplussed expressions. Another reason for the same could be that this painting was made after Henry married Anne Boleyn, cementing the theological rift between the English monarchy and the Catholic church, and effectively resulting in the failures of the missions that both Dinteville and de Selve were sent to England for.

All that being said, the technical aspect of the painting is also impeccably done, wherein the furs, the tassels, the handle of the dagger, the pages of the book, all of these are so beautifully rendered that they have an almost tactile feel to them. This painting, a veritable masterpiece, highlights a unique aspect of the renaissance wherein it was characterised by an unprecedented upsurge in scientific advancement, but simultaneously, there was also an increased commercialisation of the church and the church officials became wielders of money and power, leading to counter currents like the Protestant strand of thought emerging and taking the area by storm.

At a glance then, the selection of the two aforementioned paintings is a very pertinent reminder that the Renaissance was not just a phenomenon or a movement confined to Italy. What one needs to understand is that the Renaissance was not just one of those 'movements' that happens often on a very short trigger. It was a result of years of processes, both economic, political and cultural. Which is what makes pinpointing a single phenomenon or incident as the "flashpoint" or the "catalyst" of the Renaissance very difficult. The flourishing

trade of Italy, its prime location, the upcoming of various schools of humanism, the Protestant wave, all of these were factors that changed perspectives, and added to popular knowledge. However, just attributing the Renaissance to these factors, is also limiting.

With the power of the papacy assuming an all-encompassing nature, the close intertwining of religion and politics is also a key factor in the sheer spread of the knowledge and new theological ideas. The undercutting of clerical knowledge and misquotation of ancient texts was also a practice that met its end during this time. With greater knowledge and much more depth, as well as more detailed translations of the ancient texts, which were much revered were also achieving greater circulation, thanks to the printing press.

Moreover, people were also printing out pamphlets and airing their own personal opinions on a slew of different topics from politics to trade to art. All these attempts at circulating knowledge led to the emergence of a more cosmopolitan society that laid an emphasis on the creative side of human expression; be it art or music or theatre.

Now, drawing an immediate parallel would be difficult but it would be very safe to assume that the far reaching effects of the Renaissance, or, if I may say, its tremors were felt not just within Italy, but also as far East as Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire, and even up to Northern Europe and England.

Which makes both the above analysed paintings prime examples of how far reaching these tremors were, and the large degree with which they were felt. Therefore, to simplify it to a level that would be painful, one might as well say that the Renaissance was a result of widespread economic prosperity among large sects of Italy, and the widespread degeneracy that the middle ages were *perceived with* during the time; and the Renaissance was a movement aimed at breaking away from the dark and lawless times of the past. Effectively, under popular perception, this makes the Renaissance an attempt at moving forward to a model of society where everyone possessed knowledge and culture; and society was based on a model wherein the values of the ancients were imbibed, and new thought was also fostered. However, saying that would be reductionism at its peak, and the processes that culminated in these developments were ones that were active since a fair amount of time, and this was just the culmination of the same.

To close, I would like to echo the words of political scientist P.J. O'Rourke, saying that "not much was invented during the Renaissance, if you don't count modern civilisation". With this I rest my little inquiry with hopes that it was a fair attempt to study the Renaissance and reinforce its importance and value to society, even today.

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