

## Dosso's early artistic reputation and the origins of landscape painting

by Robert Colby

In their respective biographical accounts of Dosso Dossi (1487?–1542), Paolo Giovio and Giorgio Vasari fashioned the Ferrarese artist with a reputation for painting landscape well.<sup>1</sup> For the biographer and historian Giovio (1483–1552), this was the area in which Dosso's art excelled beyond the qualities manifest in other areas of his work.<sup>2</sup> For Vasari (1511–74): 'Ebbe in Lombardia titolo da tutti i pittori di fare i paesi meglio che alcuno altro'.<sup>3</sup> Some art historians, not without good reason, have seen continuity between Giovio and Vasari on this score. After Vasari had begun in earnest on his *Lives* in 1546, Giovio offered his services as an editor and became, according to Vasari, the chief adviser of the first edition.<sup>4</sup> But despite the synthesis of their historical projects, I shall propose here that they had very different understandings of Dosso as a painter of landscape. Vasari's account does not suggest he thought too much about or too highly of the artist and his craft of landscape painting,

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<sup>1</sup> The current article is derived from the final chapter of my Ph.D. thesis, *The Paintings of Dosso Dossi: Studies in the Artistic Currents and Court Culture of Renaissance Ferrara* (Courtauld Institute, 2007). I would like to thank William Hood, who first suggested I consider Dosso as a dissertation topic, and Patricia Rubin for her suggestions and comments throughout the research and writing process. With regards to the current topic, Professor Rubin's thoughts on Renaissance criticism and historiography have been invaluable. I would also like to thank Peter Humfrey, Paul Hills, Sue Russell and Alan Chong for their comments, and Elizabeth Frank for reading an early draft of the article. My thoughts on Dosso, landscape and the artist's early artistic reputation were first formulated as a talk given at the British School at Rome in September 2002: 'Making landscape *all'antica*: Dosso Dossi, transalpine art and Giovio's *parerga*'; thank you to Helen Langdon and Beverly Louise Brown for their suggestions following the talk. A hearty thanks to Anne Guillemet of the Curatorial Department at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum for tracking down publishable images and to Mauro Lucco for supplying colour photos of hard to find paintings. Josephine Crawley Quinn offered helpful editorial suggestions, for which I am very grateful.

<sup>2</sup> For a full treatment of Giovio's career as a historian, physician and Medici associate, see T.C.P. Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio: the Historian and the Crisis of Sixteenth-century Italy* (Princeton, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> 'Of all the painters in Lombardy, Dosso had the reputation of executing landscapes better than any other'; G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nella redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. R. Bettarini, commentary P. Barocchi (Florence, 1966), IV, 420.

<sup>4</sup> For the relationship between the two historians and the project of the 'Lives', see P. Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (New Haven, 1995), 107, 151, 178.

which was anyway the labour of *oltramontani*. For him, Dosso's 'Lombard' style proved the rule of central Italian art's supremacy, a point he illustrated by giving over most of his account of Dosso's career to the ill-fated commission at the Villa Imperiale in Pesaro.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Giovio imbued his description of Dosso's landscape painting with much significance. For him, the countryside and its representation was tied to his own appreciation of the ancient villa, a phenomenon vital to his sense of history and geography.

In addition to their different conceptions of landscape and their estimations of Dosso's significance, I shall suggest that Giovio and Vasari had in mind different examples of Dosso's paintings, corresponding to the periods for which they had knowledge of Ferrarese artistic culture, the early 1520s and the 1530s respectively, periods in which Dosso played different artistic roles. In the first phase of the artist's career, 1515–c. 1530, Dosso was the chief resident painter of Alfonso I d'Este, active in the duke's extensive renovation campaigns in the much discussed *Via Coperta* project.<sup>6</sup> During the latter phase, the early years of Ercole II's reign (r. 1534–59), Dosso remained an active participant in ducal commissions but was only one among a number of practitioners.

Humfrey has distinguished between two distinct phases in Dosso's treatment of landscape.<sup>7</sup> The earlier style is represented by paintings such as the *Three Ages of Man* (PLATE 1) and *Travellers in a Wood* (PLATE 2), which show a visual syntax resulting in part from Dosso's emulation of German prints.<sup>8</sup> These paintings have been dated to the second decade of the century or to the early 1520s.<sup>9</sup> The later stage is represented by the *Landscape with Saints* (PLATE 3), a close emulation of Flemish *Weltlandschaft*.<sup>10</sup> Universally accepted as by Dosso, the painting has been compared frequently to works by Joachim Patinir.<sup>11</sup> Humfrey dated this stage of Dosso's landscape style to the late 1520s on the grounds of a comparison with the now-destroyed

<sup>5</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), IV, 420–2. For Dosso at Pesaro, see C.H. Smyth, 'On Dosso Dossi at Pesaro', in L. Ciammitti, S.F. Ostrow and S. Settis (eds), *Dosso's Fate: Painting and Court Culture in Renaissance Italy* (Los Angeles, 1998), 241–62.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of Dosso's career, see A. Bayer, 'Dosso's public: the Este court of Ferrara', in P. Humfrey and M. Lucco, *Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara* (New York, 1998), 27–54. For a comparison between the patronage Dosso enjoyed under Alfonso and that of his successor, see Colby, *The Paintings of Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 1), 11–30. For individual paintings, see the exhaustive catalogue entries in A. Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi: la pittura a Ferrara negli anni del ducato di Alfonso I*, 2 vols (Cittadella, 1994–5). See also Humfrey and Lucco, *Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara* (above). For the documentation concerning Dosso's participation in the *Via Coperta* and Alfonso's other artistic endeavours see volumes 3 and 4 of A. Ballarin (ed.), *Il camerino delle pitture di Alfonso I*, 6 vols (Cittadella, 2002–4). See also M. Borella (ed.), *Il progetto della Via Coperta: atti del convegno di studi, 11 ottobre 2002* (Ferrara, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> P. Humfrey, 'Two moments in Dosso's career as a landscape painter', in Ciammitti, Ostrow and Settis (eds), *Dosso's Fate* (above, n. 5), 201–18.

<sup>8</sup> Humfrey, 'Two moments in Dosso's career' (above, n. 7), 205–6.

<sup>9</sup> Humfrey, 'Two moments in Dosso's career' (above, n. 7), 207. Ballarin dated the *Three Ages of Man* to 1517–18 and the *Travellers in a Wood* to 1517–18; Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. nos. 368 and 369 respectively.

<sup>10</sup> Humfrey, 'Two moments in Dosso's career' (above, n. 7), 210.

<sup>11</sup> Humfrey and Lucco, *Dosso Dossi, Court Painter* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 34, see esp. p. 196.



FIG. 1. Dosso Dossi, *Mythological Allegory*, Galleria Borghese, Rome. © Scala/Art Resource, NY. (Reproduced courtesy of Art Resource.)

*Immaculate Conception with Church Fathers and Saint Bernardino* dated to 1527–32.<sup>12</sup> The large *pala*, known through pre-war photographs, had a landscape with an elevated viewpoint and showed an attention to minute detail characteristic of the Flemish tradition. This was the style that characterized the landscape sections of Dosso's other paintings, such as the *Mythological Allegory* (FIG. 1), also dated to the late 1520s and early 1530s.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the *Landscape with Saints* (PLATE 3), a small group of *Weltlandschaft* paintings have also been associated with Dosso and his brother, Battista: *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen* (PLATE 4) and three related versions of the *Flight into Egypt*, one at the Lowe Art Museum, a nearly identical version formerly of the Fesch Collection (PLATE 5), and a third, formerly of the

<sup>12</sup> Humfrey, 'Two moments in Dosso's career' (above, n. 7), 209–10. For the dating of the altarpiece, see C. Cremonini, 'La pala dell'*Immacolata Concezione* di Dosso Dossi nel Duomo di Modena', *Dialoghi di Storia dell'Arte* 4–5 (1997), 250–7.

<sup>13</sup> For the *Mythological Allegory* see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 454 (1529); Humfrey and Lucco, *Dosso Dossi, Court Painter* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 39 (1529–30).



FIG. 2. Dosso Dossi and Battista Dossi (?), *Flight into Egypt*, formerly Harck Collection, Schloss Seusslitz (Dresden), current whereabouts unknown.

Harck Collection (FIG. 2).<sup>14</sup> The latter depicts the same figure group as the first two, but possesses a landscape different in treatment and composition. The distinctive iconography, showing Joseph riding a mule and carrying the Christ Child, is shown in a drawing attributed to Battista (FIG. 3).<sup>15</sup>

As a group, the paintings have been the subject of attributional debate, with some art historians favouring Dosso, and others, Battista.<sup>16</sup> However, the paintings may have been the product

<sup>14</sup> For the *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen*, see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 466; Humfrey and Lucco, *Dosso Dossi, Court Painter* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 52. All three versions of the *Flight into Egypt* are roughly the same size, that is, around 60 × 80 cm. For the *Flight into Egypt* in the Lowe Art Museum, Miami, see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 463. For the version formerly of the Fesch Collection, currently at Colnaghi's, see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 465. I am grateful to Tim Warner-Johnson of Colnaghi's for kindly supplying me with a transparency of the painting and for his thoughts on the unusual iconography. For the version formerly of the Harck Collection, see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 464. Another version of the *Flight into Egypt* attributed to the Dossi appeared at auction in Venice in 1979: Semenzato, 25 February 1979, no. 367, measuring 62 × 80 cm: Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), I, 352.

<sup>15</sup> Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), II, fig. 563.

<sup>16</sup> For attributions of the respective paintings see the catalogue entries cited in n. 14. See also M. Lucco, 'Battista Dossi and Sebastiano Filippi', in Ciammitti, Ostrow and Settis (eds), *Dosso's Fate* (above, n. 5), 263–87.





FIG. 3. Battista Dossi (attr.), *Flight into Egypt*, Louvre, Paris. © Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY. (Reproduced courtesy of Art Resource.)

of a shared enterprise, owing to the brothers' artistic partnership in the 1530s.<sup>17</sup> Landscapes *alla fiamminga* were a recognized artistic commodity in north Italy by this time, and the Dossi may have directed their collective efforts to meeting this need with one or the other designing the composition, depicting the figures and painting the landscape in whole or in part.<sup>18</sup>

The *Landscape with Saints* (PLATE 3), the three versions of the *Flight into Egypt* (PLATE 5 and FIG. 2) and the *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen* (PLATE 4) form the basis of my understanding of the Dossi's later landscape style in its emulation of the Flemish manner. On the evidence of his large-scale independent works (FIGS 1 and 4) and the *Landscape with Saints* (PLATE 3), Dosso appears to have been instrumental in determining this aspect of the brothers' shared output.

I shall discuss below the different phases of Dosso's landscape output and the critical responses of Giovio and Vasari. However, first I shall examine the historiographical question of the 'origins of landscape' in which Dosso's paintings have played a role.

<sup>17</sup> For the collaboration between the two brothers, which increased around 1530 when Battista began to operate as a master in his own right, see Humfrey and Lucco, *Dosso Dossi, Court Painter* (above, n. 6), 11–15.

<sup>18</sup> For landscape *alla fiamminga*, see below, pp. 221–6.



