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ABSTRACT

During the Italian Renaissance, the representation of landscape developed in significant and revealing ways. Where portraits had traditionally depicted profiled sitters against stark, placeless backgrounds, around the middle of the fifteenth century, they began to incorporate suggestions of place, often filling the entire background with sprawling landscapes. A similar "greening" took place in the backgrounds of devotional paintings as landscape imagery began to overtake the gilded grounds associated with medieval and Byzantine art. Motivating this shift, in part, was the popularity of Northern European oil paintings which were avidly circulated, collected, and copied throughout Italy. Synthesizing these cosmopolitan influences with first-hand observations of nature, Italian Renaissance landscapes offer privileged glimpses into the vibrant physical and social environments from which they emerged.

Placing these long-overlooked landscapes at the center of analysis, this dissertation excavates the experiences of historical communities that inhabited and shaped the landscape yet remain underrepresented in the historical and scholarly record. To do this, it draws upon methods from ecocriticism and historiography; and orients analysis around ethnic minorities, women, and laborers, thus de-centering the elite male Christian perspective that dominates interpretations of Renaissance art. Ultimately, this dissertation constructs a wider vision of Renaissance Italy by analyzing the historical landscape – real and represented – as a window onto the cultural, intellectual, and spiritual experiences that shaped how various individuals and communities engaged with their surroundings.

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INTRODUCTION

Visualizing the Environment

In 2011, the American Academy in Rome hired local artist Sabrina Lumicisi to paint a mural honoring the major donors to the Academy's "adopt-a-tree" program. The mural, completed in 2013, depicts the Academy and its environs from a birds-eye view (Figure 0.1). Rendered with graphic contours and colored in chalky, muted tones, the mural features important local monuments as well as the variety of trees, plants, and terrains that comprise the surrounding landscape (Figure 0.2). Together, these architectural, agricultural, and botanical emblems create a dynamic pictorial composition, dazzling in its detail and charm, that portrays the Academy as a natural and integral feature of the local environment.

The main ideas explored in this dissertation – cultural understandings of the physical environment, the relationship between inhabiting and visualizing land, the environmental dimensions of identity, and the collaborative nature of artistic labor in and out of doors – sprung forth from my experiences with this mural not only as a viewer but also as one of its makers. While studying abroad in Rome, I became Sabrina's assistant and spent the bulk of the semester perched on a scaffold, rendering the hundreds of tiny trees and bushes that blanket the mural from top to bottom. After I proved myself sufficiently, Sabrina also let me work on the faux marble panels that frame the composition. For this task, she taught me to simulate striations in the stone using various dilutions of paint and to speckle the surface by flicking the tip of my brush. Never, however, was I allowed near the finer architectural imagery. That was her purview.

On my first day of work, another one of the assistants, a kind Italian man named Walter, whisked me around by Vespa to show me the environment we were tasked with depicting. As we navigated the Academy's surrounding neighborhood of Monteverde, I remember stopping at *Il Fontanone* – which appears in the mural's lower left corner (Figure 0.3) – and being physically overwhelmed by the roar of the monumental fountain and the vastness of the gold-washed panoramic view looking out over the city. Heightened no doubt by the adrenaline rush of my first Vespa ride, this sensory overload remains imprinted upon me to this day.

I knew that experiencing these monuments and their environments would be integral to my work on the mural, but I was not yet sure how. By this time, Sabrina's composition had already been finalized down to every detail and color. An official preparatory design (*modello*) had been approved by the Academy and printed out to scale in preparation for indirect, manual transfer onto the wall – a tedious process that entailed tracing the composition in graphite onto translucent paper, applying the paper to the wall, and then redoubling the line to transfer the graphite (Figure 0.4). I wondered: if our *plein air* study session was not about sourcing images for the composition, or studying from nature in a practical sense, what purpose did it serve?

Looking at it today, I cannot pinpoint any part of the mural that would have looked differently had I not studied and experienced the landscape before setting brush to wall. The trees I painted around *Il Fontanone* give no hint of the affective overload I experienced when visiting that site. Nevertheless, I know that being attuned to the local ecology mattered. It deepened my connection to the project, to my colleagues, and to the community for which the mural was being made. Every day that I worked, passersby stopped to discuss which elements they recognized, which they did not, and which they thought we got completely wrong. I came to learn that the creative process for a project like this entails a constant and multi-vocal exchange between

makers, community members, and the landscape itself. Behind every painting of a landscape is a set of ecological and social relationships.

Refining and expanding this idea through the dual lens of art history and environmental studies, this dissertation analyzes the long-overlooked landscape backgrounds of Italian Renaissance paintings to explore the complex relationship between inhabiting and visualizing the physical environment. Italian Renaissance landscape backgrounds, which synthesize cosmopolitan influences with first-hand observations of nature, offer privileged glimpses into the vibrant physical and social environments from which they emerged. Placing these images at the center of analysis, this dissertation excavates the experiences of historical communities that inhabited and shaped the landscape yet remain underrepresented in the historical and scholarly record. To do this, it draws upon methods from ecocriticism and historiography and orients analysis around ethnic minorities, women, and laborers, thus de-centering the elite male Christian perspective that dominates interpretations of Renaissance art. Ultimately, this dissertation produces a wider vision of early modern Italy by analyzing these historical landscapes – real and represented – as a window onto the physical, intellectual, and cultural experiences that informed how various individuals and communities engaged with their surroundings.

Traditionally, analyses of Italian Renaissance landscape backgrounds have been subsumed within the discrete, though related, studies of perspective, naturalism, transalpine exchange, and, most crucially, landscape painting. Landscape painting – generally defined as an

¹ For references within studies of perspective, see: Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Mirror, The Window, and the Telescope: How Renaissance Linear Perspective Changed Our Vision of the Universe* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2009); James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994); John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).

artistic genre where landscape constitutes the primary subject matter – is a global phenomenon with diverse expressions and conventions across temporal, cultural, and geographic boundaries. In the western context, the history of landscape painting commonly begins in 1604 when Karel van Mander first defined landscape ("Landschapken") as an independent artistic genre.² From the eighteenth century to the early twentieth, writers such as Immanuel Kant, John Ruskin, and Jacob Burckhardt would reflect on the aesthetics of landscape painting and its relations to discourses of nature and culture.³ The mid-twentieth century brought about a constellation of impactful publications on the subject. Between 1950-1966, Ernst Gombrich, Kenneth Clark, Richard Turner, and (less explicitly) Erwin Panofsky each wrote their own versions of the history of landscape painting.⁴ Together, their accounts trace a lineage from the naturalistic

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For naturalism, see: James S. Ackerman, *Origins, Imitation, Conventions: Representation in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Jan Biolostocki, "The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity," in *The Renaissance and Mannerism*, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Edward J. Olszewski, "Renaissance Naturalism: The Rare and the Ephemeral in Art and Nature," in *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 1, 2 (Winter 1982): 23-28; Otto Pächt, "Early Italian Nature Studies and the Early Calendar Landscape," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 13, (1950): 13-47; For transalpine exchange, see notes in Chapter Two. For synthetic assessments of the vast discourse of landscape painting up to 2008, see Dennis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining, and Representing the World* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008); W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*; Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins, eds., *Landscape Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Jacob Wamburg, *Landscape as World Picture: Tracing Cultural Evolution in Images* (Arhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2009); Christopher Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

² In Van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck* (*Book on Painting*), he describes "Landschapken" as independent subject matter. For a thorough analysis of this text, its engagement with Vasari, and its legacy in art history, see Walter S. Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander's* Schilder-Boeck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

³ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), translated by S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Books, 1990); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), translated by J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Publishing, 1951); John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vols.1-5 (London: Allen, 1904); John Ruskin, "Lectures on Landscape (Oxford: 1871)," in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (New York: T.Y. Crowell & Co., 1905).

⁴ Ernst Gombrich, "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape" in *Gombrich on the Renaissanace, Volume 1: Norm and Form* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), 107-

background details of Giotto and Pisanello (Figure 0.5 & 0.6) and the panoramic agricultural landscapes of the Lorenzetti's Palazzo Pubblico frescoes in Siena (addressed in Chapter One) to the independent landscapes of Northern Baroque art (Figure 0.7) and, finally, to the fully fledged landscape paintings of nineteenth-century England and America (Figure 0.8). Within this teleology – a trajectory favored by modern art history because it traces a steady march toward abstraction via secularization – Italian Renaissance backgrounds provide the "missing link" between late medieval nature studies and Baroque pastoral imagery. Yet, they remain undertheorized within their own specific cultural and environmental contexts.

To address this issue as well as its root causes, my dissertation is organized around a series of object studies linked by the theme of landscape and each taking on a particular historiographic problem in Italian Renaissance studies including nationalist approaches to style, the nature/culture binary, and the naturalization of elite, male Christian perspectives as the default subject position in art historical analysis. ⁵ Chapter One establishes an analytical framework that dislocates Renaissance landscapes from the broader history of landscape painting

^{121;} Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976); Richard Turner, *The Vision of Landscape in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

Stephen J. Campbell, "On Renaissance Nonmodernity," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 20:2 (2017): 261-294; Claire Farago (ed.), *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America*, 1450-1650 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Michael Anne Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); David Young Kim, *The Traveling Artist in Renaissance Italy: Geography, Mobility, and Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994); Christopher Wood, *A History of Art History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Christopher Wood and Alexander Nagel, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010); Rebecca Zorach, "Without Fear of Border Guards': The Renaissance of Visual Culture," in *New Perspectives in Iconology* (Brussels: Academic and Scientific Publishers, 2011), 23-41; Rebecca Zorach, "What Future?", *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 22:2 (2019): 421-428.

and develops a cultural history of the environment and its representations. It does so by bringing together various Renaissance descriptions of landscape, including agricultural treatises and bureaucratic texts related to land management, and placing these in dialogue with contemporary descriptions of art. The following chapters apply this framework to case studies which, along with the critical interventions they facilitate, establish a new history of Italian Renaissance painting that prioritizes landscape over figure, disrupts teleologies of modernity rooted in the Florence-centric Renaissance canon, and equally values the pictorial innovations of master painters and unknown makers.

