



## Journeys of Albrecht Dürer: historiographical readings on the letters to Pirkheimer and the Netherlands journal

Lucas Cavalcanti Botelho

### Abstract

This project aims at collecting historiography concepts to support our comprehension on two important sources left by Albrecht Dürer in the early sixteenth century: the letters sent to Willibald Pirkheimer in 1506 and the journal written by Dürer during his travels to the Netherlands in 1520-21. The reading of these documents traditionally relied on Art History methodology. However, the most recent wave of scholars has demonstrated a wide range interest in cultural aspects of Dürer's writings. The research has been based on interpretative works published in German and English since the 1870's; the texts written by Dürer himself were translated from German to Portuguese in a previous research project, and they have been used as historical sources. By tracking historiography we're able to understand how interpretations on Dürer's point of view have evolved. We can also visualize trends in History studies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter. The research has given us a better perception on how to interpret Dürer's writings and his times.

### Key words:

Albrecht Dürer, journeys, Modern History

### Introduction

Albrecht Dürer accomplished at least two important travels: the first one to Venice, in 1505-1507, where he engaged in the painting of a canvas to the building of *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*; the second one to the Netherlands, in 1520-21, when he followed a diplomatic body to represent his home town of Nuremberg on the occasion of Charles V's crowning in Aachen.

Two historical sources were left from these travels: a series of 10 letters to Willibald Pirkheimer in Nuremberg, sent from Venice along the year of 1506; and the personal journal he wrote during his travels to the Netherlands. Long-lasting historiographical discussions have been established to interpret these sources.

This project engages in a recollection of main concepts in debates concerning Dürer's travels to Venice and the Netherlands. It follows the first translation of Dürer's personal writings to Portuguese.

### Results and Discussion

Historiography debates on Albrecht Dürer's travels and its sources can be divided in three moments:

**1) late 19<sup>th</sup> century:** Moriz Thausings published biographical studies on Dürer in the 1870's in Vienna. His collecting of personal sources written by the artist was the first attempt to classify these documents as materials for archival analysis.

**2) 20<sup>th</sup> century:** in 1954 Erwin Panofsky published his monograph *Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*. He extended some of Thausing's ideas and implemented a detailed serialized study on every visual and written source of the artist. Most of what we now discuss about Dürer derives from Panofsky's interpretation.

**3) early 21<sup>st</sup> century:** works of Katherine Crawford Luber, Giulia Bartrum, Larry Silver and Jeffrey Chipps Smith arrived as of the early 2000's and brought new perspectives to prior debates.

We developed a comparative analysis of these three time frames in historiography to understand how scholars have interpreted Dürer's travels to Italy and Northern

Europe. We assessed their methodology, considering especially their reading of written sources.

### Conclusions

**Travel to Venice (1505-7):** Discussions on the visit to Italy concern two main topics: 1) the possibility of an early stay in Venice: Luber contests the assumption raised by Thausing and Panofsky that Dürer went to Venice before 1505. 2) the painting of *The Feast of the Rose Garlands* in the year 1506: Dürer narrated the composition of this work in his letters to Pirkheimer.

**Travel to the Netherlands (1520-21):** most historiography lines read this journey as a turning point in Dürer's life. This is the moment when he changed his perspective on art issues and took more engaged steps towards theoretical works. It is also the moment when he gets infected with malaria, which would eventually cause his death seven years later.

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