FIG. 4. Dosso Dossi, *Melissa*, Galleria Borghese, Rome. © Scala/Art Resource, NY. (Reproduced courtesy of Art Resource.)

#### LANDSCAPE PAINTING/PAINTING LANDSCAPE: THE QUESTION OF SUBJECT

Dosso's paintings of countryside scenes have been part of the historiography of a particular aspect of modern art historical scholarship, the search for the origins of 'pure landscape', that is, a 'painting without a subject'.

Friedländer was the first art historian to construct a theory of landscape as a painting without a subject, finding its origins sometime in the 1520s on both sides of the Alps.<sup>19</sup> He argued that subject-less landscape was the result of a division of labour in the face of increasing demand in northern markets.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, Gombrich thought it was created by the emergence of a new

<sup>19</sup> M.J. Friedländer, *Essays über die Landschaftsmalerei und Andere Bildgattungen* (The Hague, 1947). This was the basis of subsequent phenomenological approaches to the question of landscape. See, for example, K. Clark, *Landscape into Art* (London, 1949); R. Turner, *The Vision of Landscape in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton, 1966); G. Romano, *Studi sul paesaggio: storia e immagini* (Turin, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> Friedländer, *Essays* (above, n. 19), 58.

critical category on the part of Renaissance humanists, primarily Giovio. In both northern Europe and Italy, landscape was invented because the category 'pure landscape' gave it legitimacy: 'landscape painting as we know it might never have developed without the artistic theories of the Italian Renaissance'.<sup>21</sup>

Gombrich was referring in part to that section of Giovio's 'Life' of Raphael in which the historian included a few lines about Dosso's art. Giovio described an aspect of the Ferrarese's painting as *parerga*, supplementary work or 'side-pieces', specifically areas showing landscape elements: woods and mountains, hunting and fishing, and peasants at their labour. The *parergon* was distinct from the subject of the painting, the *iusta opera*.

Doxi autem Ferrariensis urbanum probatur ingenium cum in iustis operibus, tum maxime in illis, quae parerga vocantur. Amoena namque picturae diverticula voluptuario labore consecratus, praeuptas cautes, virentia nemora, opacas perfluentium ripas, florentes rei rusticae apparatus, agrorum laetos fervidosque labores, praeterea longissimos terrarum marisque prospectus, classes, aucupia, venationes, et cuncta id genus spectatu oculis iucunda, luxurianti ac festiva manu exprimere consuevit.<sup>22</sup>

Gombrich and Gilbert independently identified Pliny as the source for Giovio's description.<sup>23</sup> In a passage describing the art of Studius, Pliny praised the depiction of the landscape that included both its natural dimensions and human constituents. This was the model for Giovio's description of Dosso's paintings.

Non fraudando et Studio divi Augusti aetate, qui primus instituit amoenissimam parietum picturam, villas et porticus (portus?) ac topiaria opera, lucos, nemora, colles, piscinas, euripos, amnes, litora, qualia quis optaret, varias ibi obambulantium species aut navigantium terraque villas adeuntium asellis aut vehiculis, iam piscantes, aucupantes aut venantes aut etiam vindemiantes. Sunt in eius exemplaribus nobiles palustri accessu villae, succollatis sponsione mulieribus labantes trepidis quae feruntur,

<sup>21</sup> E.H. Gombrich, 'Renaissance artistic theory and the development of landscape painting', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 41 (1953), 335–60, esp p. 335. This was re-edited as 'The Renaissance theory of art and the rise of landscape', in E.H. Gombrich, *Norm and Form, Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London, 1966), 107–21.

<sup>22</sup> P. Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, 3 vols (Milan/Naples, 1971), I, 18; 'The elegant talent of Dosso of Ferrara is proven in his proper works, but most of all in those that are called *parerga*. For pursuing with pleasurable labour the delightful diversions of painting, he used to depict jagged rocks, green groves, the firm banks of traversing rivers, the flourishing work of the countryside, the joyful and fervid toil of the peasants, and also the distant prospects of land and sea, fleets, fowling, hunting, and all those sorts of things so agreeable to the eyes in an extravagant and festive manner'. Translated in C.S. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* (London, 1993), 55.

<sup>23</sup> Gombrich, 'Renaissance artistic theory' (above, n. 21), and C. Gilbert, 'On subject and not subject in Italian Renaissance pictures', *The Art Bulletin* 34 (1952), 202–16.

plurimae praeterea tales argutiae facetissimi salis. Idem subdialibus maritimas urbes pingere instituit, blandissimo aspectu minimoque inpendio.<sup>24</sup>

In a further passage Pliny used the term *parerga* to describe the sections of a painting by Protogenes in which the artist painted ships.<sup>25</sup> The explicit connection between *parerga* and paintings of landscape was forged in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499), in the description of details supplementing mosaics of subjects such as *Europa and Icarus*: ‘cum gli exquisiti parergi, aque, fonti, monti, colli, boscheti, animali’.<sup>26</sup> This was presumably the source of Gioivo’s use of the word. Many of Dosso’s paintings, such as *Melissa* (FIG. 4), have exquisite examples of Dosso’s ability to paint landscape scenery, which was independent from the main subject of the painting, the figure in the foreground. However, Gombrich and Gilbert went a step further and suggested that, on the grounds of Gioivo’s description, Dosso’s art was among the first examples of ‘pure landscape’, if not the first.

Both Gombrich and Gilbert read ‘in illis, quae parerga vocantur’ against ‘iustis operibus’ to mean landscape as a separate kind of art. What Gioivo apparently meant as one part of a larger work, they suggested was an independent genre. In his translation, Gilbert rendered the word ‘genus’ as ‘genre’, which gave the impression that Gioivo was creating a semantic category. Despite Battisti’s correction that Gioivo meant only a different kind of painting within a single work (as with Protogenes’s ships, the landscape mosaics in Colonna’s description or the background of *Melissa*), Dosso’s paintings have continued to be described as amongst the earliest examples of landscape as an independent art, that is, a ‘painting without a subject’.<sup>27</sup>

The premise of Gilbert’s article was a general critique of Panofsky’s iconographical method codified in his *Studies in Iconology*, in which meaning was explained by identifying a textual source.<sup>28</sup> (In 1925 Venturi had applied this methodology to one of Dosso’s landscapes (PLATE 1), suggesting it was an allegory of age based on the pairs of older men, children and adults, and it remains known as the *Three Ages of Man* to this day.<sup>29</sup>) Gilbert found an alternate approach by

<sup>24</sup> Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 35.116–17. ‘Studius too, of the period of the Divine Augustus, must not be cheated of his due. He first introduced the most attractive fashion of painting walls with villas, porticoes (harbours?), and landscape gardens, groves, woods, hills, fish-pools, canals, rivers, coasts — whatever one could wish, and in them various representations of people strolling about, people sailing, people travelling overland to villas on donkey-back or in carriages, and in addition people fishing, fowling, hunting, or even gathering the vintage. His pictures include noble villas reached across marshes, men tottering along with women, trembling burdens, on their shoulders, carried for a wager, and very many such lively and witty subjects besides. It was the same man who introduced the practice of painting seaside cities in open terraces, producing a charming effect with minimal expense.’ Translation from R. Ling, ‘Studius and the beginnings of Roman landscape painting’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 67 (1977), 1–16, at p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 35.101.

<sup>26</sup> F. Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, 2 vols, ed. G. Pozzi and L.A. Ciapponi (Padua, 1964), I, 53; this was first identified by R. Buscaroli, *La pittura di paesaggio in Italia* (Bologna, 1935), 26.

<sup>27</sup> E. Battisti, *Rinascimento e Barocco* (Turin, 1960), 148–9. See also Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer* (above, n. 22), 59.

<sup>28</sup> Gilbert, ‘On subject and not subject’ (above, n. 23).



describing Dosso's landscape paintings as 'not-subject': along with the *Three Ages of Man* he cited the *Travellers in a Wood* (PLATE 2).<sup>30</sup> This allowed the painting semantic ground in the face of the absence of recognizable mythological, allegorical or literary subject.

More recently, Christopher Wood has described Dosso's landscapes as 'framed images truly empty of subject', 'pure landscape' or a 'painting without a discernible subject'.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the *Three Ages of Man*, he cited the recently rediscovered *Countryside Scene* (PLATE 6) as an example of what Giovio may have seen as the basis of his description of Dosso's painting.<sup>32</sup>

Wood defined Dosso's paintings of landscape as among the first images that can be read as visual recreation, supplementary diversion given legitimacy by the frame.

All those suspicious and useless recreational moments were absorbed into the work. The work of art became an object that worked and diverted at the same time. But this duality was no longer a hierarchy. The new frame devalued or even obscured entirely the old internal divisions, the boundaries between work and accessory that once ran across the life of the painter and the surface of the painting. The dissolution of these interior frontiers had ethical implications, for it placed the work now in an uncomfortably ambiguous and dependent relationship with pleasure. The work now displayed the escape from temporal prisons, from responsibility, from community and sociability, from profitable labour.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the meaning of pleasure, which may have been less problematic in the courtly milieu of Renaissance Ferrara, Wood's argument hinges on twentieth-century criticism that relies on nineteenth-century, bourgeois notions of artistic consumption.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the paintings he cited, such as the *Countryside Scene* (PLATE 6), look now like 'independent landscape paintings' because they are individually framed: but there is no evidence for how they may have been displayed as autonomous (self-contained) works. Instead there are several references to friezes of landscape paintings in the Ferrarese interiors, as described below. Pliny's *parergon* affirmed only the practice of painting landscape as an aspect of a larger work or for mural decoration.

This accords with the use of the term *paese* in the Renaissance. The first consistent use of the term was in the 1520s and 1530s in the *notizie* of Marcantonio Michiel. While Michiel used

<sup>29</sup> A. Venturi, 'Arte ferrarese del Rinsacimento', *L'Arte* 28 (1925), 89–109.

<sup>30</sup> Gilbert, 'On subject and not subject' (above, n. 23); Faietti, too, considered paintings such as the *Three Ages of Man* to be examples of what Giovio might have seen while in Ferrara — M. Faietti, '1490–1530: influssi nordici in alcuni artisti emiliani e romagnoli', in V. Fortunati (ed.), *La pittura in Emilia e in Romagna*, 2 vols (Milan, 1995), I, 9–47, see esp. p. 33 — as did Humfrey, 'Two moments in Dosso's career' (above, n. 7), 206–9.

<sup>31</sup> Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer* (above, n. 22), 58–9.

<sup>32</sup> Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer* (above, n. 22), 59 n. 179.

<sup>33</sup> Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer* (above, n. 22), 59.

<sup>34</sup> Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer* (above, n. 22), 54–5 and 59–61, citing especially Jacques Derrida's *La vérité en peinture* (Paris, 1978), ch. I: 'Parergon'.

the word in numerous cases, it is most often descriptive not appellative.<sup>35</sup> In general it serves to indicate the predominance of landscape elements, not to signify a new genre of art. One work is described as a 'tavollette de paesi', another as depicting figures 'in un paese'.<sup>36</sup>

The sense of the word in Michiel's notes accords with its general use at the time. If an artist was known for his ability to paint *paesi*, it meant he could render landscapes for small paintings of biblical or hagiographical scenes as well as for the decoration of rooms and *loggie*. This is the kind of artistic speciality that Giovio called *parerga* when he noted Dosso's ability in this regard.

