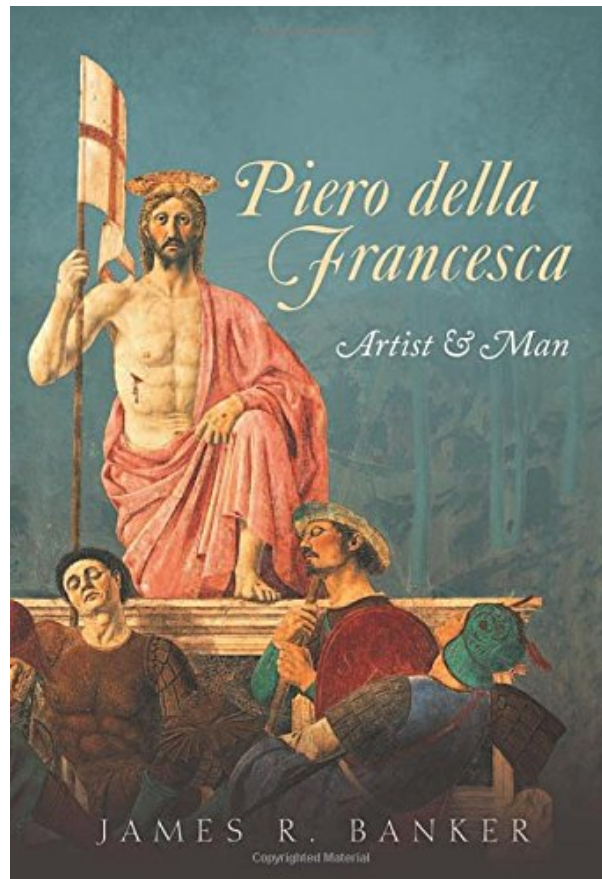
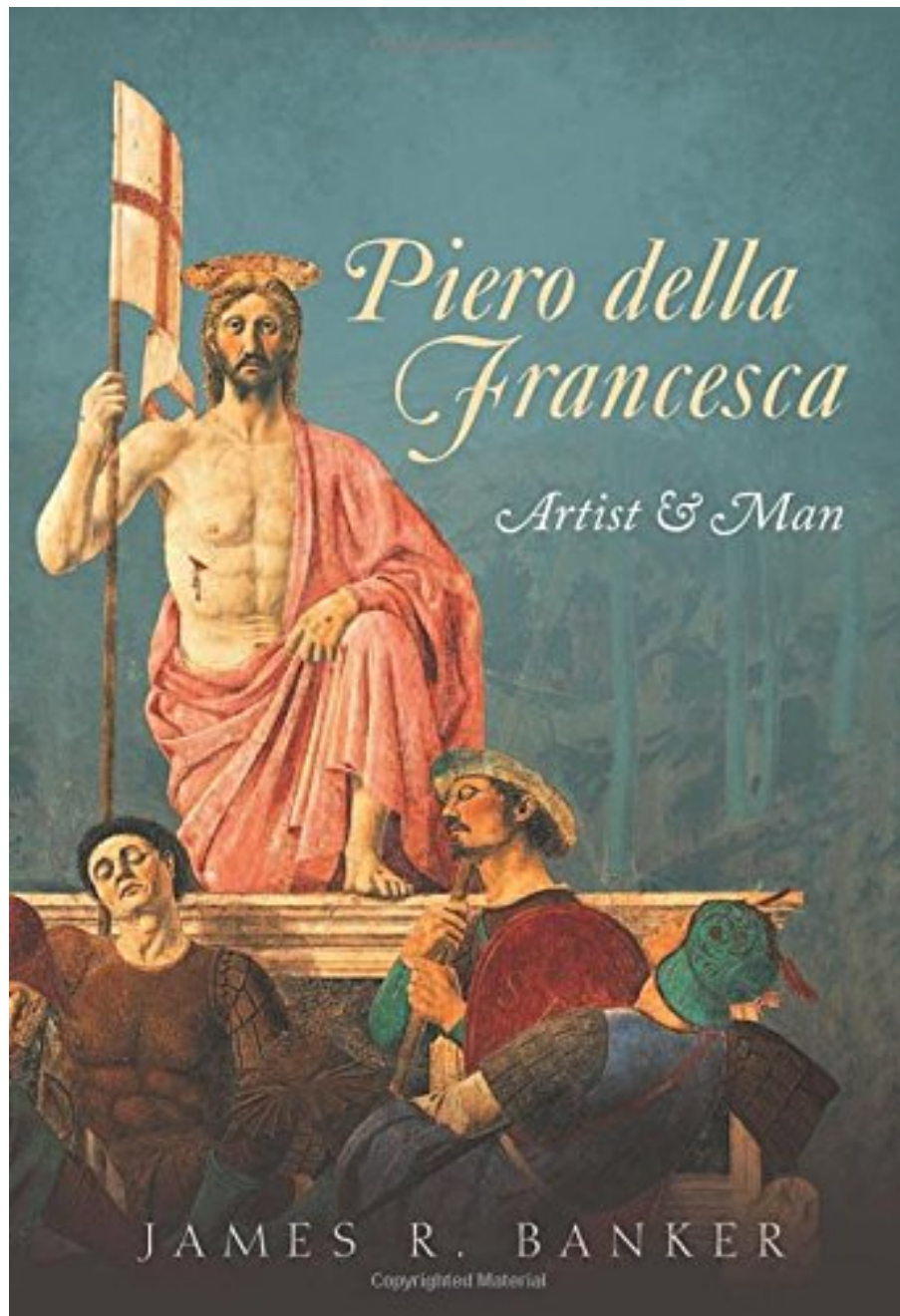


PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA: ARTIST AND MAN BY JAMES R. BANKER



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Review

"James R. Banker's *Piero della Francesca: Artist and Man* reminds us that...the human scale of his art--the ability to have his divine characters look us square in the eye as our eyes square up the mathematically intense realism of his worlds--never gets old."

--Big Think

About the Author

James R. Banker is professor emeritus of Italian history at North Carolina State University, and lives for most of the year in Florence and Sansepolcro. An expert on the life and works of Piero della Francesca and Sassetta, two artists closely associated with San Sepolcro, his research has emphasized the role of lay religion in the lives of early Renaissance Italians, and the role of patrons, lay and clerical, in the paintings of both Sassetta and Piero. Author of numerous articles on Renaissance themes, his books include *Death in the Community: Memorialization and Confraternities in an Italian Commune* and, most recently, *The Culture of San Sepolcro During the Youth of Piero della Francesca*.

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PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA: ARTIST AND MAN BY JAMES R. BANKER PDF

Largely neglected for the four centuries after his death, the fifteenth century Italian artist Piero della Francesca is now seen to embody the fullest expression of the Renaissance perspective painter, raising him to an artistic stature comparable with that of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

But who was Piero, and how did he become the person and artist that he was? Until now, in spite of the great interest in his work, these questions have remained largely unanswered. *Piero della Francesca: Artist and Man* integrates the story of Piero's artistic and mathematical achievements with the full chronicle of his life for the first time, fortified by the discovery of over one hundred previously unknown documents, most unearthed by the author himself.

The book presents us with Piero's friends, family, and collaborators, all set against the social background of the various cities and courts in which he lived - from the Tuscan commune of Sansepolcro in which he grew up, to Renaissance Florence, Ferrara, Ancona, Rimini, Rome, Arezzo, and Urbino, and eventually back to his home town for the final years of his life. As Banker shows, the cultural contexts in which Piero lived are crucial for understanding both the man and his paintings.

What emerges is a thoroughly intriguing Renaissance individual, firmly embedded in his social milieu, but forging an historic identity through his profound artistic and mathematical achievements.

