Threlfall-Holmes is better served by the series of bursar and obedientiary rolls at Durham, from which she extracts the priory's consumption of wine and spices during the late fifteenth century. Even if the former had apparently halved since the earlier part of the century, a daily average (including fast days) of 1.1 pints seems liberal; nor was the quantity reduced when the price rose. These were upper class victuals, and the role of food as a status symbol is the theme of Christopher Woolgar's close examination of two aristocratic household accounts. Not only were very substantial portions served – considerably in excess of the average daily energy requirement – but much time and ingenuity were devoted to presentation, at least on the lord's table, where appearance was deemed more important than taste and texture. Feasts could be political statements, as was that for Archbishop Neville's enthronement in 1465 on which Woolgar promises a further study. In the concluding paper, Peter Fleming revisits the debate on the acceptable face of oligarchy in the medieval town, contrasting the official portrayal of benign mayoral rule in *Ricart's Kalendar* with the exemplars of tyrannous officials in the Towneley Cycle and some vitriolic castigation of employers in popular verse. In his introduction, Michael Hicks adeptly draws out the themes of this diverse and rewarding volume, rightly observing that it reflects the vigour and debate of late medieval studies.

Magdalen College, Oxford G. L. HARRISS

The Gubbio Studiolo and Its Conservation. Vol. I: *Federico da Montefeltro's Palace at Gubbio and Its Studiolo*, by OLGA RAGGIO; Vol. II: *Italian Renaissance Intarsia and the Conservation of the Gubbio Studiolo*, by ANTOINE M. WILMERING (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999, pp. 222; pp. 263. £85).

THESE volumes examine in detail what, when acquired for $32,500 in 1939 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, was claimed as 'unquestionably one of the great historical and artistic documents of the Italian Renaissance' (I, p. 3), and secondly its restoration, euphemistically termed conservation. This artefact is the main remnant of the studiolo (private study) commissioned by Federico da Montefeltro (1422–1482), duke of Urbino, K. G., for his Gubbio palace, that second only to Urbino in his state. Illusionistic intarsia (marquetry) extends to approximately half the room's height, topped with a wooden frieze painted blue, its Latin inscription gilt (blue and gold were Montefeltro colours); there is also the room's goffered and painted ceiling and that of identical design from over the room's window alcove. After ten years' restoration these components were put on display once more in 1996. The boxed set under review is in effect the exhibition catalogue, luxuriously produced, prodigal in its high-quality colour plates (there is some duplication); each volume's text is supported by end-notes, a prodigious bibliography (again some duplication) and index. Dr Raggio introduces the first volume with new material on the room's vicissitudes prior to acquisition. Its display is explained in the light of losses over half a millennium, notably of its paintings, originally over the frieze, and at no time described (fortunately something of their general nature can be deduced from the frieze inscription). From two previously unknown primary documents (not published) Raggio establishes that these paintings on panel – their number

unspecified – were removed in 1673 by their Medici owners (I, pp. 157, 159, 163). Thereafter, appositely, the room's original artistic unity is examined. A key factor, the focus of the display, is the intarsia's *trompe l'oeil*, investigated in Martin Kemp's concluding chapter. The second volume by Dr Wilmering, the conservator, admirably sets this marquetry against other intarsia of the period in the region. Revealingly he shows how intarsiatori worked dyeing, cutting and glueing wood for illusionistic effect (II, pp. 145–7). The fifteenth-century craftsmen are compared to those of the nineteenth century, who, in restoring, tended to replace rather than preserve damaged elements. This underlines two fundamental questions. How faithful is the display to Federico's work of art? Is the supporting text of the two volumes reliable and adequate?