The project's historical narrative follows a loose trajectory from c.1350-1510 in Central and Northern Italy, particularly in the Adriatic regions of the Veneto and the Marche, wherein the representation of landscape developed in revealing ways. While landscape motifs and scenery had long been popular in Italian manuscripts, material culture, and secular art, they remained largely absent from the genres of portraiture and devotional painting until the middle of the fifteenth century. Where Italian artists had traditionally depicted profiled sitters against stark, placeless backgrounds, around 1450, they began to incorporate suggestions of place, often filling the entire background with sprawling outdoor panoramas (Figures 0.9-0.11). By the sixteenth century, the open window or the drawn curtain that reveals a landscape became a pervasive trope in Italian portraiture (Figure 0.12). A similar "greening" took place in Italian devotional painting, a genre that had long been defined by the use of gold leaf backgrounds to signify the sacrality and otherworldliness of religious scenes (Figure 0.13-0.15).6 Landscape backgrounds, made up

⁶ I borrow the term "greening" from Jodi Cranston's *Green Worlds of Renaissance Venice* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 1; Recent studies in gold-ground painting include Anne Dunlop, "Gold Coins and Gold Leaf in Early Italian Paintings," in *The Matter of Art: Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics, c.1250-1750*, eds. Christy Anderson, Anne Dunlop, and Pamela H. Smith (Manchester: Manchester University

of mimetic representations of the earthly world, generated interpretive possibilities unachievable in the flat expanses of monochrome or the material aesthetics of gold. Indeed, portraits and devotional scenes have different meanings depending on what surrounds them. In the fifteenth century, these meanings relied on a cultural understanding of landscape as deeply entwined with notions of citizenship, profession, gender, faith, and ethnicity, as well as with embodied experiences like nourishment, fear, and pleasure. Chapter One establishes that images of landscape both presupposed and produced a kind of "ecological literacy" derived from these discourses of ecology and identity. As such, they engaged spectators in a spatial and social field of references that complicate the primarily scriptural and poetic readings dominant in modern scholarly analyses of Italian Renaissance paintings – readings that assume an audience comprised primarily of literate Christian men.

From Gold to Green

While the shift from gold to green was not monolithic – indeed, nuances and variations existed across regions, artists, collections, and even within a single artwork such as Carlo Crivelli's *Brera Crucifixion* (c.1490) (Figure 0.16) – over the course of the fifteenth century in

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Press, 2015); David Young Kim, "Points on a Field: Gentile da Fabriano and Gold Ground," in *Journal of Early Modern History*, 23:2-3 (May 2019): 191-226; Christopher Lakey, "Persistent Materialities: The Use of Gold Leaf in Painting, c.1300-1600" (in-progress).

⁷ This draws upon theories of deconstruction and semiotics, specifically, Jacques Derrida's notion of the *parergon*. See: Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 6:1 (1972): 9-19; Jacques Derrida and Craig Owens, "The Parergon," *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 3-41.

Italy, landscape imagery flourished in the spaces where gold once lay. Scholars typically explain this development as a function of the influence of Northern European painting and the "discovery" of nature through antiquity, a view popularized by Ernst Gombrich in "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape." To this first point, there is a direct correlation between the rise of landscape in Italian Renaissance paintings around 1450 and the circulation of Northern paintings in Italy around that same time. There is also a clear stylistic influence as well. Rather than contesting this history, however, I argue that even if Italian Renaissance painters *did* take inspiration from Northern art, that does not mean they ignored the landscapes outside their own windows. It is important to take both realities into account. To the second point: While ideologies of nature and beauty are key to understanding landscape, when analyzing its representations, it is equally valuable to consider the lived experiences and material constraints unique to the making and viewing of art.

Correspondingly, this dissertation resists any single explanation for the shift from gold to green. Instead, it explores multiple overlapping stimuli (such as artistic influence, patron's taste, and professional ambition) through analysis of individual works. For example, Chapter Two, which focuses on Giovanni Bellini's *Niccolini Crucifixion*, explores the influence of Northern art

⁸ An example of this variety within a collection can be seen in the 1472 inventory of Countess Antonia Sforza which lists gold-ground and landscape-background panel paintings side by side: "uno quadro di gesso de relevo mezzo ad oro di n[ost]ra donna cum portelle / uno quadro uso di gesso di poco [valore] dela madona senza portelle / uno quadro cum uno christo cu[m] la croce i[n] spalla sensza oro / uno quadro cum christo i[n] l[']orto cum li apostoli dormie[n]ti / et piu la imagine dela p[er]fecta Madona Antonia ritratta al naturale / uno q[ua]dretto pizulo simalm[en]to cu[m] lo Seraphino San Fran[cesco]." Archivio di Stato di Firenze. Fondo Urbinate. Divisione B, Filza 9, 6. *Atti per l'adizione dell'eredita di Antonia Sforza Moglie di Ottaviano Martinengo da Brescia, fatti a nome del suo fratello - Costanzo Sforza di Aragona Signore di Pesaro* (1479). fol. 228.

⁹ Ernst Gombrich, "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape." For a critical response to Gombrich, see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*.

as it pertains to the representation of local, Italian landscapes. In the process, it uncovers a representational apparatus that would have spoken directly to Ancona's Jewish community. Chapter Three applies a feminist ecocritical approach to Piero della Francesca's *Double Portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino* (c.1474) to show how patrons' tastes for individualized landscape backgrounds gave rise to images that betray their makers' lived experiences and world views. Shifting focus towards the conditions of making, Chapter Four considers the professional ambitions of workshop assistants, who were traditionally tasked with background imagery, as a potential motivator for the complexity and virtuosity of Renaissance painted landscapes. Together, I argue, these varied influences and drives created new artistic opportunities that reconfigured the relationship between figure and field and enabled artists to forge deeper connections between real and depicted worlds.

Interpreting how those connections were understood in their own time demands parallel inquiry into cultural histories of the environment as well as the function of background, a complex pictorial entity with its own aesthetics and history. While there are significant bodies of scholarship on both landscape and background in Italian Renaissance art, these topics are rarely examined in relation to one another in a sustained and systematic way. In Important exceptions include the work of Brigit Blas-Simmen, Peter Bokody, and David Young Kim, whose forthcoming book, *Groundwork: The Field of Renaissance Painting* will be the first dedicated art

¹⁰ Book-length art historical studies on the representation of landscape in Italian Renaissance art include Jodi Cranston, *Green Worlds of Renaissance Venice*; Karen Hope Goodchild, "Towards an Italian Renaissance Theory of Landscape" (Dissertation: University of Georgia, 1990); Martin Warnke, *Politische Landschaft: zur Kunstgeschichte der Natur* (Munich: C. Hanswer, 1992). For medieval and Byzantine, see: Katherine Crum, "Space and Convention in the Landscapes of Early Tuscan Painting, 1250-1350," (Dissertation: Columbia University, 1984); Alfred K. Siewers, *Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Veronica della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

historical study of Renaissance backgrounds.¹¹ Fascinatingly, one of the most attentive and extensive analyses on the relationship between environmental imagery, pictorial background, and embodied experience in Italian Renaissance art is a 1905 book of travel writings by the American author Edith Wharton. The book, aptly titled *Italian Backgrounds*, inspires my approach. Consider the following passage:

In the Italian devotional pictures of the early Renaissance there are usually two quite unrelated parts: the foreground and the background. The foreground is conventional. [...] It is only in the background that the artist finds himself free to express his personality. Here he depicts not what someone else has long since designed for him [...] but what he actually sees about him, in the Lombard plains, in the delicately modelled Tuscan hill-country, or in the fantastic serrated landscape of the Friulian Alps. One must look past and beyond the central figures, in their typical attitudes and symbolic dress, to catch a glimpse of the life amid which the painting originated.¹²

Navigating between the real and represented landscape, Wharton gestures towards the interpretive possibilities of analyzing Renaissance backgrounds as windows onto the artist's world. In this way, she invokes the study of environmental history, which Italian scholar Marica di Pierri describes as a "way to rebuild the historical identity of localities, as well as the collective identity of those who live there."¹³

Environmental historians, particularly those working in the Italian context, have long grappled with the task of "reading" images of landscapes as historical evidence. ¹⁴ Methods of art

¹¹ Brigit Blas-Simmen, "Qualche lontani": Distance and Transcendence in the Art of Giovanni Bellini," in *Examining Giovanni Bellini: An Art More Human and More Divine*, ed. Carolyn C. Wilson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015); Peter Bokody, *Images-Within-Images in Italian Painting (1250-1350): Reality and Reflexivity* (Farnham Surrey & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

¹² Edith Wharton, *Italian Backgrounds* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), 173-174.

¹³ Marco Armiero and Giacomo Bonan, "The Historian, the Activist, the Ecocritic, and the Writer: An Undisciplined Debate on Italian Environmental History," 39.

¹⁴ For relevant works of environmental history, see: Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994); *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D.W. Meinig (Oxford: Oxford

history are essential to this work, as they provide ways of identifying and articulating a depicted landscape's relationship to reality without essentializing it as wholly "real" or "fictive." In what follows, I adapt Wharton's call to "[look] past and beyond the central figures" into a viable art historical method that de-centers the figure from analysis to focus attention on the broader network of agents and terrains that define related physical and pictorial ecologies. This method takes cues from ecocriticism which is, broadly defined, an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the environment and its representations; and one in which "critical reflection is embedded within narratives of encounter with nature." While ecocriticism takes many forms, at its core is an effort to trouble the nature/culture binary as it was theorized in the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. 17

Over the last four decades, Renaissance scholars working both within and beyond the field of ecocriticism have argued that Renaissance societies had a more fluid understanding of

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University Press, 1979); Richard Muir, *The New Reading the Landscape: Fieldwork in Landscape History* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000). For the Italian context, see: Emilio Sereni, *The History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Rosetta Borchi and Olivia Nesci, *Il Paesaggio Invisibile: La Scoperta dei Veri Paesaggi di Piero della Francesca* (Ancona: Il Lavoro Editoriale, 2013).

¹⁵ I borrow this language from Christopher Heuer and Rebecca Zorach's edited volume *Ecologies, Agents, Terrains* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). They draw from Felix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* to challenge fixed concepts of "landscape" and "place" with dynamic alternative frameworks that interrogate the intrinsic connection between art and ecology. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, translated by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London and New Brunswick, N.J.: The Athlone Press, 2000); originally published *Les trois écologies* (1989).

¹⁶ For a history of ecocriticism and state of the field, see Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). The quote can be found on page 8. For a thought-provoking assessment of the field and its possible futures, see Giacomo Bonan and Marco Armiero (eds.), "The Historian, the Activist, the Ecocritic, and the Writer: An Undisciplined Debate on Italian Environmental History," *AREAS* 35 (2016): 37-45.