Art historical interpretations of the Dosso–Giovio question that suggest that the artist was operating with a new critical category in mind, 'pure landscape', would, in effect, be reading back an interpretation (or controversial interpretation) of Giovio's reception of Dosso's art into a cause of the artist's inspiration. I shall suggest below how landscape themes already present in art at the Ferrarese court are more relevant to Dosso's paintings of countryside scenes. It is in this context that I shall examine Dosso's *Three Ages of Man* (PLATE 1), *Travellers in a Wood* (PLATE 2) and *Countryside Scene* (PLATE 6), before returning to Giovio's reception of Dosso's art and what may have inspired him to praise the Ferrarese artist in terms of exemplary ancient models.

## LANDSCAPE OF RECREATION AND DOMINION

According to the 1598 inventory, the *Via Coperta* room that was adorned with Dosso's *Allegorical Rhomboids* also had a landscape frieze: 'Quadri de Paesi n. 16 nel friso sotto al detto Solaro ... Friso e Cornisotto addorato sotto e sopra à detti quadri ...'.<sup>37</sup> These paintings likely correspond to those for which Dosso was paid in several disbursements between August 1520 and October 1522.<sup>38</sup> In the correspondence arranging their transferral to Modena in 1608, they were attributed to the 'mano de' Dossi' and described as 'sedici altri Quadretti à Paese, che ser-

<sup>35</sup> There is one exception, Giorgione's *Tempesta*, referred to as 'El paesetto in tela': [Marcantonio Michiel], *Notizia d'opere di disegno, pubblicata e illustrata da D. Jacopo Morelli*, ed. G. Frizzoni (Bologna, 1884), 218.

<sup>36</sup> These uses of the word, among others, appear in the notes of the Grimani collection: Michiel, *Notizia* (above, n. 35), 195–6. Other paintings that surely would have included landscape elements were not described as depicting *paesi*, for example, 'La nostra Donna can S. Iseppe nel deserto fu de man de Zuan Scorel d'Olanda', p. 218.

<sup>37</sup> 'Sixteen landscape paintings in a frieze below said ceiling ... gilded frieze and cornice above and below these paintings.' The 1598 inventory, which describes the ceiling of one room adorned with a series of oval-shaped paintings (later cut into rhomboids) and a landscape frieze, was first published by A. Mezzetti, *Il Dosso e Battista Ferraresi* (Milan, 1965), as a nine-page non-numbered facsimile following p. 135. See also Ballarin, *Il camerino* (above, n. 6), III, 274–8. For the paintings now known as the *Allegorical Rhomboids*, see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. nos. 411, 417–21, 426. See also, Humfrey and Lucco, *Dosso Dossi, Court Painter* (above, n. 6), cat. nos. 26a–26g, and P. Humfrey, 'Allegory with three Boys', in *MMI* (New York, 2001), 78–81. The surviving paintings can be associated with the 1598 inventory because of a lengthy correspondence arranging their transferral out of Ferrara in 1608, with some of the paintings going to Cardinal Scipione Borghese in Rome and others to Cesare d'Este in Modena. The full correspondence can be found in Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), I, 311–30.

<sup>38</sup> The payments are published in Ballarin, *Il camerino* (above, n. 6), IV, 346–9.

vivano per frisi o fregi della Cam.ra'.<sup>39</sup> In his 1657 record of paintings in the ducal collection in Modena, Scannelli described a 'fregio ... di rari paesi' by Dosso in a 'stupendissima Sala'.<sup>40</sup> In a 1685 inventory, Cesare Ignazio d'Este's collection contained 39 paintings attributed to Dosso, including eighteen landscapes listed in almost unbroken sequence, suggesting that they might have comprised a frieze.<sup>41</sup> Twelve of them were listed in one item: 'Dodici pezzi di quadri a paese di mano de Dossi con cornice liscia dorata antica'.<sup>42</sup> This was followed by 'Quattro paesi di mano de' Dossi' and one inscribed 'Un paese de' Dossi con un uomo vestito a nero sopra di una mula'.<sup>43</sup>

The frieze was a common feature of Renaissance interiors by the early sixteenth century, and a compliment to wall-hangings and tapestries hung below.<sup>44</sup> As described in the 1598 inventory, Dosso's paintings were capped by a *corniciotto* (cornice) above and a smaller band below.<sup>45</sup> In its simplest form, a frieze of this kind might have shown repeating all'antica motifs, verdure or heraldic devices.

The *Three Ages of Man* (77.5 × 112 cm, PLATE 1), the *Travellers in a Wood* (46 × 45.5 cm, PLATE 2) and the *Countryside Scene* (81 × 133 cm, PLATE 6) are of a format and size that would have made them suitable adornment for a frieze, though this question is complicated somewhat by the possibility that they have been cut down in later years.<sup>46</sup> Their ample size means that the figures would have been legible despite an elevated placement on the wall, while each shares a characteristic treatment of the horizon that would have added visual continuity if displayed together. Either of these last two paintings may be associated with the item in the 1685 inventory described as 'Un paese de' Dossi con un uomo vestito a nero sopra di una mula'.<sup>47</sup> To these

<sup>39</sup> 'Sixteen other little paintings of landscape that would serve for a frieze in a chamber.' Ballarin, *Il camerino* (above, n. 6), III, 318 and IV, 566–7.

<sup>40</sup> 'a frieze ... of rare landscapes'; 'most stupendous room'. This connection was first made by Mezzetti, *Il Dosso e Battista Ferraresi* (above, n. 37), 137 (not numbered). F. Scannelli, *Il microcosmo della pittura*, ed. G. Giubbini (Milan, 1966), 316–17.

<sup>41</sup> G. Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventari inediti di quadri, statue, disegni, bronzi, dorerie, smalti, medaglie, avorii, ecc.* (Modena, 1870), 309–35, esp. pp. 322–3.

<sup>42</sup> 'Twelve paintings of landscape by the hand of the Dossi with smooth, gilded 'antique' frames': Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventari* (above, n. 41), 322.

<sup>43</sup> 'Four paintings by the hand of the Dossi'; 'A landscape by the Dossi with a man dressed in black riding a mule': Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventari* (above, n. 41), 323.

<sup>44</sup> P. Thorton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400–1600* (New York, 1991), 33–53.

<sup>45</sup> For the cornices as a decorative element in the *Via Coperta* interior, see Ballarin, *Il camerino* (above, n. 6), IV, 336–44.

<sup>46</sup> For the *Three Ages of Man*, see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 368; Humfrey and Lucco, *Dosso Dossi, Court Painter* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 10. For the *Travellers in a Wood*, see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 369; Humfrey and Lucco, *Dosso Dossi, Court Painter* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 11. For the *Countryside Scene*, see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 401 (attributed to Battista). Lucco considered it an anonymous seventeenth-century copy: Lucco, 'Battista Dossi and Sebastiano Filippi' (above, n. 16), 270, fig. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ballarin associated the *Countryside Scene* with the 1685 inventory of Cesare Ignazio d'Este: Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), I, 321. He did not associate any of the other paintings, the *Three Ages* or *Travellers in a Wood*, with the Modenese collection. The *Countryside Scene* was later in the collection of Countess Sophie d'Almeida and then Princess Hélène Wrede, before appearing at auction (with an attribution to Dosso) in Sotheby's Old Master Sale, New York, 15 January 1993, lot 70. Its current whereabouts are unknown.

three examples may be added a later copy, *Landscape with Shepherds and Soldiers* (PLATE 7), and a fragment of an original.<sup>48</sup> Though there is nothing to identify these paintings securely as belonging to any one series or group, they are of a size, subject and format that can represent examples of the kind of works that could have comprised the 'Quadri de Paesi ... nel friso'.

The *Three Ages of Man* (PLATE 1), the *Travellers in a Wood* (PLATE 2), the *Countryside Scene* (PLATE 6) and the *Landscape with Shepherds and Soldiers* (PLATE 7) show the artist familiar with the subtleties of courtly, countryside themes. The careful depiction of social types is aided by Dosso's careful attention to character and demeanour expressed with painterly efficiency in a way that has been acknowledged rarely.

Sexuality is a central theme in the context of pastoral motifs unmasked by a satirical eye. The *Three Ages of Man* (PLATE 1) shows a *locus amoenus*, a couple embracing in the bushes amidst a small herd of goats, playing out the pastoral motif of lovers in the countryside. Their elaborate dress suggests that they have fled the court for romance. Two youths appear from behind the rise to observe the couple's clandestine activity, thus adding a humorous note. Two men in red robes suggestive of academic gowns stand in the background in conversation, one with his hands behind his back while the other leans in as if engaged in civilized debate. Given the steeple and buildings in the background, the scene is not far from the city — in the *bosco* or perhaps the *barca*, that enclosed, wild preserve surrounding ducal retreats. Such might have been the scene near one of the villas of which there was a number adjacent to the city, most significantly Belfiore, then within the walls of the Herculean Addition.<sup>49</sup>

In the *Travellers in a Wood* (PLATE 2) a magistrate wearing sombre black makes his way through the woods accompanied by soldiers, perhaps on the way to court or returning to/from a far-flung assignment in a corner of the Ferrarese territory. A beggar approaches on a small mule with his hand outstretched. The magistrate raises an indignant arm while the soldiers do nothing in response.

On the right of *Countryside Scene* (PLATE 6) a couple hidden in the brush is locked in a tight embrace. Recognizable only as a tangle of limbs and clothing, they are unobserved by passers-by. Figures in forms of court dress walk along well-trodden paths in conversation, their gentle demeanour expressed in the delicate comportment so effectively rendered by the artist. The couple in the foreground walks arm in arm, the lady leaning in to her interlocutor, who is dressed as a courtier bearing arms to show his status as a knight. A court functionary or magistrate on a mule observes the scene without participating. Buildings in the middle-ground and background suggest that the city is nearby.

In a later copy of a now-lost painting, *Landscape with Shepherds and Soldiers* (PLATE 7), Dosso's landscape style is preserved, as well as characteristic details of the painting's human sub-

<sup>48</sup> For the *Landscape with Shepherds and Soldiers*, see Lucco, 'Battista Dossi and Sebastiano Filippi' (above, n. 16), 270, fig. 7; for the fragment, see Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi* (above, n. 6), cat. no. 370.

<sup>49</sup> For the association between Dosso's landscapes and the *delizie* see Humfrey, 'Two moments in Dosso's career' (above, n. 7), 207. An early but still useful study of Este villas can be found in G. Pazzi, *Le delizie estensi e l'Ariosto* (Pescara, 1933). For a recent treatment with updated bibliography, see I. Tosi, 'Origine, sviluppo e decadenza delle delizie estensi nel ducato di Ferrara (1385–1598)', *Musei Ferraresi* 18 (1999), 40–54.



jects. An elaborate city rises in the distance, complete with gothic campanile. Shepherds tending goats and two youths playing reed pipes flank a group of soldiers in the middle.