The artefact displayed comprises the components removed from the Gubbio palace in 1874, when over three years the intarsia in particular was restored and altered to fit another room (though never installed), that of the window and its alcove area especially being modified: a plan reveals this (II, p. 145). In 1888 Adolfo Venturi, the Ministry's inspector, deemed the marquetry 'largely renovated so that only a few traces remain of the original parts' (I, p. 5). Yet on the basis of how the original wood was cut and dyed, Urbino's study's marquetry (completed by 1476) is assigned to the team of Bacio Pontelli, that of Gubbio to the workshop of Giuliano da Sangallo, claimed to have been executed in Florence, and assembled in the Gubbio study only about 1483 (I, p. 11). Certainly this date conflicts with other testimony, characteristically not mentioned, and is untenable. It is based on interpreting two features of what (through arguing in a circle) is stated to be the last panel crafted: that of the alcove to the window's right (II, frontispiece). There a lectern bears Virgil's *Aeneid* open at the passage telling of young Pallas' death outside besieged Troy, following a man-to-man encounter with Turnus; close by is a mirror inscribed: G.BA.LDO.DX. It is concluded that these features provide: 'a compelling allusion to Federico's recent death' in September 1482, and Guidobaldo's accession to the duchy, adding for good measure: 'this panel undoubtedly [was] commissioned by Guidobaldo's tutor, Ottaviano Ubaldini' (I, pp. 151–2, where regent is intended, the tutor being Lodovico Odasio). Any supposed comparison of Federico's death to that of Pallas would have been most inept, as sixty-year Federico died of malaria in Ferrara's ducal palace, not in battle and distant from any campaign. The passage's purpose was to stress that military valour was the way to fame and immortality, exemplified in Federico's highly successful career, as emphasized by his accoutrements of war in the marquetry. It echoes a quotation from Virgil in the intarsia of the Urbino study, plausibly identified as such in 1986 by Luciano Cheles. Then, too, Cheles suggested the mirror and its inscription were intended to be viewed as an oxymoron: Baldo (boldness)/Prudenza (prudence, a mirror's attribute), epitomized in the heir to the duchy, Guidobaldo, born in Gubbio, the Baldo of his name consciously taken from Gubbio's patron saint. The title of 'Dux' in the inscription was of courtesy, not comparable in usage to 'king' in its implication, perhaps as Raggio supposes. It must be remembered that the publication is intended for a mass audience, not scholars; a self-assured text ignores anything that conflicts with what is advanced, as the above example illustrates.

The volumes tend to gloss over the fact that little has changed in the arrangement of the component parts of the 1996 display, as against that of 1941. For that of 1941 floor-tiles were specially made, copied from those in the Urbino

study. The latter are late sixteenth-century, replacing original wood (I, p. 83), but they remain in the current exhibition (I, p. 9; II, p. 141). It was appreciated when purchased that the post-1874 alteration rendered the design of the window and its immediate surround – the alcove – problematic (I, p. 7). Today they remain as reconstructed in 1941, save that the ceiling has been placed higher, and the frieze inscription runs above the window (I, p. 9; II, pp. 141, 152–3). Reconstructing loss to this inscription (evident by the 1560s, probably through damp, as the window faced northeast) is limited to a short note where reference is to an unpublished paper (I, pp. 72, 186 n. 28). There are two photographs (from the same source) of an intarsia panel 'once below the window of the Gubbio studiolo', seemingly one of two lost in transporting the artefact from Venice to New York in 1939 (I, pp. 8–9, 181 n. 30; II, p. 148). The illustration in volume II shows the small lost panel from below the window as next to what apparently, when photographed, was the main right-hand panel of the alcove; this latter is not the right-hand alcove panel as assembled in 1941 and in 1996 (II, frontispiece). No such loss below the window is hinted at in the current display.