¹⁷ For theories and examples of the nature/culture binary, see: Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*; John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*.

nature and culture than previously assumed.¹⁸ In recent years, these insights have informed a kind of "ecological art history" which landscape scholars Andrea Gaynor and Ian Mclean describe as "primarily concerned with the relationship between the aesthetic and representational functions of landscape art, the environment it depicts and the ecology of this environment."¹⁹ Drawing upon the work of theorists like Jane Bennett and Félix Guattari and connecting with themes explored in the so-called "material turn," ecological art history embraces the inextricability of social, material, and ecological systems. ²⁰ Ecology is both a subject and a method.²¹

Combining strategies from ecocriticism, environmental history, and social art history, my method explores how cultural perceptions of the physical environment inform the production and

Important contributions include Mary Garrard, Brunelleschi's Egg: Nature, Art, and Gender in Renaissance Italy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Claudia Lazzaro, The Italian Renaissance Garden: From the Conventions of Planting, Design, and Ornament to the Grand Gardens of Sixteenth-Century Central Italy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Sarah Miglietti, "Between Nature and Culture: The Integrated Ecology of Renaissance Climate Theories," in Early Modern Écologies: Beyond English Ecocriticism, eds. Pauline Goul and Phillip John Usher (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020); Caroline Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Rebecca Zorach, Blood, Milk, Ink, and Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Andrea Gaynor and Ian Mclean, "The Limits of Art History: Toward an Ecological History of Landscape Art," *Landscape Review* 11:1 (2005): 4-14. Recent eco art history includes the work of Karl Appuhn, T.J. Demos, Christopher Heuer, Verity Platt, Sugata Ray, and Catherine Walsh.

²⁰ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London & New Brunswick, NJ: Athlone Press, 2000). For an assessment of the material turn in art history, see Jennifer L. Roberts, "Things: Material Turn, Transnational Turn," *American Art* 31:2 (Summer 2017): 64-69.

²¹ My thinking here is greatly informed by the work of Italian ecocritic Serenella Iovino, especially her book *Ecocritisim and Italy: Ecology, Resistance, and Liberation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

reception of its visual representations.²² This eco-social approach has two central premises: that objects of visual culture have specific environmental contexts that are inextricable from their religious, social, and political contexts; and that the physical landscape itself can serve as valuable evidence for the ways historical individuals made and experienced images. The broader stakes of such an approach are that it diversifies the kinds of evidence interlocuters can call upon for iconographic analysis, thereby destabilizing the privileged position that literary evidence holds in western art history. This, in turn, enables the study of a broader range of Renaissance perspectives beyond those of the educated, Christian men who composed most of the written record, and have long stood at the center of art historical investigations.²³ This is possible because, while landscape and its representations are not easy reflections of one another, both derive their meanings from shared understandings of the relationship between natural and social ecologies. Because pictorial imagery engages in processes of signification between these virtual and physical worlds, painted landscapes have the capacity to generate a field of ecological, social, and spatial associations that, when interpreted in context, can reveal a broad range of historical experiences, presences, and perspectives.

In developing this eco-social approach, I have benefited greatly from reading beyond my field.²⁴ In some ways, the archival and material riches of Italian Renaissance art history have

²² I especially draw upon Patricia Simon's concept of "social iconography" (defined as "the mutual feedback loop and reinforcement between imagery and its context") which calls for thinking beyond "elite knowledge and textual sources alone." Patricia Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

²³ Michael Baxandall's "period eye" establishes precisely such a viewer as the default for interpreting Italian Renaissance art. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29. More on the patriarchal and racial implications of this in Chapter Two.

²⁴Particularly influential texts include Claudia Brittenham, "Locating Landscape in Maya Painting," in *Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, under review); Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

allowed the field to remain beholden to its traditional methods while other fields of art history, particularly those with a more limited textual and material archive, have generated dynamic interdisciplinary approaches drawn from cultural anthropology, archaeology, and environmental history. Taking cues from this stimulating work, especially from the fields of medieval European and colonial Latin American art histories, my method prioritizes environmental evidence and vernacular archival sources, embraces speculative analysis, and approaches objects from the perspective of broader cultural experiences rather than focusing solely on those of artists and patrons.²⁵

I apply this method by first systematically describing and analyzing a painting's environmental imagery, paying close attention to details that might initially appear insignificant.²⁶ This includes identifying buildings, types of terrain, plant species, and topographical features as well as locating their real-world referents, when possible. I then examine each element within its unique cultural and social history. That information helps me

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^{1992);} Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), especially her analysis of Christian iconography in relation to local knowledge; Barbara Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geograficas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Alessandra Russo, *The Untranslatable Image: A Mestizo History of the Arts in New Spain* 1500-1600 (Austin: University of Texas, 2014), specifically her concept of "cartographic emergency"; Sugata Ray, "Hydroaesthetics in the Little Ice Age: Theology, Artistic Cultures and Environmental Transformation in the Early Modern Braj, c.1560-70," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 40:1 (2016): 1-23; Karen Overby and Maggie W. Williams, eds., "Hoarders and Hordes: Responses to the Staffordshire Hoard," special issue of *postmedieval* 7:3 (2016).

²⁵ In navigating these fields, I am indebted to ongoing conversations with Carly B. Boxer and Catalina Ospina.

²⁶ For theories of detail, see Daniel Arasse, *Le Détail: Pour une histoire raprochée de la peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, DL 2014); Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017); Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (London: Macmillan, 1998); and Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

craft arguments about the painting's reality effects, that is, what it can (or cannot) reveal about the lived experiences of the communities within which it was made. I believe that this method, which boils down to analyzing environmental imagery – both what it represents and how it is represented – within its unique cultural and ecological context, can be applied to any object crafted with the intention of visualizing landscape.

The objects I have chosen to analyze in this dissertation come primarily from the Adriatic nexus of Venice, Padua, Ancona, and Urbino because the topography of these regions (the Veneto and the Marche) remains recognizable, for the most part; and because, in the Renaissance, regional tastes and artistic abilities tended towards richly detailed, graphic landscapes rendered in birds-eye perspective, a spatial paradigm that – unlike linear perspective – renders distant details in legible scale. Historically, these very aspects of Adriatic Renaissance art have been negatively construed as "provincial," "gothic," and "backwards" because they do not conform to the traditional – and predominately Florentine – narrative of the Italian Renaissance as the re-birth of Greco-Roman aesthetic ideals, exemplified by heroic bodies and linear perspective. By centering a study of Italian Renaissance painting around Adriatic innovations in pictorial landscape, this dissertation demonstrates the historical significance of regions and perspectives that have long been sidelined in histories of Italian art.

CHAPTER ONE:

Campi, Luntani, Paese, Provincie: The Renaissance Environment in Renaissance Terms

Summary

Bringing together environmental history and art history, this chapter expands conventional definitions of "landscape" and "background" in order to change how we see and understand the so-called "landscape backgrounds" of fifteenth-century Italian panel paintings. It does so by replacing this ahistorical term, which is grounded in teleological narratives about landscape painting (a genre that emerged a century later), with an interpretive framework based on Renaissance conceptions of the physical environment and its artistic representations. Focusing on a selection of vernacular texts and related images produced in fifteenth-century Italy, this chapter contextualizes and interprets the spectrum of painted landscapes that predated landscape painting as an artistic genre. Laying the foundation for the rest of the dissertation, it presents a set of historical terms through which to describe the Renaissance environment and establish a framework for interpreting how its diverse inhabitants visualized, engaged with, and shaped their surroundings. In the product of the dissertation of the rest of the dissertation of the stablish and the product of the product of the product of the dissertation of the rest of the dissertation of the presents and the product of the produ

¹ For a similar project on the sixteenth-century context, see Karen Hope Goodchild, "Towards an Italian Renaissance Theory of Landscape" (Dissertation: University of Georgia, 1990).

² This engages with W.J.T. Mitchell's work on landscapes, and particularly his effort to "displace the genre of landscape painting from its centrality in art historical accounts of landscape [...]." W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 3.

³ While it focuses on artwork produced later and mostly beyond Italy, similar themes are addressed in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design*

Introduction

Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegories of Good and Bad Government* fresco cycle (1338-1339) in the Sala dei Nove of Siena's Palazzo Pubblico is an iconic work of late medieval/early Renaissance art that is often cited as one of the first modern examples of landscape as primary subject matter in western painting (Figure 1.1).⁴ On the side of *Good Government*, a sprawling landscape flourishes with a variety of lush, well-managed crop fields alive with human industry (Figure 1.2). A winged personification of Security (*securitas*) floats overhead holding a haunting avatar of a hanged man (Figure 1.3).⁵ A section of the inscription below her reads "Without fear every man may travel freely." On the opposing wall, a pendant personification – Fear (*timor*) – hovers over the landscape of *Bad Government*, a barren and degraded countryside littered with jagged stones and plagued by brush fires and bandits (Figure 1.4 & 1.5). Fear, wild-eyed, brandishes her sword and holds up an admonishing inscription which reads, in part: "Because

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and Use of Past Environments, eds. Denis Cosgrove, Stephen Daniels, and Alan R. H. Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁴Versions of the claim that these are the first modern landscape paintings can be seen in Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976), 8-17; Rachel Ziady DeLue and James Elkins (eds.), *Landscape Theory*, 97; in Chapter 5 of Katherine Crum's *Space and Convention in the Landscapes of Early Tuscan Painting* (Dissertation: Columbia University, 1984).

⁵ For more the relationship between security, infrastructure, and public welfare in Renaissance society, see Gerrit Jasper Schenk, "'Human Security' in the Renaissance?: 'Securitas', Infrastructure, Collective Goods and Natural Hazards in Tuscany and the Upper Rhine Valley," in *Historical Social Research* 35: 4 (2010): 209-233.

⁶ The full inscription reads: "senca paura ognum franco camini / elavorando semini ciascuno / mentre che tal comuno / manterra questa don[n]a i[n] signoria / chel alevata arei ogni balia." Randolph Starn and Loren W. Partridge, *Arts of Power: Three Halls of State in Italy, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 266.

each seeks only his own good in this city / Justice is subjected to Tyranny." Using a locally resonant visual vocabulary, Lorenzetti presents a forceful argument for the ways that governance, good or bad, manifests itself in the physical landscape, here represented as a delicate ecology of agriculture, infrastructure, and security. Shedding crucial light on the social and political dimensions of landscape in early Renaissance Italy, as well as a set of pictorial conventions for representing them, this fresco cycle remains a touchstone for art historians of early modern Italy and of landscape painting, as well as for contemporary artists seeking to locate their practice within a longer western tradition of representing the physical environment.