The presence of magistrates in two of the paintings shows the countryside as a geographical mass to be administered. Soldiers in the *Travellers in a Wood* (PLATE 2) betray the reality of the countryside as a home to bandits. The background of *Melissa* (FIG. 4) shows a man-at-arms approaching two men in court attire seated in conversation. They turn to face the standing figure, whose brandished sword rests upon his shoulder. Peaceful escape from the court requires armed protection. The role of the soldier in Dosso's paintings was not uncontroversial. Their obscure behaviour in the *Landscape with Shepherds and Soldiers* (PLATE 7) suggests that men-at-arms could also take advantage of the permissive *ambiance* offered by countryside retreat.

Dosso's landscape vision unites pastoral motifs and aristocratic pursuits with vivid realities. This combination was novel for Renaissance painting of the early 1520s, and possible in part because of Dosso's unique painterly skill of characterization. However, similar themes were made the subjects of tapestry cycles, which were a popular feature of north Italian court collections. These often show scenes of courtly diversion: romance, concerts, picnics, hunting and outdoor games depicted in sumptuous verdant settings. They are idealized, but do not exclude the rustic details of agrarian life: peasants, farmers and animal husbandry. One example dating from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, *Open Air Meal in the Garden of Love* (FIG. 5), shows a group in lavish court attire being served at table while a buffoon performs in the background. An amorous couple in the foreground adds a frank sexual note to the tableau. A peasant walks along a path leading to a farm built out of the ruins of a crenellated fortress. Here are combined many of the elements seen in Dosso's paintings: aristocratic pastimes, rustic details and (somewhat) clandestine romance. The delights of the court are enjoyed in the freedom of the countryside against the backdrop of the rhythm of rural life.

The Este were famed for their collection of tapestries, which had been built up over the course of the fifteenth century by three successive Este princes, Niccolò III, Leonello and Borso.<sup>50</sup> Like his predecessors, Ercole I commissioned pieces from artisans residing in Ferrara or purchased hangings from contacts abroad, but expended less on this aspect of the ducal collection, perhaps owing to its already substantial size.<sup>51</sup> During Alfonso's reign, local production was modest, but as Forti Grazzini has shown, there was a pattern of purchasing Franco-Flemish tapestries, as in the case of several acquisitions from Flemish merchants in 1517.<sup>52</sup> An inventory completed in 1529 details a large collection of tapestries previously unknown in the fifteenth-century inventories: 64 large works of determined mythological or biblical subjects (*coltrine*) and 174 'a verdura' either for chambers or bed-ensembles, as well as other occasional pieces (for

<sup>50</sup> N. Forti Grazzini, *L'arazzo ferrarese* (Milan, 1982), 16–50.

<sup>51</sup> Forti Grazzini, *L'arazzo ferrarese* (above, n. 50), 51–5.

<sup>52</sup> Forti Grazzini, *L'arazzo ferrarese* (above, n. 50), 56. See also N. Forti Grazzini, 'Arazzi di Bruxelles in Italia, 1480–1535. Tracce per un catalogo', in E. Castelnuovo (ed.), *Gli arazzi del cardinale: Bernardo Cles e il ciclo della Passione di Pieter van Aelst* (Trento, 1990), 35–71; N. Forti Grazzini, 'Flemish weavers in Italy in the sixteenth century', in G. Delmarcel (ed.), *Flemish Tapestry Weavers Abroad: Emigration and the Founding of Manufactories in Europe* (Leuven, 2002), 131–62.



FIG. 5. Franco-Flemish, *Open Air Meal in the Garden of Love*, current whereabouts unknown.

example, *spalliere, antiporti*).<sup>53</sup> Tapestries ‘a verdura’ probably comprised a *mille-fleurs* pattern on a green ground usually featuring a central chivalric emblem. This was a long-standing favourite of court decoration. In 1430, the Flemish *tapissier* Jean Hosemant confirmed with his patron Pope Martin V the order for a series featuring the papal arms and ‘various representations of branches, trees, animals, birds, fields, rivers, clouds, and other images of this sort, as comely as art can make them’.<sup>54</sup> Some ‘verdura’ pieces in the 1529 Ferrarese inventory contained figures, in one case a ‘uomo selvatico’, in another, ‘buffoni’.<sup>55</sup>

Given the size of the Este collection but the vagueness of the inventory’s descriptions, a review of Franco-Flemish tapestry subjects from the first quarter of the sixteenth century might reveal further the types of landscape motifs present in Alfonso’s Ferrara. One example (FIG. 6) shows a shepherd and shepherdess seated in a verdant setting exchanging ribald verses.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> The unpublished inventory has been discussed by Forti Grazzini, *L’arazzo ferrarese* (above, n. 50), 56. Archivio Stato di Modena, Camera ducale, Amministrazione della casa, arazzi e tappezzerie, reg. n. 14 bis. *Inventario delle tapezarie*, 1529.

<sup>54</sup> E. Müntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes pendant le XVe et le XVIe siècle; recueil de documents inédits tirés des archives et des bibliothèques romaines*, 3 vols (Paris, 1878–82, reprint, 1983), II, 310.

<sup>55</sup> Forti Grazzini, *L’arazzo ferrarese* (above, n. 50), 59, n. 74.

<sup>56</sup> For the iconography and dating of the *Shepherd and Shepherdess Making Music* (1500–30), see A.S. Cavallo, *Medieval Tapestries in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1993), cat. no. 35. See pp. 485–7 for examples of related subjects.



FIG. 6. Early sixteenth-century Franco-Flemish tapestry, *Shepherd and Shepherdess Making Music*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Susan Vanderpoel Clark, 1967 (67.155.8). © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Reproduced courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

Another (FIG. 7), known in at least two versions, shows a falconer with two women dressed in elaborate courtly attire accompanied by a page and, more unusually, a halberdier.<sup>57</sup> The figure, standing with his back to the viewer and leaning on his halberd, is based on a Dürer print.<sup>58</sup> Along with similarities in subject, the hanging's visual language is closer than earlier tapestries to the pictorial syntax of Dosso's paintings. The sumptuousness and magnificence of Franco-Flemish tapestry would have validated the depiction of countryside pastimes, a framework that Dosso may have used as a template for his own interpretation of the theme.

Dosso's paintings represent a vision of the landscape as *locus amoenus*, a *giardino d'amore* expanded to encompass the domesticated grounds of the villa and the countryside beyond the city walls.<sup>59</sup> Details of political dominion, portrayals of recreation and the bemused treatment of

<sup>57</sup> The *Falconer with Two Ladies, a Page, and a Foot Soldier* is dated 1500 to 1530. For its variants and iconography, see Cavallo, *Medieval Tapestries* (above, n. 56), cat. no. 36.

<sup>58</sup> Cavallo, *Medieval Tapestries* (above, n. 56), 491.

<sup>59</sup> This is the essential conclusion drawn by Humfrey regarding these paintings: Humfrey, 'Two moments in Dosso's career' (above, n. 7), 209.





FIG. 7. Early sixteenth-century Franco-Flemish tapestry, *Falconer with Two Ladies, a Page, and a Foot Soldier*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Reproduced courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, through the ARTstor/IAP Service.)

pastoral motifs suggests Dosso's paintings were made for a sophisticated audience. The version of the countryside here portrayed would have been familiar to members of the Este household, at once a literary ideal of sylvan retreat, an antidote to the restriction of court life and the geographic mass of the *ducato*. As such, they would have made a suitable adornment for ducal residences, dated as they are to the years in which Dosso was executing paintings for Alfonso's apartments.

The next section will examine Giovio's reception of Dosso's paintings of landscape scenes and how images of the countryside may have related to a project of his own, the revival of the ancient villa.

#### MAKING LANDSCAPE ALL'ANTICA: GIOVIO, THE VILLA AND THE LANGUAGE OF OTIUM

By 1514, Giovio had begun the practice of writing the history of his times, including the work of famous artists.<sup>60</sup> Initially based in Rome as a Medici dependant, he was often in Florence,



where his patron, Cardinal Giulio, had been appointed governor by his, Giulio's, cousin, Leo X. Giovio was involved in the decorative scheme for large reception rooms at the Medici villa, Poggio a Caiano, in 1520.<sup>61</sup> From Florence he began to make contacts at the courts of Mantua and Ferrara, and was known and admired by the Ferrarese agent in Florence, who recommended him to Alfonso d'Este. By February 1521 Giovio had received from the duke a requested portrait of the physician and Greek scholar Niccolò Leonicensi, for a collection he was building.<sup>62</sup> Their warm relationship later bore fruit in Giovio's biography of Alfonso, *De Vita et Rebus Gestis Alphonsi Atestini Ferrariae Principis*. During the brief period between the pontificates of Leo X and Clement VII, Giovio was attached to the household of Gerolamo Adorno, an agent for the cause of the Holy Roman Empire. Travelling with Adorno he arrived in Ferrara in December 1522 on a mission to detach the duchy from its French allegiances and to encourage better ties with the Hapsburgs. While there he met Leonicensi, renewed his friendship with Celio Calcagnini, and would have seen the paintings by Dosso in the ducal apartments. In October 1522 Dosso had received a large payment of 158 *lire*, signalling the completion of extensive work in the *Via Coperta*.<sup>63</sup> Thus the duke might have been particularly eager that the visiting Imperial embassy should see the rooms when they arrived two months later. As discussed above, the bedroom included a frieze of paintings later inventoried as *paesi* and attributed to Dosso.

In 1523 Giovio was back in Rome for the beginning of a long career serving Pope Clement VII and later Paul III. After his arrival there, the only substantial period he spent outside the city (until returning to build his museum on the shores of Lake Como in 1537) immediately followed the Sack of Rome in 1527, when he fled to Ischia at the invitation of Vittoria Colonna.<sup>64</sup>

Giovio referred to Dosso in his *De Viris Illustribus*, an idealized dialogue between the author, the *marchese* del Vasto and Giovanni Antonio Muscettola, all guests of Vittoria Colonna during Giovio's Ischian retreat.<sup>65</sup> In a section entitled *Dell'imitazione*, Giovio displayed his opinions in the well-known humanist debate on the nature of literary imitation and style, a debate founded on Cicero's discussion of the orator's training in *De Oratore*.<sup>66</sup> Operating in the tradition of *ut*

<sup>60</sup> For Giovio's early activity, see Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio* (above, n. 2), 20–7.

<sup>61</sup> This was first mentioned by Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), IV, 511. See also P. Costamagna, *Pontormo* (Milan, 1994), cat. no. 34, for the inventions.

<sup>62</sup> Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio* (above, n. 2), 34, n. 40.

<sup>63</sup> See above, n. 38.

<sup>64</sup> For an evocative description of Giovio's Ischian retreat, see Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio* (above, n. 2), 86–105; for the building of the museum, see pp. 159–62, 187–9.

<sup>65</sup> For the dialogue, see Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento* (above, n. 22), I, 19–23. See also T.C.P. Zimmermann, 'The evolution of Renaissance art criticism', in C.H. Clough (ed.), *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance, Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristelle* (Manchester, 1976), 406–24, esp. pp. 410–12. For the dating of *De Viris Illustribus* to around 1528, see n. 50.