The window's size at the time the intarsia was installed is crucial, affecting the lighting of the artefact and the wall-space available. Of prime concern are two existing small windows above and to the right and left of the main window, hence of consequence for the location of painted panels above the frieze (I, pp. 84, 165, a drawing of the inside wall showing the three windows, the two small ones unblocked in 1984; II, p. 105, a photograph of about 1984 showing a detail of the interior wall; I, p. 60, a photograph post-1984 showing the three windows taken from outside the palace). Though this issue was raised as a vital factor several decades ago, nowhere here is it even hinted that measurements of the intarsia *in situ* taken in 1873, like those of the shell of the room taken in 1940 (I, pp. 7, 10), may not be a reliable guide for the main window's original size within the studiolo. Structurally the window existed as a feature of the medieval Palazzo della Guardia (donated for the palace). It is not documented when this window was much reduced in size, though the implication of the current display and the publication is that it was blocked off at the time of the intarsia's installation, when the two small windows were created, resulting in particularly ugly exterior apertures (inconsistent with Duke Federico's taste). Moreover the full extent of the medieval window outside was framed in the style of Francesco di Giorgio, who designed the study. It is reasonable to suppose the window's interior size was commensurate with that outside frame (otherwise the outside frame would have conformed to the reduced window-size). The implication of this large window is that the two small windows would have been unnecessary for lighting the study and are a later feature. In the prevailing war conditions of 1940 the Museum relied on a report from Gubbio that claimed the two small blocked windows were an original feature of Federico's study (I, p. 10) and this determined the small reconstructed size of the main window (corresponding, of course, to that in 1940 and now). Accepting the small windows as likely to be a post-1673 modification, consequent on reducing the size of the main window because of damp (I, p. 93), the problem of placing the series of Seven Liberal Arts over the frieze is resolved. Of the four known of the series, only two exist (National Gallery, London), and are assigned to Justus of Ghent and his workshop, late 1470s. Their subject is in accord with the inscription, and the series can be arranged over the seven main cupboards in the marquetry. Ordered

so the painted listing of Federico's honours and titles at the head of the known panels reads in correct sequence, in each panel the shadow cast by the source of light would correspond to that in the marquetry below, consistent with the artistic unity of the Urbino study (this is not the case in Raggio's proposed scheme, I, pp. 164–5). There would be space for the associated panel of Federico and his son listening to an oration, likewise by Justus, and its original wall-attachments are like those of the Liberal Arts panels. This was proposed in 1967, but ignored by Raggio. What of the document of 22 May 1477, issued by Francesco di Giorgio to an artisan? The requirement was painting the room's free wall-space plum-coloured, the frieze blue and its lettering gilt. The room was clearly defined as the 'Camera sui Ill. Dom.' (the duke's room). Evidently this task could only be undertaken when the rest of the room's artistic features were in place. This clashes with Raggio's dating of 1483, so she dismisses the document as irrelevant on the grounds that the private study was never referred to as 'Camera', but must have denoted the duke's bedchamber (I, pp. 154–5). Leaving aside the necessity to postulate another otherwise unknown room in the palace decorated with a frieze and inscription, the claim regarding 'Camera' is entirely erroneous. Contemporary primary evidence brought forward in an article of 1995 (listed in the bibliography but otherwise ignored) testifies that 'Camera' was indeed used for Duke Federico's study. Inevitably doubts exist regarding the authenticity of the display, while its supporting publication has significant imperfections.

University of Liverpool CECIL H. CLOUGH

The Ambassadors' Secret: Holbein and the World of the Renaissance. By JOHN NORTH (London: Hambledon, 2002; pp. xix+346. £25).

GENERATIONS of art historians and codebreakers have sought to fathom the meaning of Hans Holbein the Younger's enigmatic double-portrait of Jean de Dinteville, bailly of Troyes, and Georges de Selve, bishop of Lavour, commonly known as *The Ambassadors*. They have read it as a document of diplomatic and religious history (as an allegory of Reformation discord), or of popular piety mixed with personal biography (a complex *memento mori* reflecting Dinteville's maudlin world-view). John North seeks to overturn such conclusions with a reading that, while perhaps closer to the latter than he acknowledges, is both simpler and infinitely more complex than anything previously offered.

There is a lot of introductory material, most of it necessary, and all of it informative. Separate chapters introduce Holbein himself, the sitters, and Nicholas Kratzer, the astronomer, mathematician, and Henry VIII's instrument-maker, seen by North as the painting's true designer. The book then proceeds by careful stages, through extended argument with the real or imagined objections of art-historians, towards the revelation of the Northian thesis. There is something of an intellectual tease to all this. Hints of what is to come are repeatedly dropped to keep the reader hanging on, but gradually the destination of the argument becomes clear.

North demonstrates that, contrary to received wisdom, the astronomical and horological instruments depicted are not simply props in a portrait with still life. They are neither broken nor awry (symbolic of 'time out of joint'), still less