After visiting the frescoes in 1970, the twentieth-century Chicago-based painter Roger Brown noted, with a tinge of frustration at the critical reception of his own landscape-focused paintings: "The Sienese and Florentines of the thirteenth [sic] century painted the landscape and buildings, plants and trees, animals, people, and costumes they saw around them. Were they regionalists? Provincials? They certainly changed the course of Western painting." In rehearsing the art historical trope that these frescoes "changed the course of Western painting," Brown gets at the core of a troubling entanglement between the *historiographic* significance of these frescos (they constitute the origins of landscape painting as it was theorized in the nineteenth century) and their *historical* significance (they document how Renaissance people conceptualized and visualized their surroundings). In other words, the assumption that these frescoes constituted a

⁷ The full inscription reads: "P[er] volere elbenpropio i[n]questa terra / som[m]esse la giustitia atyrannia / unde p[er] questa via / no[n] passa alcun se[n]ca dubbio dimo[r]te / che fuor sirobba e dentro daleporte."

⁸ While Brown references the thirteenth century specifically here, his frequently conflated painters from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries under the category of "Italian Primitives." Roger Brown, "Untitled Writing #11," transcribed by Elijah Burger (Chicago: Roger Brown Study Collection Archive, n.d). I believe he visited these frescoes during his 1970 trip to Italy because his subsequent work reflects their influence. Furthermore, his friend and colleague, the artist Barbara Rossi, told me he sent her a postcard of the frescos around that time.

moment of rupture in the way that landscape was conceptualized and represented contradicts the reality that, in their time, they reflected an existing cultural understanding of landscape visualized through an already well-established visual vocabulary. Given that there is little evidence that the Lorenzetti frescoes were widely studied, copied, and otherwise circulated beyond Tuscany, one could reasonably argue that they had a greater artistic influence beginning in the nineteenth century than they had in their own time. Indeed, as Brown makes clear, contemporary artists continue to invoke their imagery as a hallmark of authentic, figurative art, connected to its local environment. If these frescoes did in fact change the course of western painting, the "what" and the "when" of that change are not so self-evident.

I begin by problematizing landscape painting's Renaissance origin story because it forms the anchor of a teleology that has served to homogenize and marginalize the vibrant array of landscape imagery that existed in Renaissance Italy. I am speaking of the visually rich and descriptive environmental imagery that surrounds and grounds the human figures in so many fifteenth-century portraits and devotional scenes. Consider, for example, the slivers of cultivated land visible on either side of the Madonna's throne in Carlo Crivelli's *Madonna and Child* in Ancona (Figure 1.6); and the hilly farmlands that host a procession of horses and soldiers in the background of Gentile da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 1.7). This imagery – what I term a painted landscape, rather than a landscape painting – is pictorially complex, rich in detail, and full of information about the ways that historical communities visualized their surroundings and their place within them. Frustrating the modern aesthetic categories of "subject" and

⁹ Many Sienese painters trained in the Lorenzetti workshop. Later generations of Sienese painters like Bartolo di Fredi [d.1410], Sano di Pietro [d.1481], and Giovanni di Paolo [d.1482] demonstrated a heightened interest in landscape imagery that speaks to the influence of the Lorenzetti frescoes.

"setting," these painted landscapes merit sustained analysis and their own place in the history of art.

Sidestepping the Sala dei Nove

If the story of western landscape painting begins in the Lorenzetti frescoes in the Sala dei Nove, an alternate narrative – a history of the painted landscape *before* landscape painting – might begin fifteen feet away, in front of a commonly-overlooked fresco of San Bernardino da Siena (Figure 1.8) executed, ironically, a century *after* the Lorenzetti frescoes. Painted by the Sienese artist Sano di Pietro around 1450, the fresco depicts San Bernardino, the prolific Franciscan preacher known for his scathing sermons targeting witches, sodomites, and Jews.

In the fresco, Bernardino emerges mountain-like from a flat, circular representation of the world. A blanket of terrain unfurls beneath his sandaled feet. In direct contrast to the particularized representations of hills and architecture that populate the Lorenzetti frescos next door, Sano's image distills the whole world into a schematic and repeated pattern of four distinct components: land, water, trees, and architecture. Streams of faded blue pigment divide Bernardino's globe into cells, each one occupied by a building and a pair of trees. Impressively, the tiny buildings register clearly as basilican churches despite Sano's extreme economy of brush strokes and color. The painting's message is clear: Bernardino's proselytizing begets a properly Christian world – a church in every town.

This image, however rudimentary, speaks volumes about what it meant to visualize the world in Renaissance Italy. In its miniaturized and restricted formal language, Sano's fresco reveals the most basic iconography for representing the physical environment. Each of the four

repeated formal components are essential and mutually dependent. Without buildings or trees or water or land, the world would be unrecognizable. For example, remove the rivers and the painting's sense of repetition and scale disappears. It becomes a single sprawling landscape instead of an infinite expanse of towns. Remove the churches, and witness a world without humans, a world without God. Bernardino's globe visualizes a central claim of this chapter: that natural, social, and spiritual ecologies were inextricable from one another in the Renaissance imaginary.

Within conventional art historical approaches, it might seem absurd to compare the interpretive value of Bernardino's stripped-down globe with Lorenzetti's monumental landscapes. Indeed, it is telling that most visitors to the Sala dei Nove walk past Sano's fresco without giving it much of a glance. Yet, though they are separated by a century, rendered in dramatically different scales, and detailed to varied degrees, both emerge from a similar cultural understanding of the physical environment and, therefore, are equally valuable as windows onto that world; that is, if we know how to look at, describe, and interpret them.

In what follows, I approach these tasks in three parts. Part One establishes a historical vocabulary through which to describe both real and represented landscapes. Part Two analyzes the eco-social relationships between Renaissance communities and their natural surroundings progressing in scale from individual plots of land to the broader agricultural landscape and, finally, to regional topographies. Part Three interrogates the complex processes by which descriptions of these surroundings – both visual and verbal – produce and transmit cultural knowledge. The chapter concludes by synthesizing these insights into a framework for historicizing the Renaissance environment in Renaissance terms.

Part One: Describing Environmental Imagery

The first sentence of Kenneth Clark's *Landscape Into Art* reads: "We are surrounded by things which we have not made and which have a life and structure different from our own." Among these he enumerates trees, flowers, grasses, rivers, hills, and clouds, the clear implication being that the definition of a landscape is a natural topography, pure and untouched by man. As we will see, Renaissance understandings of the physical environment were much more complex. Buildings, crops, and distant figures were not mere ornaments to the natural topography, they were part of its ontological fabric. Together, this network of images constituted a figure's surroundings.

In the fifteenth century, there was no single aesthetic category that encapsulated the field of environmental imagery – trees, buildings, people, crop fields, rivers, etc. – that populates the pictorial space around a central figure or figural group. I call this imagery "environmental" because its only unifying features are that it depicts the outdoors (the physical environment) and it surrounds figures, or, one might say, it "environs" them. Historical accounts refer to such environmental imagery in varied and unstable vocabulary. In descriptions of art, environmental imagery is usually split into its individual components and presented as a list among other compositional elements. An example of this can be seen in Bartolomeo Fazio's *De viris illustribus* (1456) where the Genoese humanist guides his reader through the experience of seeing a Van Eyck painting, now lost.

[there are] women of uncommon beauty emerging from the bath, the more intimate parts of the body being with excellent modesty veiled in fine linen, and of one of them [Van Eyck] has shown only the face and breast but has then

¹⁰ Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art*, 1.

¹¹ Mitchell also critiques Clark's opening line in Landscape and Power, 68.

represented the hind parts of her body in a mirror painted on the wall opposite, so that you may see her back as well as her breast. In the same picture there is a lantern in the bath chamber, just like the one lit, and an old woman seemingly sweating, a puppy lapping up water, and also horses, minute figures of men, mountains, groves, hamlets, and castles, carried out with such skill that you would believe one was fifty miles distant from another.¹²

Beginning with principal figures and moving to environmental imagery, Fazio's *ekphrasis* praises and delights in the distant figures of "men, mountains, groves, hamlets, and castles." Rather than splitting the painting into subject matter and setting, figure and landscape, he moves through the composition organically, embedding the central figures within a field of imagery comprising their surroundings.

A similar rhetorical strategy can be seen in Leon Battista Alberti's widely influential treatise, *On Painting*, from around the same period.¹³ In Book Two, the author characterizes the constellation of animal, vegetable, and architectural imagery that we would now call a "landscape background" as simply a function of *varietà* (variety) in an *istoria* (a narrative painting).¹⁴ He writes: "I say that an *istoria* is richly varied if it contains a good mixture of old men, young men, boys, matrons, maidens, girls, babies, domestic animals, little dogs, little birds, horses, sheep, buildings, and provinces (*provincie*)."¹⁵ This final term is interesting, because

¹² Bartolomeo Fazio, *De viris illustribus* (1456) as cited in Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350-1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

¹³ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, eds. Cecil Grayson and Martin Kemp (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

¹⁴ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, 71. For more on Alberti's definition of *istoria*, see Anthony Grafton, "Historia and Istoria: Alberti's Terminology in Context," in *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 8 (1999): 37-68; For an interpretation of similar connections between variety and landscape imagery in Van Mander, see Walter Melion, "Introduction: The Affinity of History and Landscape," *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander's* Schilder-Boeck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 1-12.

¹⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting (Book II), 75.

while it translates most directly to the English "provinces," some have chosen to translate it as "fields and hills," or "landscapes and all similar things." ¹⁶

One of the earliest instances of a word like "landscape" being used to categorize pictorial imagery comes from Marcantonio Michiel's *Notizie di Opera di Disegno* (c.1525).¹⁷ In this inventory, the author uses the terms "*paese*" and "*paesetto*" (commonly translated as "landscape") no less then fourteen times to describe paintings, including, notably, Giovanni Bellini's *St. Francis in the Wilderness* (Figure 1.9).¹⁸ That entry reads: "The oil painting of Saint Francis in the desert made by Zuan Bellino, begun by him for M. Zuan Michiel has a *paese* nearby that is marvelously finished and studied." This phrasing, "has a *paese* nearby," stands out among the other thirteen entries that use the term. In every other case, Michiel's descriptions follow a similar formula: a figure in a *paese* ("[...] nostra Donna nel paese [...]") or a *paese* with figures ("[...] un paese con alcuni pescatori [...]").²⁰ The significance of these distinctions is important because during this period, the word *paese* did not only mean "landscape" but also "country" or "village." Michiel's use of the possessive "has" ("*ha un paese*") and the qualifier

¹⁶ "landscapes and other similar things" comes from John Spencer's translation of Alberti's *On Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); "fields and hills" comes from Jan L. de Jong in "Universals and Particulars: History Painting in the 'Sala di Costantino'," *Recreating Ancient History Episodes from the Greek and Roman Past in the Early Modern Period* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 41.

¹⁷ Marcantonio Michiel. *Notizia d'opere di disegno* (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1884). The original manuscript is conserved at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Ital. XI 67 (7351).