<sup>66</sup> See also P. Giovio, *Scritti d'arte: lessico ed ecfresi*, ed. S. Maffei (Pisa, 1999), 221–32. For the *topos* of imitation and individual talent in relation to the Renaissance revival of Roman rhetoric, see M. Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orator: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford, 1971), 1–50.

*pictura poesis*, Giovio made artistic practice an example for literature, and advocated for imitation as apprenticeship, to be followed by the development of individual style. As examples of personal style, Giovio cited artists: Donatello, Michelangelo, Sebastiano, Titian and Dosso.<sup>67</sup> Describing the Ferrarese painter, he wrote: ‘Doxium imagines rigidae, vivaces, convolutae, effumidis adumbratae coloribus’.<sup>68</sup> In his analysis of Giovio’s vocabulary, Maffei noted that *rigidae* was a word Cicero used to describe sculpture in *Brutus*.<sup>69</sup> *Vivax*, vigorous or animated, first appeared as a term to describe figures in Alberti’s *De Pictura*.<sup>70</sup> When combined with *convolutae*, rendered by Maffei as ‘sinuous’, the three terms effectively represent Dosso’s style of modelling the figure.<sup>71</sup> His unusual use of colour is described as ‘effumidis adumbratae coloribus’, implying a vapour-like quality.<sup>72</sup> Giovio’s description shows that he was looking closely at Dosso’s paintings, seeking to understand their specific qualities in order to create anew a critical vocabulary to express them.

At around the same time that he wrote *De Viris Illustribus*, Giovio wrote the biographies of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael, where the reference to Dosso’s *parerga* appeared. The ‘Lives’ of both Raphael and Leonardo are posthumous, while the last datable reference in Michelangelo’s ‘Life’ is 1525: it therefore has been supposed that they were written during the same period of Ischian retreat as *De Viris Illustribus*, that is, around 1528.<sup>73</sup> Their form is similar to the *elogia* that later accompanied individual portraits in Giovio’s portrait collection: the historian was at work on a series of these biographies, which he hoped to publish with printed versions of the portraits.<sup>74</sup> At the end of the ‘Life’ of Raphael, Giovio mentioned other painters, Giulio and Penni, Sebastiano, Titian, Costa and Sodoma, as well as Dosso.

Zimmerman has shown Pliny’s descriptions of paintings to be the source for much of Giovio’s vocabulary in *De Viris Illustribus*.<sup>75</sup> In the case of his description of Dosso’s landscape ability in the ‘Life’ of Raphael, his paraphrase of Pliny can be seen as both an approximate description and a lexicographical choice: the application not of a suitable word but of an entire passage from

<sup>67</sup> The full text of the dialogue is published in Giovio, *Scritti d’arte* (above, n. 66), 216–19.

<sup>68</sup> The complete passage reads: ‘Doxium imagines rigidae, vivaces, convolutae, effumidis adumbratae coloribus mire delectant, quae tametsi in eadem re certius exprimenda et specie varia sint et dissimilia, summam tamen omnes alios modo, uti genii iudiciaque tulerunt, excellentis industriae commendationem accipiunt’ (Barocchi, *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento* (above, n. 22), I, 22–3). ‘Dosso is wonderfully delighted by images that are rough, vivacious, intertwined and shaded with smoky colours; and although in expressing, surely, the same nature and appearance of things the works of these painters are varied and dissimilar, nonetheless, as tastes and judgement have disposed, they have all received, each in his own way, the highest commendation for excellence’: translation by Zimmermann, ‘The evolution of Renaissance art criticism’ (above, n. 56), 412.

<sup>69</sup> Maffei in Giovio, *Scritti d’arte* (above, n. 66), 231, n. 88.

<sup>70</sup> Maffei in Giovio, *Scritti d’arte* (above, n. 66), 231.

<sup>71</sup> Maffei in Giovio, *Scritti d’arte* (above, n. 66), 231.

<sup>72</sup> Maffei in Giovio, *Scritti d’arte* (above, n. 66), 231.

<sup>73</sup> Zimmermann, ‘The evolution of Renaissance art criticism’ (above, n. 65), 415, 422–3, n. 50.

<sup>74</sup> Zimmermann, ‘The evolution of Renaissance art criticism’ (above, n. 65), 415. See also Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio* (above, n. 2), 207–8.

<sup>75</sup> Zimmermann, ‘The evolution of Renaissance art criticism’ (above, n. 65), 414–15. See also Maffei in Giovio, *Scritti d’arte* (above, n. 66), 231–2.

a known classical source. By such means, Giovio was honouring Dosso's art, but also positioning himself as one qualified to recognize, name and explain modern art in terms of the antique.

One of the key features of Giovio's description of Dosso's art is the difference between the treatment of the painting's subjects (*iusta opera*) and *parerga*. The same distinction is made in another similar discourse on landscape in Giovio's *Dialogus de Viris et Foeminis*, composed around the same time.<sup>76</sup>

Mirifice [...] me delectant haec amoena diverticula, quibus instituti sermones nostri non secus ac in pictis tabulis videmus, in quibus non tam ipsae grandiores imagines ex decreto pictoris eleganter expressae commendantur, quam illa parerga in remotis recessibus ad prospectus rationem successive diminuta, uti sunt venationes, sylvae, flumina, pastorales casae, et evagantium nubium simulachra, quae extemporanea quadam lascivia manus eruditae ad detinendos spectantium oculos cum iucunda dissimulatione depinguntur.<sup>77</sup>

Details and ornament are praised, in some cases more than the figures that articulate the subject. Maffei has suggested that Giovio's use of the term 'lascivia', ornament, echoes the term 'lascivo penicillo' that was used to describe the faculty evident in Raphael's Vatican Loggia grotesques, an ornamental form distinct from paintings with determined subjects.<sup>78</sup>

The word choice in both landscape passages suggests a separate artistic process requiring a specific disposition, one informed by the positive associations of *otium*.<sup>79</sup> I suggest Giovio derived this concept from the rhetorical genre of the epideictic form as described in Cicero's *Orator*, which associated epideictic with *otium*. In *Orator* Cicero isolated the 'show-pieces' of epideictic that were designed to entertain with a 'sweet and copious style'.<sup>80</sup> In one of his earlier treatises on the subject, *De Oratore*, Cicero had presented the three rhetorical species — forensic, deliberative and demonstrative (epideictic) — as equal parts of the rhetorical triad. But

<sup>76</sup> For the dating of the *Dialogus de Viris et Foeminis*, see Zimmermann, 'The evolution of Renaissance art criticism' (above, n. 65), 418; Maffei in Giovio, *Scritti d'arte* (above, n. 66), 276–7.

<sup>77</sup> *Dialogus de Viris et Foeminis Aetate Nostra Florentibus*, in *Pauli Iovii Opera*, IX, *Dialogi et descriptiones*, eds F. Travi and M. Penco (Rome, 1984), 197. 'It pleases me much, these pleasant paths with which we see the discourse of our argument, not so differently than in a painted picture, where one praises not the figures rendered with elegance in conformity with the criteria of the painter, as much as the details (*parerga*) in the background rendered always smaller in succession according to the laws of perspectival views, in which there are hunts, woods, springs, shepherd's huts and figures composed from moving clouds, that are painted with unrehearsed richness of ornament by a hand expert in detaining the eye of the spectator in pleasant dissimulation'; trans. Gregory Crane.

<sup>78</sup> Maffei in Giovio, *Scritti d'arte* (above, n. 66), 276, n. 103; for Raphael's biography, pp. 260–3, for a discussion of Raphael's grotesques and his 'lascivo penicillo', pp. 268–70.

<sup>79</sup> For the meaning of *otium* in the Renaissance, which was problematic due to its associations with turpitude, see B. Vickers, 'Leisure and idleness in the Renaissance: the ambivalence of *otium*', *Renaissance Studies* 4 (1990), 1–7, 107–54.

<sup>80</sup> Cicero, *Orator* 38–9, 42 in *Brutus and Orator*, trans. G.L. Hendrickson and H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge (MA), 1939), 333, 335, 337.

in *Orator*, Cicero suggested that demonstrative oratory is not suitable for weighty subjects and thus is ‘fitter for the parade than for the battle; set apart for the gymnasium and the palaestra, it is spurned and rejected in the forum’.<sup>81</sup> While unfit for the ‘contests of public life’, this form ministers to the ‘voluptati aurium’, the pleasures of the ear, and offers a public expression of *otium* within proscribed boundaries.<sup>82</sup> Along with Cicero’s *De Oratore* and *Brutus*, *Orator* was among the first works put into print when it was published in 1465.<sup>83</sup>

Giovio attributed the particular nature of Dosso’s landscapes to his ‘pursuing with pleasurable labour the delightful diversions of painting’, language that conjures up the notion of *otium*.<sup>84</sup> This is reinforced by the general description of Dosso’s ‘extravagant and festive manner’. When Giovio distinguished between the playfulness of painted landscape scenes and the figures that show the painting’s subject, he may have been echoing the distinction in rhetorical genres between epideictic, on the one hand, and forensic and deliberative, on the other.<sup>85</sup>

Giovio was probably aware of the ancient and contemporary sources that discussed landscape as a subject suitable for the places of leisure and retreat, villas, *loggie* and gardens. Vitruvius mentioned landscape as a fitting subject for the walls of a villa: in his division of the three theatrical registers, tragic, comic and satyric, the satyric mode is shown by painted backdrops of landscape.<sup>86</sup> In book IX of *De Re Aedificatoria*, Alberti suggested landscape as a suitable ornamentation for the walls of the *villa suburbana* and alluded to Vitruvius’s tripartite scheme.<sup>87</sup> Public apartments and those of ‘the most eminent individuals’ should be ornamented with deeds of great princes; the rooms of private citizens should be appointed in a manner suitable to them. The walls of the *villa suburbana* should be decorated with scenes from the ‘life of the simple farmer’, that is landscape, because that is ‘the most light hearted of them all’; a reference to the literary register of the satyric genre. ‘We are particularly delighted when we see paintings of pleasant landscapes or harbours, scenes of fishing, hunting, bathing, or country sports, and

<sup>81</sup> Cicero, *Orator* (above, n. 80), 42, p. 337.

<sup>82</sup> Cicero, *Orator* (above, n. 80), 208, p. 481.

<sup>83</sup> G.A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, 1999), 226.

<sup>84</sup> To use Wood’s translation: see above, n. 22.

<sup>85</sup> By the sixteenth century, the use of rhetorical concepts to fashion terms of art criticism was quite common. See B. Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford, 1988), 343–54. The pioneering study linking the revival of ancient rhetoric to the origins of Renaissance art criticism is M. Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford, 1971). See also C. Goldstein, ‘Rhetoric and art history in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque’, *The Art Bulletin* 73 (1991), 641–52.

<sup>86</sup> Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 7.5.2: ‘Then they proceeded to imitate the contours of buildings, the outstanding projections of columns and gables; in open spaces, like exedrae, they designed scenery on a large scale in tragic, comic, and satyric style; in covered promenades, because of the length of the walls, they used for ornament the varieties of landscape gardening, finding subjects in the characteristics of particular places; for they paint harbours, headlands, shores, rivers, springs, straits, temples, groves, hills, cattle, shepherds’; Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, 2 vols, trans. F. Granger (London, 1961–2), II, 103. In book 5.6.9, Vitruvius first mentioned the tripartite division of theatrical modes and the satyric register depicting landscape.