- Sales Rank: #1228604 in Books
- Published on: 2014-04-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.00" h x 1.10" w x 9.80" l, 1.70 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 304 pages

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8 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Piero's Life and Work in a Superb New Study

By Kenneth Hughes

James R. Banker is Professor Emeritus of Italian History at North Carolina State University. For many years he has spent most of his time in Florence and in Sansepolcro, Piero's home town in the Tuscan hills southeast of Florence. He has written dozens of articles and books on Italian history and culture of the Quattrocento, concentrating especially on Sansepolcro and the life, times, and artistry of Piero. His current book is the summation of his years of archival research, scholarly sleuthing, and thoughtful consideration, and it is an outstanding study. Although not trained as an art historian per se, Prof. Banker has spent at least as much time steeped in the aura of Piero's art as anyone else, and his voice is as authoritative as any of the specialists in art history who have written before him. Indeed, his expertise in social and cultural history and his archival work (which has unearthed a considerable number of hitherto unknown documents pertaining to Piero) enable him to discuss the painter's works in their social context more specifically and with greater certainty than most art historians do. That combination makes for one of the book's most engaging features, its balance between discussion of the artworks and examination of what else was going on in the artist's life at the time.

One of the most difficult things in writing about Piero is to figure out exactly where he was at any specific time, given the general scarcity of documentation. But where he was determines also what he was doing, because you can't paint a fresco unless you're there, and, conversely, to date a painting means pinning the artist down to the particular place at the particular time. Prof. Banker's complete mastery of whatever documentation there is--contracts, letters, signed witnesses to marriages, dowries, the sale of everything from land to woad (the source of much of the town's wealth) and every other imaginable written source--enables him to construct a very convincing itinerary and, therefore, a persuasive timeline for Piero's major paintings. Many scholars have contended that it is difficult to date Piero's paintings because there is not much apparent development or evidence of evolving style in them. But the author's ability to construct a plausible timeline from extrinsic evidence has led him to discern for the first time three distinct phases in Piero's work, based on the painter's use of perspective, proportion, and spatial organization--three major components of his painterly practice throughout his life, but with shifting emphasis. The discussion of Piero's mathematical work follows along with the examination of his life and art; the writer is keen to show how Piero's interest in perspective and proportionality continually informs his artistic practice and vice-versa, and when it comes to the painter's later years, when his absorption in his geometrical treatises displaced much of his painterly activity, the discussion reveals Piero to have been one of the most gifted and original mathematicians of his time, a man whose "visual acumen" (216) was the source of both his brilliant painting and his brilliant geometrical theorizing. Piero emerges as a true "Renaissance man" equal in genius to Leonardo and Michelangelo, indeed, "the most intellectual painter of the Quattrocento" (1).

Prof. Banker has taken an excellent look at Piero as "Artist and Man," a fine model of what a life-and-work study of an artist should be. His writing is organized, lucid, and approachable--almost conversational--throughout. The volume has generous scholarly apparatus in the form of maps and figures of geometrical bodies, a chronology, extensive selected bibliography and index. There are ten color plates of major paintings and thirty-one black-and-white illustrations. Unfortunately, the majority of the paintings discussed

are reproduced only in black and white on text paper and are neither very clear nor in very useful contrast; it will pay to have an album of good reproductions at hand while reading. That is the only negative criticism I have of this book, which is in every other way outstanding and highly recommended.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

The great Piero book now is James Banker's Piero della Francesca

By Bill Berkson

The great Piero book now is James Banker's Piero della Francesca, Artist and Man. It is astonishing in many ways. Banker began simply as a historian studying the medieval commune of San Sepolcro, found Piero in that mix, and busied himself writing two books on the documentation, such as it is, of Piero in the town archives. That started maybe 30 years ago. Now he has written about every aspect of Piero—artist, mathematician, possible architect, citizen, family man—connecting many dots, dispelling old hearsay notions, giving a very fine sense of who this Piero may have been, his boundless curiosity and intellectual connections, and how he did what he did. There are parts I disagree with (especially Banker's interpretation of The Flagellation, which all too easily dismisses the Oriental look of the lefthand foreground figure), and you must be prepared for Banker's rather hard-nosed refusal to see the kind of spiritual (if not Platonic) light that nonetheless many of us cannot help but see. But it is very good history, plainly written—"just the facts," as it were, with straight declarative sentences abounding— and eventually had me in tears, both for the understanding of Piero himself and for Banker's devotion.

0 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Piero in Evidence

By David Maxim

Banker's biography is beautifully written, beautifully clear. He presents evidence of Piero's whereabouts at certain times in the artist's life heretofore sketchy in details as though he were solving a mystery in a way that is compelling for the reader to continue on.

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