

SEROUX D'AGINCOURT'S *HISTOIRE*
AS A POSSIBLE POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR
TWO PICTURES BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI,
AND SOME CONTINGENT OBSERVATIONS

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In recent years, Virginia Surtees, Elizabeth Prettlejohn, Eriko Yamaguchi, and several other scholars have cast much new and revealing light on the paintings and drawings of the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle by relating them to visual materials that were available in such works as Carlo Lasinio's *Pittura a fresco del Campo Santo di Pisa* (1812) and Camille Bonnard's *Costumes des XIII^e, XIV^e et XV^e siècles* (1829-30). A work of a similar order and possible significance that appears to have been overlooked so far by Pre-Raphaelite scholars is Jean-Baptiste Louis Gerges Seroux D'Agincourt's *Histoire de l'Art par les Monumens, depuis sa décadence au IV^e siècle jusqu'à son renouvellement au XVI* (1823), an anonymous translation of which was published in London in 1847 under the title *History of Art by Its Monuments, from Its Decline in the Fourth Century to Its Restoration in the Sixteenth*.¹ Seroux D'Agincourt is mentioned by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in "Hand and Soul" as "having seen some portions of a fresco" by Chiaro dell' Erma in a convent in Pisa (551), and in F.G. Stephens's "The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art," in the same number of *The Germ* (February 1850), the *Histoire de l'Art par les Monumens* is listed first among the three sources of the examples that are adduced in the essay to demonstrate "the surpassing talent and knowledge ... and consequent success" of the early Italian painters who "follow[ed] natural principles, until the introduction of false and meretricious ornament led the Arts from the simple chastity of nature"(62). There would seem to be sufficient reason, then, for enquiring into the possible impact of the *Histoire* on the theory and practice of the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Rossetti.