<sup>87</sup> L.B. Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. J. Rykwert, N. Leach and R. Tavernor (Cambridge (MA)/London, 1988), 299.



flowery and leafy views.' These sources suggest that landscape was a separate type of art, used to create proscribed space for leisurely pursuits and the cultivation of *otium*.

Giovio's interest in descriptions of landscape can be found amongst his earliest literary endeavours. In a letter written in 1504, he imagined his family's countryside home transformed into a Roman villa by modelling his prose on Pliny the Younger's descriptions of his own villas in Tuscany, Umbria and Como, descriptions that included the surrounding landscape.<sup>88</sup> This admiration for the culture of the villa bore fruit when he began his museum in 1537, which he claimed was sited on an ancient Plinian villa.<sup>89</sup> His early letter indicates how the 'future humanist was constructing a life based on the myth of antiquity' that he would live out through his literary exploits, the magnificence of his patron and, later, his own magnificence, by the creation of the museum.<sup>90</sup> By seeing the countryside around him through Pliny's descriptions, it became an object of *all'antica* significance, having aesthetic value in tune with the privileged position from which villa inhabitants considered their surroundings. The ethos of villa life altered the relationship of the beholder to the world around, as one's surroundings were transformed from encroaching wilderness to pleasant dominion. For the man of letters who created a sense of reality from ancient literary sources, the experience of the villa may not have been immediately tangible in the beginning of his career. But the humanist's desire to see it recreated may have opened his eyes to worthy approximations in the courts through which he moved, before he could recreate it for himself in his Plinian villa in Como, beginning in 1534.<sup>91</sup>

## DOSSO AND ITALIAN LANDSCAPE IN THE FLEMISH STYLE

Despite the initial coincidence of their historical projects, Giovio and Vasari's understanding of Dosso's ability to paint landscape differed. For Giovio, it likely reflected an earlier period in the artist's career, works that were already completed by the time of the historian's visit to Ferrara in 1522. As we have seen, this would have included at least one example of a frieze of landscape paintings in a prominent location. Vasari's perception of Dosso's ability in this area was probably based on a later phase of the painter's *oeuvre*, in which he emulated Flemish style for both small paintings of saints and for biblical scenes and larger paintings that included landscape elements.

Dosso's *Landscape with Saints* (PLATE 3) is one of the closest approximations of Flemish paintings by a north Italian in these years when there was a taste for painting *alla fiamminga*.

<sup>88</sup> Zimmermann, 'The evolution of Renaissance art criticism' (above, n. 65), 418, n. 70. For the letter see Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio* (above, n. 2), 4–5, and S. Della Torre, 'L'inedita opera prima di Paolo Giovio ed il museo: l'interesse di un umanista per il tema della villa', in *Atti del convegno Paolo Giovio, il Rinascimento e la memoria* (Como, 1985), 283–91. For Pliny's letters on his villas, see P. de la Ruffinière du Prey, *The Villas of Pliny from Antiquity to Posterity* (Chicago/London, 1994).

<sup>89</sup> For the museum, see Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio* (above, n. 2), 187–9, 206–8.

<sup>90</sup> Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio* (above, n. 2), 5.

<sup>91</sup> The literature on Giovio's villa and museum is considerable. See Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio* (above, n. 2), 159–62, 206–8.



FIG. 8. Garofalo, *Lamentation of the Dead Christ*, Pinacoteca Brera, Milan. (Reproduced courtesy of the Pinacoteca Brera, Milan.)

While the fifteenth-century Ferrarese taste for Flemish art has been well documented, there is no record of paintings by contemporary Flemish artists in Ferrara in the 1520s.<sup>92</sup> However, there were numerous Flemish paintings mentioned in Venetian, Mantuan and Veronese collections during the 1520s and 1530s, and large numbers of them were imported on speculation.<sup>93</sup> This

<sup>92</sup> The literature on Flemish art in fifteenth-century Ferrara is extensive. For a recent treatment of the topic with previous bibliography, see L. Campbell, 'Cosmè Tura and Netherlandish art', in S. Campbell and A. Chong (eds), *Cosmè Tura: Painting and Design in Renaissance Ferrara* (Boston, 2002), 71–105.

<sup>93</sup> For a recent review of the literature on the north Italian reception of Flemish painting, see the essays collected in C. Lementani-Virdis (ed.), *La pittura fiamminga nel Veneto e nell'Emilia* (Verona, 1997); B. Aikema and B.L. Brown (eds), *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Dürer, Bellini and Titian* (New York/London, 2001). See also L.S. Dixon (ed.), *In Detail: New Studies of Northern Renaissance Art in Honor of Walter S. Gibson* (Turnhout, 1998), 37–47. There are numerous examples of Flemish painting cited in Michiel, *Notizia* (above, n. 35), 173, 178, 195–7, 208, 218, 219. In 1535 Matteo del Nassaro brought 300



FIG. 9. Garofalo (attr.), *Capriccio alla Fiamminga*, Galleria Borghese, Rome. © Scala/Art Resource, NY. (Reproduced courtesy of Art Resource.)

trend increased until Vasari could quip in a 1547 letter to Benedetto Varchi that ‘non è casa di ciavattino che paesi todeschi non siano’.<sup>94</sup>

The presence of Flemish paintings in Ferrara can be inferred from the close emulation of the *Weltlandschaft* tradition in Garofalo’s altarpieces, such as the 1527 *Lamentation of the Dead Christ* (FIG. 8), and the so-called *Capriccio alla Fiamminga* (FIG. 9).<sup>95</sup> Also dated to the late 1520s, the *Capriccio* (attributed to either Girolamo da Carpi or Garofalo) shows a landscape

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Flemish paintings to Italy and sold 120 to Federico II Gonzaga: S. Sulzberger, ‘Matteo del Nassaro et la transmission des oeuvres flamandes en France et en Italie’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 55 (1960), 147–50, esp. p. 149. For this purchase and the intended project for their installation, see C.M. Brown, ‘Pictures in the Ducal Palace in Mantua, among them a collection of “Quadri de Fiandra”’, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 44 (1981), 53–5; G. Rebecchini, ‘Exchanges of works of art at the court of Federico II Gonzaga with an appendix on Flemish art’, *Renaissance Studies* 16 (2002), 381–91.

<sup>94</sup> ‘as for German landscapes, there is no cobbler’s house without one’. P. Barocchi (ed.), *Trattati d’arte del Cinquecento fra manierismo e controriforma* (Bari, 1960–1), 61.

<sup>95</sup> For the altarpiece, see A. Fioravanti-Baraldi, *Il Garofalo: Benvenuto Tisi, pittore (c. 1476–1559). Catalogo generale* (Ferrara, 1993), cat. no. 129. For the *Capriccio*, see R. Turner, ‘Garofalo and a *Capriccio alla Fiamminga*’, *Paragone* 181 (1965), 60–9. For the troubled attributional history of the painting, see P. Della Pergola, *Galleria Borghese: i dipinti*, 2 vols (Rome, 1955), I, cat. no. 12.

with fantastic mountains, elevated horizons and strong attention to detail, in addition to Bosch-like creatures that parade in the foreground.

Dosso's *Landscape with Saints* (PLATE 3) often has been compared to Patinir's work, though he generally achieved a softer, more atmospheric effect closer to the so-called 'Master of the Female Half-lengths'. The 'Master' has long been recognized as a painter (or group of painters) active in Antwerp in the circle of Patinir.<sup>96</sup> Many of the paintings of half-length figures ascribed to the 'Master' have early Spanish provenances, and thus it is probable that some of the workshop's output was made for direct export.<sup>97</sup> Though there are none with documented Venetian and north Italian provenances, they easily could have been brought to Italy as part of a commercial enterprise in Flemish goods.<sup>98</sup>

Humfrey has signalled important compositional similarities between the Dossi's *Low Flight into Egypt* and the 'Master of the Female Half-lengths's' *Flight into Egypt* in Raleigh.<sup>99</sup> Other paintings attributed to the 'Master' — the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist* (PLATE 8), the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (FIG. 10) and *Landscape with John the Baptist Preaching and the Baptism of Christ* (FIG. 11) — may be relevant to understanding the artistic choices represented by the *Landscape with Saints* (PLATE 3), the *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen* (PLATE 4) and the Harck *Flight into Egypt* (FIG. 2).

In the example of the *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen* (PLATE 4), rock and river formations are similar to those found in the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist* (PLATE 8). A central mound of earth acts as the backdrop for the action of the figures in the foreground. Pathways lead away into the middle distance, inhabited by peasants and soldiers picked out in bright costumes. The bare cliffs and vertical rock formations stand behind the crenellated walls of the city, which sits on the edge of the water. The dense foliage of the trees frames the distant vistas and brooding, aqueous skies. The palette is similar to the *Landscape with John the Baptist Preaching and the Baptism of Christ* (FIG. 11), which also includes figures in bright garb and turbans who amble along well-trodden paths.

It was probably the reputation of these examples of Dosso's *oeuvre* that led Vasari to characterize the artist as the leading painter of landscape 'in the German manner'.

<sup>96</sup> Friedländer was the first to identify the 'Master'; see M.J. Friedländer, *Die Altniederländische Malerei* (Berlin, 1924–37); M.J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 16 vols (Leiden, 1967–76), XII, 18–21. See also R.A. Koch, *Joachim Patinir* (Princeton, 1968); W.S. Gibson, 'Mirror of the Earth': *The World Landscape on Sixteenth-century Flemish Painting* (Princeton, 1989), 15–16. More recently, see E. Konowitz, 'The Master of the Female Half-lengths group, eclecticism and novelty', *Oud Holland* 113 (1999), 1–12. See also T. Heineman (ed.), *Uppsala University Art Collection: Painting and Sculpture* (Uppsala, 2001), 156–7; E. Vergara, *Patinir: Essays and Critical Catalogue* (Madrid, 2007), 264–5.

<sup>97</sup> E. Konowitz, 'Master of the Female Half-lengths group', in J. Turner (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art*, 34 vols (New York, 1996), XX, 664–6.

<sup>98</sup> For Flemish paintings in the *Weltlandschaft* tradition in Italy, see Gibson, 'Mirror of the Earth' (above, n. 96), 37–47.

<sup>99</sup> Humfrey, 'Two moments in Dosso's career' (above, n. 7), 210.





FIG. 10. 'Master of the Female Half-lengths' (attr.), *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY. (Reproduced courtesy of Art Resource.)

#### 'DA POI CHE LA MANIERA TEDESCA S'È VEDUTA': VASARI'S ACCOUNT OF DOSSO'S LIFE AND THE REPUTATION OF LANDSCAPE IN THE *LIVES*

Vasari visited Ferrara twice, first in 1540, then again in 1542.<sup>100</sup> Though he had not yet begun his project of compiling a collection of artists' *Lives*, he was gathering information and forming opinions about artistic activities in different regions. In Mantua he met Giulio Romano, describing his four days there as the artist showed him drawings and plans dating from his days in Raphael's studio.<sup>101</sup> But this kind of contact was exceptional. In most cities, he met with local figures and saw what was easily accessible, keen to gauge the local reputation of local artists.<sup>102</sup> He was given at least partial access to the Ferrarese *castello*, because in the *Life* of Girolamo a Carpi he described two paintings by the artist, *Occasio* and *Venus Nude with Amore*

<sup>100</sup> For a reconstruction of his itinerary, which appeared in the 'Life' of Garofalo from the second edition, see Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), V, 409, 414, 418.