¹⁸ The term appears decades earlier in one of Lorenzo de Medici's writings about art: "Conciossiache alcuni si dilettanto di cose allegre, come animali, verzure, balli e festi simili; altri vorrebbono vedere battagli o terresti o maritime e simili cose marziali e fere; altri paesi, casamenti e scorci e proporzioni di prospettiva; altri qualche altra cosa divesra; e pero, volenda che una pittura interamente piaccia, bisogna adiungervi questa parte: che la cosa dipinta ancora per se diletti." Lorenzo de Medici, *Opere*, Vol. 2, ed. A. Simoni (Bari, 1913-14), 68.

¹⁹ "La tauola del San Francesco nel deserto a oglio fu opera die Zuan Bellino, cominciata da lui a M. Zuan Michiel et ha un paese propinquo finite e ricercato mirabilmente." Marcantonio Michiel, *Notizia d'opere di disegno*, 68.

²⁰ Michiel, *Notizia d'opere di disegno*, 159, 32.

"nearby" ("propinquo") suggests a translation as "village," or more precisely, "a town with its countryside." Importantly, Bellini himself does not use the word paese, but instead describes the detailed and evocative imagery surrounding his figures as "luntani" (distances) or "fantaxie" (fantasies).²¹ In this terminology, we begin to see how spatial relationships, especially distance and juxtaposition, are fundamental to conceptions of the environment.

Notably, the word *paese* also appears in connection to painting in Leon Battista Alberti's c. 1450 treatise on architecture, *De re aedificatoria*. With respect to the decoration of private homes (and porticoes in particular here), he identifies three categories of suitable subject matter for paintings: great men and their deeds, scenes from civic life, and scenes from agrarian life. The first, he notes, is best suited to public spaces within the villa while the last is more appropriate for garden spaces. Elaborating on these agrarian scenes, he writes: "Our souls rejoice further in seeing paintings of delightful *paese* (landscapes/rural towns), harbors, fishing, hunting, bathing, shepherd's games, and things full of flowers and branches." It is notable that this artistic category – the agrarian painting – features in his treatise on architecture but not his treatise on painting; and furthermore, that he uses the word *paese* in the agrarian context but *provincie* when describing a narrative painting. The ambiguity and instability of these historical

²¹ This comes from his correspondence with Isabella d'Este regarding a different commission that was never realized. This correspondence will be addressed more fully in Chapter Four. For more on Bellini's descriptive language, see Brigit Blas-Simmen, "Qualche lontani': Distance and Transcendence in the Art of Giovanni Bellini," in *Examining Giovanni Bellini: An Art More Human and More Divine*, ed. Carolyn C. Wilson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

²² Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, translated into Italian by Cosimo Bartoli (Florence: 1550). "Rallegransi oltra modo gli animi nostri nel veder dipinti paesi dilettevoli, e porti, e pescagioni, e cacciagioni, e notationi, e giocchi da pastori, e cose fiorite, e piene di frondi." 333.

terms speak to the difficulty, and indeed futility, of defining landscape as a singular entity during this period. Not to mention the irrelevance of a term like "background."

The Italian word for "background" (*sfondo*) does not appear in fifteenth-century writings about art which instead describe compositions in terms of figures (*figure*) and the literal fields (*campi*) of color, pattern, or imagery that surround them. ²³ The flexibility of this term demonstrates a complex understanding of the relationship between real and pictorial spatial paradigms. Such complexity is belied by terms like "background" or "setting" which impose spatial boundaries and hierarchies onto intricate networks of human and non-human imagery. Indeed, in these verbal lists describing paintings, whether real (as in Fazio's) or ideal (as in Alberti's *istoria*), it is hard to draw a line where subject matter ends and setting begins, where foreground cleaves from background. The challenge of translating terms like *paese*, *provincie*, and *luntani* speak to a modern preoccupation with defining landscape as categorically distinct and wholly "natural," separate from human industry. Yet, as we will see, there was little distinction between the natural and built environments in Renaissance vernacular conceptions of

²³ Examples of this language can be seen in Neri di Bicci's *Ricordanze* in which one entry describes a composition of God the Father with angels against a starry blue background as, "Dio padre cho[n] serafini d'atorno, chanpo azuro razato e stele." See Neri di Bicci, *Le Ricordanze: 10 Marzo 1453 – 24 Aprile 1475* (Pisa: Marlin, 1976), 7. An in-depth study of Italian Renaissance artists' contracts can be found in Hannelore Glasser, *Artist's Contracts of the Early Renaissance* (New York: Garland, 1977).

landscape.²⁴ Therefore, we need not translate *paese* as either landscape or village, because in the fifteenth century it could be unproblematically both.²⁵

In line with period descriptions, then, we should conceive of Renaissance painted landscapes not as backgrounds but rather as networks of heterogenous environmental imagery that surround and situate human figures and their constructions, activating them within a field of ecological, spatial, and social signifiers. A function of *varietà*, this imagery transcends ontological binaries of human/non-human, natural/artificial. Finally, it appeals to the sensations of pleasure and delight that come with recognizing familiar places and things. In what follows, we will see how this pictorial framework aligns with period understandings of the intertwined natural, social, and spiritual ecologies that defined the physical environment itself.

Part Two: Describing the Physical Environment in Daily Life

Carlo Crivelli's monumental *Brera Crucifixion* (Figure 1.10) presents a dramatic vision of Christ's final moments. On either side of the cross, the emotionally tortured figures of Mary Magdalene and St. John the Evangelist gaze up in grief and horror. Around them a landscape unfurls in aerial perspective, its illusory quality cut off at the top by an arresting lunette of gilded

²⁴ This is something that Barbara Mundy discusses in relation to mapmaking in colonial New Spain. She shows how when Spaniards asked native painters for a map of "the town", town – for the Spaniards – meant an architectural entity, while, for the native painters, it meant something closer to community: an interdependent system of land, people, and buildings. Barbara Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 91.

²⁵ The Frick's catalogue *Giovanni Bellini: In a New Light* translates Michiel's *paese* as "a landscape [or small town]." See Susannah Rutherglen, "The Desert and the City: Marcantonio Michiel and the Early History of St. Francis," *Giovanni Bellini: In a New Light* (London: D Giles Limited, 2015).

panel.²⁶ The landscape's high horizon line affords the viewer a detailed and mesmerizing view of the Marchigiano hills where Crivelli lived and worked. Note the city's feudal towers, Roman arches, and terracotta roofs; all emblematic of the fifteenth-century architecture Crivelli could have seen in his adopted hometown of Ascoli Piceno (Figure 1.11). Furthermore, the three-lobed mountain above St. John the Evangelist's head recalls the distinctive profile of Monte Ascensione, visible from multiple vantage points in the city (Figure 1.12). Crivelli's environmental imagery does not replicate the Ascolano topography precisely, but evokes its locality and atmosphere through specific *kinds* of terrain – a lobed mountain, a rolling hill, etc.²⁷

In his five-hundred-page monograph on the artist, Ronald Lightbown describes the environmental imagery in the Brera crucifixion briefly as "a landscape of brown earth and dark-green bushes and trees, dominated in the middle ground by the bare grey trunks which in the art of Mantegna, Giovanni Bellini and Crivelli himself have already so often pictured the Passion." He goes on to analyze the background buildings separately from the natural features, concluding that the landscape as a whole presents Jerusalem with a "Marchigiano twist." This interpretation is by no means incorrect. However, in parsing the composition into primary and secondary content (the figures and the background) and isolating the landscape's urban and natural forms, it reduces a rich pictorial composition into a singular entity – "a landscape" – and assigns it a singular meaning – symbolizing the Passion of Christ. As we will come to see time and again, the physical environment bore myriad associations beyond the spiritual realm. Land,

²⁶ For a dedicated analysis of this work, see Alison Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," in *Ornament and Illusion: Carlo Crivelli of Venice*, ed. Stephen J. Campbell (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner, 2015), 57-77.

²⁷ Relevant to a discussion of different "kinds" of landscapes is Jay Appleton's *The Experience of Landscape* (London: Wiley, 1996).

²⁸ Ronald Lightbown. *Carlo Crivelli* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 430-431.

in Renaissance daily life, was not a monolith, an abstract concept, or a neutral empty ground available for human intervention. Each aspect of the landscape, from the quality of its terrain to the proprietors of its bounty, had particular qualities that a historical viewer would have been skilled in distinguishing and interpreting. Religious doctrine was simply one form of knowledge that contributed to this complex ecological literacy.

Documentary sources such as tax records, agricultural treatises, and chorographies (written descriptions of topographical regions) are crucial to the study of landscape imagery because they articulate various modes of describing, measuring, and spatializing the physical environment.²⁹ The sources that will be examined below define the physical environment in similar terms as Fazio, Bellini, and Alberti define environmental imagery, that is, as a diverse network of agents, interests, and meaningful terrains organized within a relational spatial paradigm.³⁰

The Renaissance infrastructures of bureaucracy present a fruitful source for highlighting the variety of meanings and associations that environmental imagery would have carried in fifteenth-century Italy.³¹ Bureaucratic, or notarial, documents both recorded and reinforced a

²⁹ Italian Renaissance scholarship on how communities spatialized and navigated the urban environment includes: Nicholas Terpstra and Colin Rose (eds.), *Mapping Space, Sense, and Movement in Florence: Historical GIS and the Early Modern City* (London: Routledge, 2016); Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance: sound, architecture, and Florentine daily life* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2017).

³⁰ As mentioned in the Introduction, I borrow this language from Christopher Heuer and Rebecca Zorach (eds.), *Ecologies, Agents, Terrain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

³¹ Recent studies on the intersection of bureaucracy, landscape, and artistic production include Alex Hidalgo's *Trail of Footprints: A History of Indigenous Maps from Viceregal Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019) and the exhibition catalogue *Quand les artistes dessinaient les cartes. Vues et figures de l'espace français, Moyen Âge et Renaissance*, Archives nationales site de Paris – Hôtel Soubise (September 24, 2019 – January 6, 2020).

shared reality among the diverse individuals that made up Renaissance communities.³² This included people of all genders, religions, ethnicities, classes, and professions. Clerics, scholars, and laborers all participated in the same bureaucracy. Both the content and the literary structure of notarial documents speak to the inextricability of social and natural ecologies within the Renaissance imaginary.

