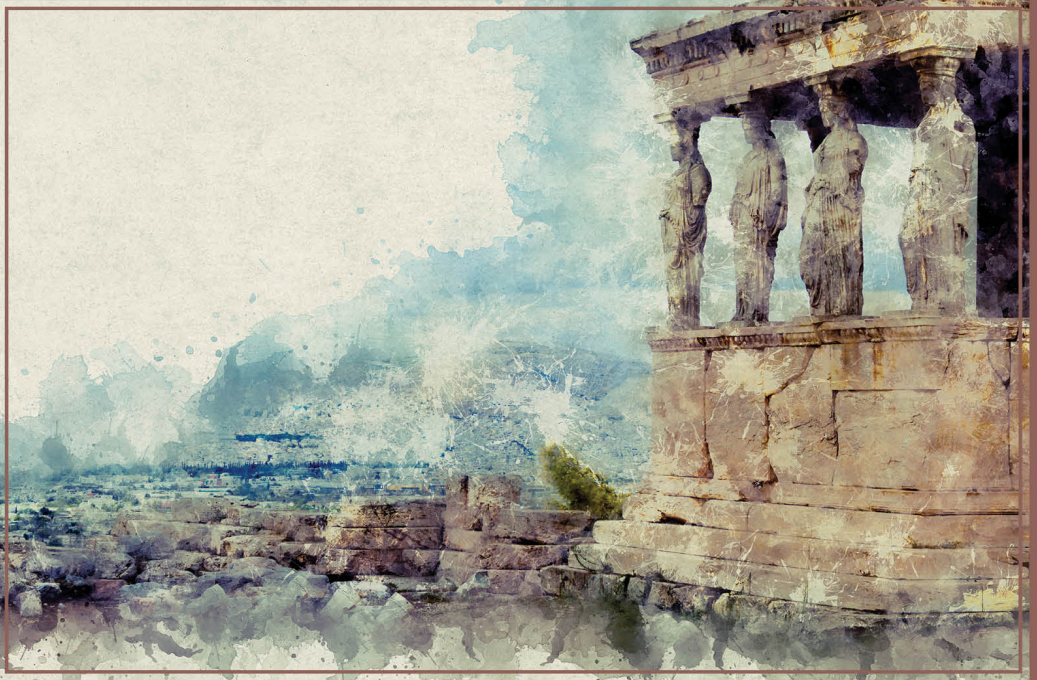


QUATREMÈRE  
DE QUINCY'S ON  
*THE IDEAL IN THE  
PICTORIAL ARTS*



Translated, Annotated, and Introduced by  
Michel-Antoine Xhignesse

**Quatremère de Quincy's**  
*On the Ideal in the*  
*Pictorial Arts*



Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy François Bonneville (stipple engraving, c. 1797) © National Portrait Gallery, London

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
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*Pour Maman/Mum, Marianne Xhignesse*



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## Translator's Introduction

### *Quatremère de Quincy and the Mimetic Ideal*

Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy (1755–1849) was one of the most celebrated intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He was the author of twenty-one major works on art and architecture, including the three volumes on architecture of the *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1782–1832) and the *Dictionnaire historique de l'architecture* (1832–1833), as well as several biographies of major artists, including Raphael (1824) and Michelangelo (1835).

In his heyday, he was perhaps the best-known art theorist in Europe, and he exerted considerable influence over French arts policy during the Revolution, Empire, and Restoration. In particular, he gained international attention as the first classicist to establish that ancient Greek statuary was polychromatic, for which feat he greatly impressed both Wagner and Schelling, whose notes show their great appreciation for his imaginative reconstruction of Phidias's chryselephantine statues of Athena and Zeus.<sup>1</sup>

Although still a staple of Francophone histories of aesthetics,<sup>2</sup> to date he has been unjustly neglected by Anglophone aestheticians who, thanks to the vagaries of translation, know far more about the modern period in German aesthetics. Thus, for example, Quatremère de Quincy did not rate an entry in Bernard Bosanquet's *A History of Aesthetic* (1892), Paul Guyer's impressive *A History of Modern Aesthetics* (2014), nor even in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Kelly 2014; although he is mentioned in six entries, primarily concerning architecture, he is entirely absent from the entry for "French Aesthetics"). Even in Francis Coleman's *The Aesthetic Thought of the French Enlightenment* (1971), Quatremère de Quincy figures as no more than a bibliographic entry, despite his prominent place in the aesthetic life of the period.

In this respect, Quatremère de Quincy is no mere outlier: until comparatively recently, there were no English translations of many of the titans of

modern French aesthetics, including Yves-Marie André, Charles Batteux, and Jean-Baptiste DuBos. Indeed, many important figures of the period remain entirely untranslated, including Jean-Pierre de Crousaz and Anne Le Fèvre Dacier, and all of these figures are conspicuously absent from English-language histories of the period. Yet there is much to interest us in Quatremère de Quincy, who enjoyed a privileged historical position straddling the divide between the aesthetic practices and preferences of France's *ancien régime* and the modern sensibility which was born of the Revolution, and which he helped to guide. Writing at the dawn of the development of the art museum (in the form of the Musée Napoleon, now the Louvre), for example, Quatremère de Quincy was perhaps the earliest and most powerful voice against the establishment of such museums. He argued that art museums decontextualize the works in their care, thereby preventing audiences from properly experiencing them, as they would have done *in situ*.<sup>3</sup> This treatise raises concerns which still resonate with art historians, critics, and curators today, and we can see in it the first glimmers of contextualism taking root in art-theoretical discourse.

The great academicians Victor Cousin (1792–1867) and Francois Pierre Guillaume Guizot (1787–1874) called Quatremère de Quincy the “French Winckelmann,”<sup>4</sup> and there is a tendency among those art theorists who know of him to treat him as a lesser extension of the German art historian, whose influence on him is without question. Quatremère de Quincy took to heart Johann Joachim Winckelmann's dictum that “Good taste . . . first formed itself under the Greek sky,”<sup>5</sup> and vigorously pursued Winckelmann's Neoclassicist project.

Unlike Winckelmann, whose untimely murder prevented him from achieving his scholarly aims at the Vatican Museum, Quatremère de Quincy led a long life in the corridors of power and wielded a great deal of influence over the French cultural milieu. Like Winckelmann, Quatremère de Quincy was convinced that art and aesthetics had reached their apex in Classical civilization, particularly in Classical Greece. But he was more than just Winckelmann's more successful parrot; indeed, although his aesthetic theory builds on Winckelmann's insights, it is far more systematic and wide-ranging and even features some significant disagreement with his idol (see below).

Neoclassical aesthetics advocated primarily for Classical subject matter in art and emphasized pure contour line drawing, along with an underlying moralism that championed virtues perceived to be Classical. These features were intended to supplant the decadence of Rococo art, with its frivolous emphasis on ornamentation and asymmetry. The discovery of Herculaneum (1739) and Pompeii (1748) had inspired Winckelmann's Neoclassical aesthetics. But major discoveries in those same places in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—to say nothing of discoveries in Aegina, Phigalia, and the island of Milos, as well as the discovery of the Parthenon marbles (1805,