<sup>101</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), V, 78–9.

<sup>102</sup> Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari* (above, n. 4), 135.

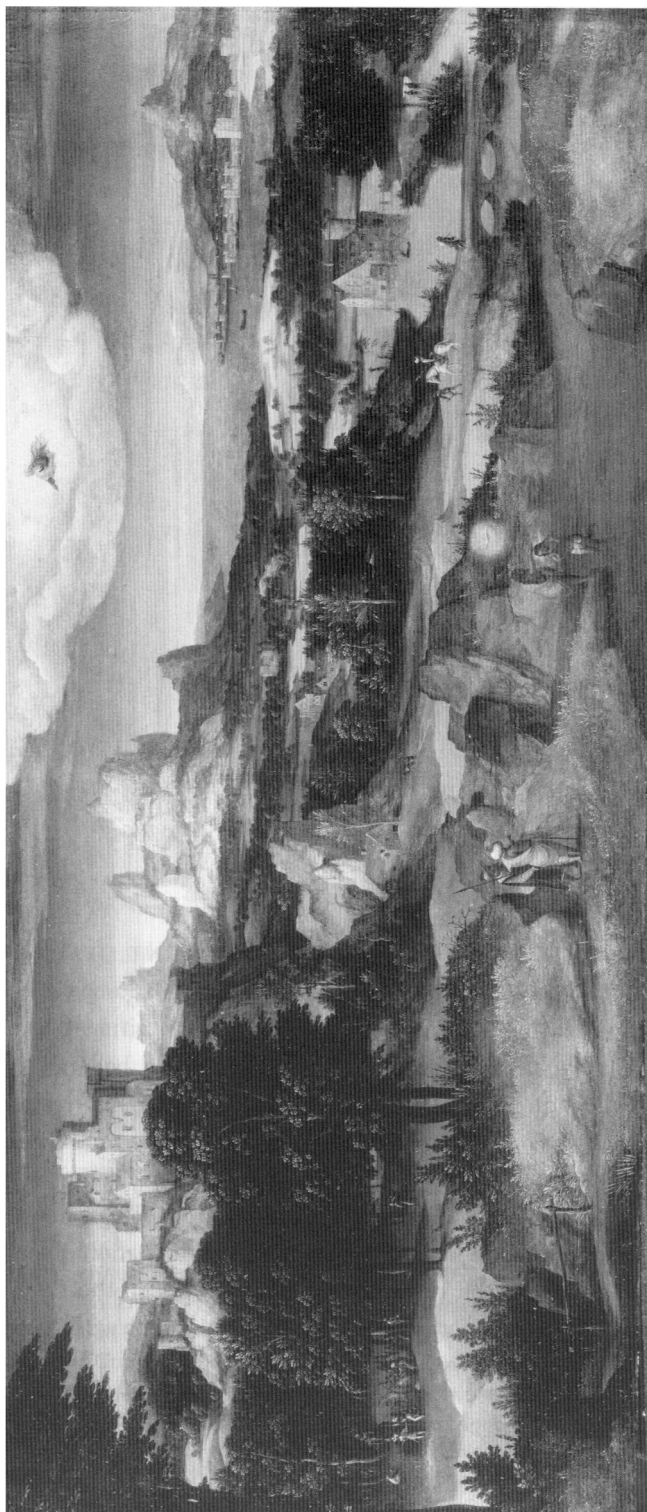


FIG. 11. 'Master of the Female Half-lengths' (attr.), *Landscape with John the Baptist Preaching and the Baptism of Christ, Uppsala University Art Collections*. © Uppsala University Art Collections. (Reproduced courtesy of Uppsala University.)

in the ducal apartments.<sup>105</sup> At the time of these visits, Dosso was still alive or had died only recently.

The account of 'Dosso e Battista Ferraresi, pittori' appeared in the *Life* of Alfonso Lombardi, a Ferrarese sculptor whose career took place mostly in Bologna and Rome.<sup>104</sup> Vasari began by reciting Ariosto's mention of the Dossi and calibrating the measure of fame the poet had attributed to the brothers.

Quasi ne' medesimi tempi che il Cielo fece dono a Ferrara, anzi al mondo, del divino Lodovico Ariosto, nacque il Dosso pittore nella medesima città, il quale, se bene non fu così raro tra i pittori come l'Ariosto tra i poeti, si portò nondimeno per sì fatta maniera nell'arte, che oltre all'essere state in gran pregio le sue opere in Ferrara, meritò anco che il dotto poeta, amico e dimestico suo, facesse di lui onorata memoria ne' suoi celebratissimi scritti: onde al nome del Dosso ha dato maggior fama la penna di messer Lodovico che non fecero tutti i pennelli e' colori ch'e' consumò in tutta sua vita. Onde io per me confesso che grandissima ventura è quella di coloro che sono da così grandi uomini celebrati, perché il valor della penna sforza infiniti a dar credenza alle lodi di quelli, anchorché interamente non le meritino.<sup>105</sup>

In the context of an extensive *paragone*, in which Ariosto had asserted the supremacy of poetry over painting, the poet had mentioned a series of ancient artists along with their modern counterparts: Timagoras, Parrhasius, Protogenes and Apelles, and Leonardo, Mantegna, Bellini, Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian and Sebastiano del Piombo, as well as the Dossi brothers.<sup>106</sup> All of them stood, or were meant to stand, at the pinnacle of renown, and thus prove his point that, no matter how great their art, they were dependent on literary men to craft their reputations after

<sup>105</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), V, 417–18.

<sup>104</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), IV, 419–23.

<sup>105</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), IV, 419–20. 'About the same time that Heaven presented to Ferrara, or rather, to the world, the divine Lodovico Ariosto, there was born in the same city the painter Dosso, who, although he was not as rare among painters as Ariosto among poets, nevertheless acquitted himself in his art in such a manner, that, besides the great esteem wherein his works were held in Ferrara, his merits caused the learned poet, his intimate friend, to honour his memory by mentioning him in his most celebrated writings; so that the pen of Messer Lodovico has given more renown to the name of Dosso than did all the brushes and colours that he used in the whole of his life. Wherefore I, for my part, declare that there could be no greater good-fortune than that of those who are celebrated by such great men, since the might of the pen forces most of mankind to accept their fame, even though they may not wholly deserve it.' G. Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 2 vols, trans. G. de Vere (New York, 1996), I, 868.

<sup>106</sup> *Orlando furioso* XXXIII.1–2: 'Such ancient painters as Parrhasius, / Zeuxis, Timagoras, Protogenes, / Apollodore and Polygnotus, / Timanthes and Alexander's Apelles, / Whose names for ever will be known to us / (In spite of Clotho and her cruelties) / As long as men shall write and men shall read / What artists' hands in former ages did, / And those of recent times, or living still, / Leonardo and Mantegna and the two / Named Dossi, Gian Bellino, he whose skill / In paint and marble may be likened to the Angel Michael's, Bastian, Raphael, / And Titian to whose mastery is due / Such glory that Urbino shares no more, / And Venice shines no brighter, than Cadore'. *Orlando furioso*, 2 vols, trans. B. Reynolds (New York, 1977), 279.

their works were destroyed by time. The project of the *Lives* was closely bound with the question of fame. Vasari did not object to Ariosto's roll-call of artistic greatness, only that Dosso and Battista Dossi were included among superior artists. He proposed his account of the Ferrarese artists as a more balanced appraisal of the craft of the Dossi brothers. Primarily he offered the ability to paint landscapes as the chief merit of their art.

Praise is dispensed as freely as blame throughout the short description of career and works. Criticism of a mediocre work is followed by that worthy of commendation. Vasari described the commissions for the Duomo of Ferrara, in Modena and Faenza, all paintings that he had seen on his earlier travels.<sup>107</sup> Roughly half of the account is given over to a description of the Pesaro commission.<sup>108</sup> Vasari was assistant to Bronzino in 1533, and was assisted by Raffaellino dal Colle in commissions of 1536 and later in the mid-'40s when he was preparing his book of *Lives*: both worked with Dosso on the same suite of rooms at Pesaro.<sup>109</sup> So it is not surprising that much of the *Life* is given over to that project. Vasari gave few descriptions of Dosso's work for the Este court, except to allude generally to his many paintings around Ferrara and the frescoes 'di chiaro e scuro' of Herculean subjects in the courtyard of the palazzo.<sup>110</sup> Information that appeared in other artists' *Lives* in the 1568 edition does not suggest that Vasari had access to Dosso's work in the ducal palace.<sup>111</sup>

After extracting the lengthy description of the Villa Imperiale commission, the outline of the first edition of Dosso's artistic life reads:

Era il Dosso ferrarese pittor molto amato dal duca Alfonso di Ferrara, prima per le sue qualità nell'arte della pittura, e poi per le sue piacevolezze che molto al Duca dilettavano. Ebbe in Lombardia titolo da tutti i pittori di fare i paesi meglio che alcuno altro che di quella pratica operasse, o in muro o in olio o a guazzo, massimamente da poi che la maniera tedesca s'è veduta. Fece in Ferrara nella chiesa cattedrale una tavola con figure a olio tenuta assai bella, e lavorò al Duca nel palazzo infinite stanze insieme con un suo fratello detto Batista, i quali sempre furono nimici l'uno dello altro, ancora che lavorassero insieme. Egli fecero di chiaro e scuro il cortile del duca di Ferrara con le storie di Ercole, e dipinsero una infinità d'ignudi per quelle mura; e similmente per tutta quella città lavorarono, e in muro et in tavola molte cose dipinsero. Fecero in Modona nel Duomo di loro mano una tavola; e si condussero a Trento per il cardinale a lavorare il palazzo suo in compagnia d'altri pittori, e quivi fecero molte cose di lor mano. Furono appreso condotti a Pesero per il

<sup>107</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), IV, 420, 422.

<sup>108</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), IV, 420–2.

<sup>109</sup> Smyth, 'On Dosso Dossi at Pesaro' (above, n. 5), 243, nn. 22–4.

<sup>110</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), IV, 420.