Notaries were highly respected in Renaissance Europe, serving a similar social function to modern-day lawyers, if not a more important one. They were responsible for legalizing exchanges of property, documenting tax and debt payments, and drafting wills, dowries, and complaints. They also mediated between Latin and vernacular culture, giving a clear voice to complex concepts and spatial phenomena. Notarial documents, while formulaic, are also highly descriptive, particularly with regards to cataloguing land ownership. During the fifteenth century, land parcels (called "pezze³³ di terre" in Italian) were recorded primarily through written descriptions, a far cry from modern surveying practices which entail quantifying and abstracting the physical landscape into a set of numerical values and spatial coordinates.³⁴ Interestingly, in many parts of Renaissance Italy, even numerical accounting was written out descriptively, for example, "three florins [...] plus another three florins" instead of "3+3."³⁵ In the second half of

³² For a compelling study on the truth-value of notarial sources, see Kathryn Burns's, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

³³ This comes from the Latin *pecia* (piece).

³⁴ A fascinating cultural history of measurement in medieval and early modern Italy is Emanuele Lugli's *The Making of Measure and the Promise of Sameness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019). Part IV of the book, "Fields," offers particularly useful insights in relation to the present study of notarial land records. For a study of the long durée shift from qualitative to quantitative modes of measurement in Renaissance Europe, see Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Europe, 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³⁵ "florenos tres [...] alios tres florenos [...]." ASPU, Fondo Notarile, Notary: Simone Vanni, no. 12, f. 58 r.

the fifteenth century, Arabic numerals were not yet fully integrated into vernacular knowledge.³⁶ Put briefly, descriptive language was essential to the function of bureaucracy.

Notarial documents pertaining to land ownership had to effectively visualize a specific environmental context using only words. Notaries achieved these objectives by adhering to a strict descriptive format, an example of which can be seen in the following land-sale document (*emptio*) drafted in Urbino in 1444 by the notary Nicola di Giovanni di Mastro Cola.³⁷ The format of this document, which is highly typical of the genre, begins with the client's name (Bartolomeo Francesca Cole de Urbino) including their city or country of origin (de Urbino), then gives the date (August 11th, 1444), and then goes on to describe in detail where the document is being drafted ("enacted in the city of Urbino"): on whose property ("the property of Donna Jacobe") and where that property lies in relation to other properties ("on the public road with the property of the aforementioned Donna Jacobe being on one side, and, on the other side, [the property of] Johanne Peri Andre [and?] Blaxii of San Leo").³⁸ Only after laying out this spatial topography of people, property, and place, does the notary begin to state the purpose of the meeting and transaction. A similar formula can be seen in land registries (*catasti*) where

³⁶ Arabic numerals became popularized in Italy through the spread of double entry bookkeeping, a type of accounting that was used by Venetian merchants and codified by the mathematician Luca Pacioli (d. 1517). His treatise *Summa de arithmetica* (1494) taught complex mathematics through the lens of commerce. Because of its connection to commerce and the east, Arabic numerals were adopted more readily in major port cities such as Venice and Genoa before spreading to the rest of the peninsula. For more on this, see Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality*. The notarial documents from the second half of the fifteenth century in Urbino use a mixture of written and Arabic numerals.

³⁷ ASPU, Fondo Notarile, Notary: Nicola di Giovanni di Mastro Cola, no. 42. [1444-48], f. 15. Margin index: "Bartolomei Francseca Cole de Urbino Emptio."

³⁸ "actum in civitate Urbinii / res dicte d[o]n[n]e Jacobe / strata[m] pub[licam] vias et res dicte d[o]n[n]e Jacobe et alia lat[us] p[ositio]ntib[us] Johan[n]e peri Andree [?] Blaxii de Santo Leo." Ibid.

people are named along with their land parcels which are in turn defined by their size and what they produce.

The *catasti* records of fifteenth-century Urbino, an important court center with abundant agricultural resources, present a richly detailed vision of the local environment, its bounty, and its diverse inhabitants. Consider the following three entries:

- I. Lady Catherine of Lunardo de Marco has land in the town of San Brancato in the neighborhood that is called Rio della Fossa.³⁹ On the first side is the street, on the second side is the moat, on the third side is Giuliano de Piero of Urbino, and on the fourth side is Bartolo de Piero. Six *staio* of cultivated and vined [land], four *staio* of wooded land, one *staio* of rocky land.⁴⁰
- II. Lorenzo of Sir Piero Spadaio (the swordsmith) has land in the town of Valdazzo in neighborhood that is called Vallagosto. On the first side is the street, on the second side is Lucia d'Antonio de Vanni. On the third side is Maestro Vanni de Diotalene, and on the fourth side is Nencio de Ghignialdo. Cultivated and vined [land] of 1 *plurine*, 3 *staio*, [and] 2 *tabula*.⁴¹
- III. [Venturello the Jew] has land in the town of Campo Cavalli in the neighborhood that is called Delle Schiave which was inherited from Daimano del Resta [...]. On the first side is the fraternity of Santa Maria, on the second side is Andrea di Matteo, on the third side is the Church of San Lorenzo, and on the fourth side is Gionta di Vanni. One *staio* of wooded land.⁴²

³⁹ The formula throughout the *catasti* is: city + "v.o." + neighborhood in that city. I have not been able to definitively translate this abbreviation, but I think it might refer to the verb "voco/vocare" therefore I have translated it here as "in the neighborhood that is called."

⁴⁰ "Donna Caterina de Lunardo de Marcho a terra in la villa//de Sanbrancato in vo[co] del rio de la fossa la via a p[rimo] el[ato] fossato a ii [lato] Giuliano de Piero da Urbino a iii el[lato]//Bartolo de Piero a iiii [lato]. Culta et vignata sta[io] sey//Silvata sta[io] quatro Rupino sta[io] uno." ASPU, Catasti del Commune di Urbino, f. 90.

⁴¹ "Lorenzo de Ser Piero Spadaio a terra in la villa de Valdazzo in vo[co] de vallagosto. La via ap[rimo lato] lucia dantonio de van[n]i aii. maestro van[n]I de dio talene aiii e Nencio de Ghignialdo aiiii. Culta e vignata pl[urine] una sta[io] tre tab[ula] doi." ASPU, Catasti del Commune di Urbino, f. 90.

⁴² "[Venturello hebreo] ha terra in villa de campo cavalli in vo[co] de le schiave la quale de trasse da Damiano del resta alib[ro] II, 27 la fraternita da san[ta] maria alp[rim]o Andrea di mateo al ii la chiesa di san Lorenzo al iii Gionta di Van[n]I al iiii. Selva sta[io]." ASPU, Catasti del Commune di Urbino, f. 391.

Catasti entries define members of the community by the land they own, what that land produces or sustains, and what (or who) surrounds it. Human and non-human actors are inextricable within this concept of community. The very names of these people and places – Piero from Urbino, Horse Fields (campo cavalli), the Moat District (rio della fossa) – blur the boundaries of human and non-human, person and place. 43 Furthermore, rather than being counted as abstract, isolated units, every individual is defined by the people (neighbors) and environmental features (moats and roads, for example) that surround them on all four sides. This bureaucratic method presents a deeply social and ecological way of envisioning the physical environment. People and land exist only in relation to one another, constituting a symbiotic network.

For a genre of document that we might expect to abstract, itemize, and quantify people and places, the *catasti* achieve quite the opposite effect. They generate a vivid and spatialized description of the physical environment. From these three short entries, we get a sense of family relations, occupations, and the contours of various neighborhoods throughout the territory of Urbino. We can visualize a world in which married women pay their own taxes, at least in name, and where it is unremarkable for a Jew to own land between a Marian confraternity and a church. 44 Not only do the *catasti* shed light on social relationships and urban topography, they

⁴³ It is also worth noting that Renaissance surnames often refer to an individual's place of origin, whether it is a country or a specific neighborhood. This wide range of place-names can be seen in a single group of fifteenth-century notarial documents from Urbino. The surnames in these documents include Giovanni di Tavoleto (a town near Urbino), Jacomo Todesco (Germany), Johanes Angeli de Casa Rotunda (a section of Montefelcino) and Aleuti Ebreo da Candia (a Jewish suburb of Ancona). ANU, Notary: Nicola [...] Cola, no. 42, f. 81; f. 43.

⁴⁴ The Jews of Urbino during this period were afforded significant privileges and social standing. This particular individual appears frequently in notarial documents and owns hundreds of land plots all over the territory.

also present descriptive accounts of the various *kinds* of land that were foundational to a functioning society.

In these documents, the word "land," translated from the Italian/Latin word *terra*, rarely appears without an adjective describing its agricultural or ecological properties. Some commonly used qualifiers are "vined land" (*terra vigneata*), "wooded land" (*terra silvata*), "cultivated land" (*terra culta*), and "rocky land" (*terra rupina*). In a single folio from the notary book of Simone Vanni the word "terra" comes up no less than twenty times, each time with a qualifier or several: "one piece of cultivated land [...] another piece of cultivated land [...] a piece of cultivated, caned, and wooded land" and so on. 45 This meticulous attention to land and its properties speaks to the significance of land as a unit of social currency in Renaissance Urbino (in fifteenth-century wills and testaments, land comes up significantly more than coin currency), but also testifies to the importance of specificity when describing and valuing land.

As we have seen, the formal vocabulary of landscape was rich and varied. Being able to describe, spatialize, and interpret the diverse components of landscape was foundational to civic and social life, from the mundane operations of bureaucracy to the business of agriculture, industry, and property. In a later section, we will see how this was also foundational to notions of personhood and community. Certainly, this material understanding of the physical environment would have informed how people represented and engaged with its image.

Re-visiting Crivelli's *Brera Crucifixion* with this in mind significantly enriches our understanding of the worlds both *in* and *of* the painting. In light of the notarial language surveyed above, Crivelli's elaborate landscape can be described as featuring at least three distinct kinds of

⁴⁵ "unam petiam terre cult[e]" "unius alius petium terre silvat[e]" "unius petius terre cult[e] sode silvat[e]." ASPU, Fondo Notarile, Notary: Simone Vanni, no. 12, f. 58 r.

terrain. The first is the rocky ground of the Crucifixion (*terra rupino*), captured by the meticulous rendering of individual rocks and pebbles. Interestingly, the pigment – a warm earthy brown – would have been sourced from the very ground it seeks to depict, thereby presenting a fascinating instance of material and virtual ecologies intersecting in the realm of art. ⁴⁶ From this rocky ground, a grid of angular hedges expands, each hedged square enclosing a cultivated field (*terra culta*). More hedge rows can be seen in the distance wrapping the hillsides. Finally, a dense cluster of trees, a miniaturized forest (*terra silvata*), emerges from the hill above the Magdalene's gilded halo. This shorthand for woods can also be seen in the lower right-hand corner of Fra Carnevale's *Crucifixion*, another Marchigiano painting of the same subject matter (Figure 1.13). More than a monolithic "landscape," Crivelli's environmental imagery exhibits remarkable *varietà* in its many different "pieces of land" brought together through artistic ingenuity and imagination.