<sup>111</sup> In the *Life* of Titian, Vasari mentioned the *Camerino* and a somewhat confused description of Dosso's paintings therein, a 'Vulcano [in una grotta] con due fabbrì alla fucina' and 'istorie di Enea, di Marte e Venere': Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), VI, 158. In the *Life* of Girolamo da Carpi, he mentioned Dosso's contribution to the *Camerino* again, this time as 'una Baccanaria d'uomini' (V, 417).



duca Francesco Maria ... Finalmente divenuto Dosso già vecchio e non molto lavorando, ebbe continuo dal duca Alfonso emolumento e provvisione, benchè egli, per un male che gli venne indebitato, in breve tempo passò di questa vita. Rimase Batista suo fratello, che vive ancora, il quale molte cose fece dopo la morte di Dosso, mantenendosi in buon stato. Fu seppellito in Ferrara patria sua; e la principalissima laude sua fu il dipingere bene i paesi.<sup>112</sup>

It would appear that Vasari derived the essential information of Dosso's life from Simone Fornari's edition of *Orlando furioso*, published in two parts in 1549–50, where Fornari recorded the lives of artists mentioned by Ariosto: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Bellini and Dosso among them.<sup>113</sup> Concerning Dosso, he wrote:

Il Dosso Ferrarese Pittore fu dal Duca Alphonso amato et per le belle qualita nell'arte, et per le sue piacevolezze, che al duca fortemente aggradivano. Hebbe in Lombardia titolo da tutti i pittori di contrafare meglio i paesi o in muro, o in olio, o a guazzo, che pittor che fusse. In Ferrara lavorò al Duca nel palazzo infinite stanze insieme co'l suo fratello Battista, colquale sempre visse come nimico. Di costui ancho intende l'Ariosto nominando duo Dossi, come si vede. Lavorarono in Modona, in Faenza, in Trento per il Cardinale, et in Pesero per il Duca Francesco Maria. Mori il Dosso gia vecchio, et fu seppellito in Ferrara, lasciando doppo se il suo fratello Battista, che anchor vive mantenendosi in buono stato.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), IV, 420–2. 'Dosso was much beloved by Duke Alfonso of Ferrara: first for his good abilities in the art of painting, and then because he was a very pleasant and amiable person — a manner of man in whom the Duke greatly delighted. Dosso had the reputation in Lombardy of executing landscapes better than any other painter engaged in that branch of the profession, whether in mural painting, in oil, or in gouache; and all the more after the German manner became known. In Ferrara, for the Cathedral Church, he executed a panel-picture with figures in oils, which was held to be passing beautiful; and in the Duke's Palace he painted many rooms, in company with a brother of his, called Battista. These two were always enemies, one against the other, although they worked together. In the court of the said palace they executed stories of Hercules in chiaroscuro, with an endless number of nudes on those walls; and in like manner they painted many works on panel and in fresco throughout all Ferrara. By their hands is a panel in the Cathedral of Modena; and they painted many things in the Cardinal's Palace at Trent, in company with other painters. They were summoned to Pesaro by the Duke Francesco Maria ... Ultimately Dosso, having grown old, spent his last years without working, being pensioned by Duke Alfonso, but despite this, he fell ill and shortly passed away. And in the end Battista survived him, executing many works by himself, and maintaining himself in good condition. Dosso was buried in Ferrara, his *patria*, and his primary fame was in painting landscapes well', translation adapted from Vasari, *Lives* (above, n. 105), I, 868–9. (De Vere translated the 1568 edition, whereas I have referred to the 1550 edition. The editions are almost identical, except for small but important differences, such as the final pronouncement about Dosso's reputation (which appears only in the earlier edition).)

<sup>113</sup> F. Gibbons, *Dosso and Battista Dossi: Court Painters at Ferrara* (Princeton, 1968), 150. While the author mentioned the fact that Fornari's discussion of Dosso preceded Vasari's as the first treatment of the artist after his death, he did not mention the similarity of the latter to the former.

<sup>114</sup> S. Fornari, *La spositione di M. Simon Fornari da Rheggio sopra l'Orlando furioso di M. Ludovico Ariosto*, 2 vols (Florence, 1549–50), I, 511–12. 'The painter Dosso of Ferrara was much beloved by Duke Alfonso



Fornari visited Ferrara while preparing his treatment of the *Furioso* and, as he recorded in the accompanying biography of Ariosto, he met the poet's son, Virginio, and brother, Gabriele, who provided him with important biographical information.<sup>115</sup> This Ferrarese sojourn, where he was actively acquiring biographical material on the poet, could well have been the moment when he gathered the details about Dosso's career.

Fornari's biography formed the extended backbone for Vasari's understanding of Dosso's career and artistic reputation. He repeated the sentence describing Dosso's final years almost word for word, but added the information about the few commissions, about which Garofalo may have informed him. The details on character, relations with the duke and Battista are all repeated from Fornari. Vasari also repeated Fornari's estimation of Dosso as a painter of landscape in nearly identical language and sentence structure. Fornari's description, which highlights the range of media in which Dosso excelled, suggested that Fornari's conception of *paesi* was the artistic process of rendering landscape for room decoration or as part of larger canvases, in the sense of the word *parergon* as it was used by Giovio. But Vasari added an important phrase to his version: 'and all the more after the German manner became known'. The use of the term 'maniera tedesca' was calculated to indicate not only artistic style but also artistic merit.

For Vasari, the *maniera tedesca* generally referred to the shared artistic legacy of all *oltramontani*: he could be vague in differentiating between Flemish and German artists and their work.<sup>116</sup> It echoed the phrase *lavoro tedesco*, which was Vasari's term for the barbaric style of post-classical art preceding the modern *maniera italiana*, which was based on the figure and led to an art of 'grace' and 'sweetness'.<sup>117</sup> As a paradigm, the *maniera tedesca* was a foil for the one true style that Vasari made the basis of his own art and the only genuine qualification for fame in the *Lives*.<sup>118</sup>

In Vasari's collection of *Lives* of Flemish painters, certain northern artists are praised for achieving the Italian manner, in one case becoming so proficient 'nella maniera d'Italia che le

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for the beautiful qualities of his art as much as his amiableness, such that the duke greatly delighted in him. He had in Lombardy the title amongst all painters that ever were of best imitating landscapes whether in fresco, or in oil, or in gouache. In Ferrara he painted for the duke an infinity of rooms along with his brother, Battista, with whom he was always hostile. It was also him [Battista] that Ariosto intended in naming the two Dossi, as we see [in *Orlando furioso*]. They worked in Modena, in Faenza, in Trent for the cardinal, and in Pesaro for Duke Francesco Maria. Dosso died in old age and was buried in Ferrara, leaving behind his brother Battista, who lived on maintaining himself in good condition' (my translation).

<sup>115</sup> Fornari, *La spositione* (above, n. 114), I, 28. See also B. Mori, 'Le vite ariostesche del Fornari, Pigna e Garofalo', *Schifanoia* 17–18 (1997), 135–78, esp. p. 135. For Fornari, see R. Contarino, 'Simone Fornari', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome, 1967–), XLIX, 80–2.

<sup>116</sup> In the collected accounts of Flemish artists he described their shared style as the *maniera fiamminga*, but then, without comment, included Dürer as amongst its practitioners. Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), VI, 224–9, esp. p. 224. In the *Life* of Pontormo he described how artists from both the Low Countries and Germany came to Italy to learn the *maniera italiana*, and thus cast off the collective *maniera tedesca* (V, 320).

<sup>117</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), I, 66.

<sup>118</sup> For an example of this, see Vasari's criticism of Pontormo: *Vite* (above, n. 3), V, 320–2.

sue opere non erano conosciute per mano di fiammingo'.<sup>119</sup> However, most artistic opportunities for northern artists in Italy were to be found in painting landscapes in the workshops of established Italian masters.<sup>120</sup> This was a general belief shared by Paolo Pino in his 1548 *Dialogo di pittura*, and was also the opinion expressed by Michelangelo in Francisco de Hollanda's *Da pintura antigua*, also of 1548.<sup>121</sup>

Just as Vasari relied on a distinction between Italian and northern, so too did he make a similar distinction between central Italian artists and 'Lombards'. 'Lombardia' (which encompassed Ferrara) was synonymous with artistic darkness, from which the wise artist would turn when encountering the true path of central Italian art. Such was the case with Garofalo, as Vasari recounted in hagiographical style, when he encountered the art and person of Raphael.<sup>122</sup>

Vasari granted Dosso the title as the best painter of landscapes in 'Lombardy' since the arrival of the *maniera tedesca*. In this sense he was competing with foreign artists and other 'Lombards' who laboured in this branch of a foreign art. In the first edition, Vasari closed Dosso's biography with a final pronouncement upon his reputation: 'Fu sepellito in Ferrara patria sua; e la principalissima laude sua fu il dipingere bene i paesi', a statement that, within Vasari's critical system, represented only a modest measure of praise.<sup>123</sup>

## CONCLUSION

For both Vasari and Giovio, landscape was a separate art. For Vasari it was distinct because it was the labour of *oltramontani* and was therefore subordinate to the *maniera italiana*. Dosso's ability to paint landscape was yet another example of his dissimilarity to central Italian artists that Vasari's criticism favoured. For Giovio, writing in the late 1520s, landscape meant something different. It was a unique art requiring a specific artistic capacity, a *voluptuarius labor*. Landscape was not a subject 'suitable for the forum', but was ideal for environments where pleasurable retreat and *otium* were cultivated. While landscape subjects did not exemplify virtues or offer the instructions of history, they did perform a rhetorical function in places — such as the villa and the court — where the representation of pleasure could also be a representation of power.

When Giovio visited Ferrara as Alfonso I's guest in 1522 and saw Dosso's paintings, the artist was the duke's main resident painter. The historian's description of Dosso's art therefore may have embodied something of the ethos of that court. Though we may never know exactly what Giovio saw, it was significant enough to form a worthy echo of a lost and ancient art.

<sup>119</sup> 'in the Italian manner that his paintings were not recognized as by the hand of a Fleming': Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), VI, 224.

<sup>120</sup> Vasari gave an example in a painting by Titian: *Vite* (above, n. 3), VI, 156.

<sup>121</sup> P. Pino, *Dialogo di pittura*, in Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte* (above, n. 4), 93–140, see esp. pp. 133–4. F. de Hollanda, *Da pintura antigua*, ed. J. de Vasconcellos (Porto, 1930), 188–9.

<sup>122</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (above, n. 3), V, 410–11.

<sup>123</sup> See above, n. 112.



Colby — PLATE 1. Dosso Dossi, *Three Ages of Man*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Reproduced courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, through the ARTstor/IAP Service.)



Colby — PLATE 2. Dosso Dossi, *Travellers in a Wood*, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon. © Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon. (Photo: Charles Choffet. Reproduced courtesy of the Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon.)





Colby — PLATE 3. Dosso Dossi, *Landscape with Saints*, Pushkin Museum, Moscow. © Scala/Art Resource, NY. (Reproduced courtesy of Art Resource.)



Colby — PLATE 4. Dosso Dossi and Battista Dossi (?), *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen*. © Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, on loan at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC). (Reproduced courtesy of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.)



Colby — PLATE 5. Dosso Dossi and Battista Dossi (?), *Flight into Egypt*, P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., Ltd., London. (Reproduced courtesy of P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., Ltd., London.)



Colby — PLATE 6. Dosso Dossi, *Countryside Scene*, current whereabouts unknown. (Reproduced courtesy of Mauro Lucco.)





Colby — PLATE 7. Anonymous, *Landscape with Shepherds and Soldiers*, copy after lost original by Dosso Dossi (?), current whereabouts unknown. (Reproduced courtesy of Mauro Lucco.)



Colby — PLATE 8. 'Master of the Female Half-lengths' (attr.), *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*, Musée d'Art Religieux et d'Art Mosan, Liège. (Reproduced courtesy of the Musée d'Art Religieux et d'Art Mosan, Liège.)