From a modern standpoint, understanding Crivelli's woods as one kind of terrain within a variegated landscape is just as valuable as identifying its religious symbolism (likely a reference to the Agony in the Garden); and in fact, there is little use in distinguishing between these categories of meaning in the first place. In Renaissance Italy, spiritual and social life were intimately connected. Furthermore, religion was not just a means of interpreting *representations* of the environment, it was fundamental to how the environment itself was treated, managed, and understood. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of agriculture, where the health of the

⁴⁶ For a study on the relationship between iconography and the material properties of color in the Mesoamerican context, see Claudia Brittenham and Diana Magaloni, "The Eloquence of Color: Material and Meaning in the Cacaxtla Murals," in *Making Value, Making Meaning: Techné in the Pre-Columbian World* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 2016), 63-94.

physical environment was seen as a direct function of its inhabitant's spiritual and social wellbeing.

The Art of Agriculture

Piero de Crescenzi's *Trattato dell'Agricoltura* (Treatise on Agriculture), written in the early fourteenth century, was translated, copied, and widely circulated throughout the fifteenth.⁴⁷ He opens the treatise by drawing connections between spiritual and agricultural "goodness" within notions of social well-being. ⁴⁸ He writes that in this "exquisite doctrine of cultivation," people can find inner peace, communal harmony, freedom from the dangers of idleness, and "live justly on the fruits of their possessions." He goes on, "thusly I have turned my mind and soul towards the cultivation of the villa. And I ask the help of omnipotent God, confide in me the liberality and courtesy of Jesus Christ." Christian ideology percolates throughout the text, coming through most vividly in moments where Piero discusses the moral virtue of land managers. Composed across twelve books, Piero's opus portrays agriculture as an edifying, virtuous, and even pious art form that entails the coordination of a diversity of skills and materials purposefully composed through human ingenuity and the forces of God and Nature.

⁴⁷ Piero de Crescenzi, *Trattato dell'agricoltura di Piero de'Crescenzi Cittadino di Bologna* (Firenze: 1605) Special Collections, University of Chicago.

⁴⁸ "E conoscendo, che nel coltivamento della villa, agevolmente si trova stato tranquilla, in pero che eccita dall'oziosita, e il danno de prossimi si schifa e ancora più che l'esquisita dottrina del coltivamento, per la quale piu agevolmente e abbondantemente si riceve utilità, e s'acquista diletto, che se negligentemente e senza certo ingegno ciascuna cosa con usato costume si coltivi, meritevolmente è da desiderare da buoni uomini, che senza danno d'alcuno vogliono vivere giustamente delle rendite delle lor possessioni, e pero al coltivamente della villa la mente e l'animo ho rivolto. E richiesto l'aiuto dell'omnipotente Dio, confidandomi della liberalità e cortesia di Gesu Christo." Piero de Crescenzi, *Trattato dell'Agricoltura*, Book 1:1.

The topics addressed in the treatise cover a vast range of subject areas including the expected horticulture, crop rotation, and animal husbandry as well some less obvious topics like architecture, engineering, security, human resource management, and medicine. Piero even includes chapters on beekeeping, pleasure gardens, and "how to recognize the beauty of a horse." The variety and scope of the treatise makes clear that agriculture was not simply one aspect of society, relegated to its rural margins, it was society's organizing infrastructure. As such, agriculture – in addition to Christian doctrine and in relation to it – presents an important framework of knowledge through which to interpret the function and meaning of environmental imagery in art.

Piero's text speaks to the many ways that Renaissance individuals and communities understood their relationship to the physical environment. He clarifies that the civic and spiritual health of a society depended on its agricultural bounty; and this in turn, depended on a carefully calibrated ecological relationship between the physical environment and the humans that managed and worked it. The entanglement of these ecologies of landscape and labor can be seen in the chapter headings of Book One alone where it is impossible to separate out the sections on land administration, for example, from those on horticulture, architecture, and meteorology:

- 1. On choosing habitable locations: on the court, houses, and the things that are needed for living in the town [...]
- 2. On air, and knowing its benefits and dangers
- 3. On wind, and knowing its benefits and dangers
- 4. On water, that humans need, and knowing its benefits and dangers
- 5. On sites of habitable locations, and knowing their benefits and dangers
- 6. On courts [...], to make in different locations and in different ways
- 7. On the intrinsic disposition of the court
- 8. On wells, and making water sources, and how to find and get water
- 9. On canals for conducting water to the cisterns and the sources
- 10. On cisterns, and how you should make them
- 11. On the materials of houses
- 12. On the office of the local administrator

Despite the seemingly categorical nature of these chapter headings, their content is much more fluid, often blurring the boundaries between human and non-human ecologies. For example, writing about air quality, Piero cites Palladio's claim that the "health of the air" affects the appearance of the topography as well the "bodies of its inhabitants insofar as in healthy air, they have good color and a good head; good sight without defect, good hearing, and a clear voice." Connecting topography and climate to public health and even beauty, Piero's text does not present an encyclopedic account of the agrarian landscape. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that such an account could exist within a pre-Enlightenment cultural logic. Instead, he presents a holistic and didactic description of the landscape's many and mutually dependent forms, behaviors, and functions.

Visualizing the Art of Agriculture

A 1495 woodcut frontispiece from Piero's treatise allows us to visualize in two dimensions the complex social and natural ecosystems described within (Figure 1.14). Printed in Venice, the woodcut depicts a villa and its countryside in aerial perspective. Within the composition, human and non-human figures of diverse social and ecological categories interact within a shared environment. Supernatural forces engage from the margins in the form of the two plaques of saints that adorn the villa's entrance and a personification of wind that blows favorably upon the landscape from the upper right-hand corner.

⁴⁹ "la sanità dell'aere dichiarano i luoghi, che sono liberi da profonde valli e da oscure tenebre, e ancora considerati i corpi degli abitanti: imperciocche nell'aere sano sono coloriti, ed hanno sano e buon capo; buona veduta e senza difetto, chiaro udire e chiara voce." Piero de Crescenzi, *Trattato dell'Agricoltura*, Book 1:2.

Just as in the Lorenzetti frescoes and the *Brera Crucifixion*, a high horizon line is deployed to maximize the amount of legible environmental imagery the artist can incorporate into the composition. Here, this perspective affords us a detailed view of the various agricultural components addressed throughout the book. A caned fence encloses the villa's courtyard which is dotted with stones, plants, and small domestic animals. Neat rows of crops fill the space around the courtyard and terminate in a minute and distant tower-topped hill, a slight yet significant gesture towards the villa's proximity to another territory.

Despite the hypervisibility offered by its birds-eye view and its seeming symmetry along a central axis, the woodcut's composition is quite sophisticated. Binaries run throughout in the juxtaposition of a water pump in the bottom left and a furnace in the lower right; and in the villa's surroundings split into right and left sections. The vined wall on the right encloses an arbored garden bracketed on either side by receptacles housing bees in netted canisters, allusions to the book's fascinating sections on pleasure gardens and beekeeping. The left side showcases crop fields in tidy tick-marked rows. Lively birds perch on a tower and circle above the crop fields, attesting both to the fields' agricultural abundance and their capacity to attract fowl for the hunt.

While picturesque, this scene also captures the constant threat of danger that defined land ownership. As described in Book One, Chapter 6, towers such as the one circled by birds functioned as a look-out and a safe house "where the head of the family and his workers can take

⁵⁰For more on this, see Johanna Elizabeth Bauman, "Piero de' Crescenzi's *Liber ruralium commodorum*: Unearthing the Origins of the Pleasure Garden" (Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2000).

their things and escape when they need to."⁵¹ Distance and isolation from other communities (indexed here by the distant tower-topped hill) increased the threat of danger. The highly restricted visual vocabulary of that distant cityscape recalls Sano's patterned globe; and serves as a reminder that environmental imagery is always significant, no matter how distant or small it appears in the world of the painting. Indeed, distance itself is a locus of meaning.

In the midst of this dizzying composition, rich in the detail and variety of its environmental imagery, stands an elegant couple, presumably the land manager and his wife. They occupy the woodcut's dead center and stand in the threshold between domestic and outdoor space. In this way, they might be seen as echoing the liminal status of the treatise itself as a source of knowledge to be studied within the home yet applied in the field.⁵² Beyond this noble couple, one other human figure inhabits the composition. Lower down and on the left, a woman wearing a peasant's headscarf sits in the doorway to her modest lodging. She shares her patch of terrain with a rooster and a porcupine-like creature and appears to work something with her hands, perhaps a textile. This figural arrangement visualizes an important theme of Piero's treatise, which is that the art of agriculture demands two kinds of people: land managers and land laborers. The class dynamics inherent to this social ecology warrant further exploration.

⁵¹"Uno [...] toronella quale el padre de la famiglia con suoi lavoratori e co le sue cose possa rifuggire quando bisogno gli fusse." Piero de Crescenzi, *Trattato dell'Agricoltura*, Book 1:6.

⁵² Similar to medical treatises from this time, it is unlikely that agricultural treatises were used like manuals "in the field" so to speak. The copies I have studied are quite clean and intact, and they often include marginalia which suggests a domestic reading context. An interesting example of this can be seen in the back of one fifteenth-century edition conserved at the Newberry Library in Chicago, where a fifteenth-century author has written instructions for cultivating *gualdo* (woad), a yellow-flowered plant coveted for its use in blue dyes. Piero de'Crescenzi, *Il libro della agricultura* (Florence: Nicolaus Laurentii, Alamanus, 1478).

In his chapter "Imperial Landscape," W.J.T. Mitchell invokes Karl Marx's term "social hieroglyph" to describe the capacity of landscape to emblematize the social relationships that define it.⁵³ This may bear on our analysis of the woodcut, as well as the written text it illustrates. At various moments throughout the treatise, Piero characterizes the relationship between land managers and laborers in moralizing and paternalistic terms. In Book 1:12, he dictates that the manager should be "well-disciplined" and of good social standing. His family must not quarrel or have an evil disposition (*stia male*), nor should they suffer from cold and hunger because this will negatively impact his ability to steward the land. Finally, he should be a good example to others.⁵⁴ Alberti reiterates these sentiments a century later in his treatise on architecture where, in a discussion of managing country estates, he goes so far as to specify where the administrator should sleep in order to best protect his family and property.⁵⁵ In addition to reminding us that the arts of architecture and agriculture had significant overlap during this period, Alberti's treatise confirms the resilience and embeddedness of Piero's belief that the health of the land and its community relied on its stewards' virtuosity.

⁵³ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 15.

⁵⁴"Il villano, o vero castaldo del luogo, o vero il lavorator del podere, deve esser bene ammaestrato, e bene disciplinato, e dosservatore de'buon costume: imperciocche egli primieramente guardare di tor l'altrui, e le sue cose salvar diligentemente. Appresso deve proccurare, che la sua famiglia non sia litigante. Appresso deve proccurare, che la detta familglia non stia male, e che non sostengane freddo ne fame, perche, se cio fara, la guarderà più salvamente di malattia, e di male oprare. Non sia ingrate, acciocche dia esemplo agli altri." Piero de Crescenzi, *Trattato dell'Agricoltura*, Book 1:12.

⁵⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, Robert Tavernor (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 142.

Critically, these concerns of moral character do not extend to the laborers, who are largely discussed as extensions of an estate's property in a similar category as domestic animals and livestock. This association, visualized in the frontispiece as well, is expressed in Piero's instructions to lay out the estate's grounds "according to the needs of the workers' families and the animals that need to be fed." Going into greater detail later on, he writes:

If the head of the estate is of such high nobility that it would disgust him (*che schifino*) to live in the same court as his workers, they can easily [live elsewhere] and install a guardian, called a Castaldo, and in the other part make their place ornate with palaces and towers and gardens according to their nobility and power.⁵⁷

It is certainly telling that his use of possessive pronouns frame the laborers as belonging to the head of the estate and not to the land.

Piero's characterization of the place of laborers within the estate's physical and social ecology is quite literally de-humanizing. He places expectations of moral character – a defining feature of humanity – only on the land managers and heads of the estate; and he frequently conflates human laborers and domestic animals into a single unit of syntax. Blurring the ontological boundaries between human and animal property, Piero's treatise speaks to some of the darker effects of a world view in which natural and social ecologies are perceived as fully interconnected. A closer look at Book One reveals how such conditional conceptions of humanity also affected perceptions of ethnic "others." 58

⁵⁶ "secondo il bisogno della famiglia de lavoratori e degli animali da nutricare." Piero de Crescenzi, *Trattato dell'Agricoltura*, Book 1:7.

⁵⁷"Ma se la nobiltà de'Signori e la Potenza è tanta, che schifino d'abitare co'suoi lavoratori in una medesima corte, potranno agiatamente nel predetto luogo cosi disposto, far dimorare un guardian, il quale si chiama Castaldo, e in altra parte fare il lor luogo ornato di palagi e di torri e di Giardini secondo che a loro nobiltà e possenza si converra." Piero de Crescenzi, *Trattato dell'Agricoltura*, Book 1: 7]

⁵⁸ Questions of ethnicity and race in medieval and Renaissance Europe are vast complex. In approaching these issues, I have learned a great deal from the bibliographic resources

Book One educates readers on how to choose the right location for their estate, which was just as important as constructing and maintaining it. In Chapter Five, Piero instructs his reader to first consider the quality of the terrain (humid, muddy, mineral-rich, etc.), then what is nearby (mountains, sea, "trees, or vines, or even dead bodies or other similar things"), and finally the climate (hot or cold) which, according to Piero, can affect body, mind, and spirit. It is at this point in the text that he rehearses a Classical theory of environmental determinism that attributes differences in appearance and temperament to the effects of certain climates.⁵⁹ He writes:

The warm habitable places cause the hair [of their inhabitants] to blacken and become frizzy: and when there will have been great dissipation [of their breath], and the draining away of moisture, the aging will come just as in the Land of the

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provided by the Medievalists of Color (MoC) professional organization, as well as from *postmedieval*'s "Making Race Matter in the Middle Ages" special issue, edited by Cord J. Whitaker (Spring 2015). Key texts from this bibliography include: Sara Ahmed, "Race as Sedimented History," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 6 (2015): 94-97; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Ananya Jahanara Kabir, and Deanne Williams (eds.), *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (1997): 103-142; David Goldberg, "The Development of the Idea of Race: Classical Paradigms and Medieval Elaborations," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 5 (1999): 561–70; Thomas Hahn, "The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race Before the Modern World," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31:1 (2001): 1–37; Elizabeth Spiller, *Reading and the History of Race in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Matthew X. Vernon, *The Black Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁵⁹ For a summary of the Classical origins of environmental determinism and its relation to modern definitions of racism, see: Benjamin Isaac, "Racism: a rationalization of prejudice in Greece and Rome," in *The Origins of Race in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For more on the relationship between theological discourse and racism in medieval Europe, see Lindsay M. Kaplan, *Figuring Racism in Medieval Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford Univity Press, 2019). For the connections between science, race, and environment, see Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Lydia Barnett, *After the Flood: Imagining the Global Environment in Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), especially Chapter Two.

Blacks where the inhabitants look old after thirty years: and in their hearts they are fearful because their breath is so dissipated.⁶⁰

The ease with which Piero incorporates a theory of race and climate into a treatise on the art of agriculture should make clear that during the medieval and early modern periods in Europe, social and natural ecologies were deeply connected in cultural epistemology. Furthermore, these belief systems could have damaging effects on the lives of marginalized and oppressed people. I point this out because, looking back from the perspective of the Anthropocene, it is easy to romanticize a time when nature and culture were more intimately connected in cultural ideology. Yet, it is also important to remember that this historical world view was constructed around hierarchies of humanity that upheld structures of oppression on the level of institutions as well as individuals.

⁶⁰ "I luoghi abitabili caldi fanno i capeglie anerire e diventare crespi: e quando in loro sarà stata grande risoluzione, e l'humidità menovata avaccio, sopravverrà la vechiezza, secondamente, che nella terra de' neri avviene, ove in trenta anni sono vecchi gli abitanti, ed in loro cuori sono paurosi, imperochè lo spirito molto si risolve." Piero de Crescenzi, *Trattato dell'Agricoltura*, Book 1:5. He derives this passage from Avicenna's medical treatise, *Qanun fi al-tibb* (1025). Avicenna, *The Canon of Medicine* (New York: AMS Press Inc, 1973), 205.

⁶¹ For more on the intersection of race, environment, and religion in medieval thought, see: Claire Weeda, "The Fixed and the Fluent: Geographical Determinism, Ethnicity, and Religion c. 1100-1300 CE," in *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 93-113; Katharine Park, "The Meanings of Natural Diversity: Marco Polo on the 'Division' of the World," in *Texts and Contexts in Medieval Science: Studies on the Occasion of John E. Murdoch's Seventieth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 134-47; John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000. Asa S. Mittman, "Are the Monstrous 'Races' Races?" *postmedieval* 6:1 (2015): 36-51.

⁶² In calling attention to the polemics of this historical distance, I engage with Marius Turda and Maria Sophia Quine's claim that race has distinct intellectual and historical traditions but should be analyzed "consciously from the perspective of the present." Marius Turda and Maria Sophia Quine, *Historicizing Race* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 3.

⁶³ Similar issues have been brought up in the context of "new materialism." Huey Copeland has pointed out how such a theory risks undermining the very real existence of human hierarchies as well as their implications. Engaging with Copeland's critique, and applying it to discourses of Renaissance art and nature, Rebecca Zorach writes that "the stakes of new materialism have to involve questions of European cultural logics that set up divides between the

Speaking to the entanglements of power, ecology, and identity from a postcolonial perspective, W.J.T. Mitchell describes landscape as a "process by which social and subjective identities are formed." This definition comes from a broader project in which he theorizes landscape as the "dreamwork of imperialism," and focuses on its function of naturalizing, or concealing, the means through which imperialism is enacted and achieved. While this is a compelling framework, and the dominant mode through which art historians have theorized the social implications of visualizing landscape, it does not easily map onto to a text like Piero's treatise or a painting like Crivelli's *Brera Crucifixion*. Indeed, the politics of seeking out and presenting a particular vision of the landscape are different when landscape is the primary subject matter versus when it is part of a broader theory of agriculture or used as a pictorial device to ground a figural narrative. Furthermore, while Renaissance Italy partook in its own variety of imperialist and colonial enterprises, the cultivation of regional and national identity was a much more dominant political project in the public imaginary. Crucially, this project also relied on shared cultural understandings of the landscape and its history.

The geographic chorography, a literary genre that (re)emerged in the second half of the fifteenth century, was instrumental in constructing notions of identity around landscape.⁶⁵ The following section will examine one such text, Flavio Biondo's *Italia Illustrata* (1474), focusing

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human and the nonhuman that refused humanness to a large majority of humans." Huey Copeland, "Tending-towards-Blackness," *October* 156 (Spring 2016): 141-144; Christopher Heuer and Rebecca Zorach (eds.), *Ecologies, Agents, Terrains*, 151.

⁶⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, Landscape and Power, 1.

⁶⁵ For more on Renaissance chorography, see Lucia Nuti "Mapping Places: Chorography and Vision in the Renaissance," *Mappings* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 90-109; Hilary Ballon and David Friedman. "Portraying the City in Early Modern Europe: Measurement, Representation, and Planning," in *Cartography in the European Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Thomas Frangenberg, "Chorographies of Florence: The Use of City Views and City Plans in the Sixteenth Century," *Imago Mundi* XLVI (1994): 41-64.

on the ways the author uses language to visualize place, calling up physical and optical experiences as well as invoking (and creating) a collective national identity. While such geopolitical texts were geared towards an elite readership, they relate to the vernacular sources surveyed above because they engage a shared cultural understanding of the physical environment, as well as a set of conventions for visualizing it. Because the function of chorography is to create recognizable images of the *oecumene* (the inhabited world), this text also invites us to further interrogate the "mutual feedback loop" between inhabiting and visualizing the physical environment.⁶⁶ This will open up a discussion of the challenges, limits, and possibilities of representing the physical environment in two dimensions.

Part Three: Describing the Environment from Within and Without

Flavio Biondo's *Italia Illustrata*, often hailed as the first modern geography, presents a tour de force of historical, archaeological, and literary scholarship.⁶⁷ Like Piero's *Trattato dell'Agricoltura* analyzed above, Biondo's *Italia Illustrata* synthesizes ancient sources with contemporary awareness and personal observations to generate a source of spatially produced and organized knowledge both of its time and connected to a longer intellectual tradition. By describing each of the Italian peninsula's eighteen regions, Biondo sought to "shed light on

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⁶⁶ Lucia Nuti, "Mapping Places," 90; Patricia Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

⁶⁷ I use the Catherine Castner edition of *Italia Illustrata: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Vols. I-II (Binghamton, NY: Global Academic Publishers, 2010). For more on Flavio Biondo, see: Fulvio Delle Donne, "La cognizione del primato: Biondo Flavio e la nuova concezione della storia," in *In presenza dell' autore. L'autorappresentazione come evoluzione della storiografia professionale tra basso Medioevo e Umanesimo* (Naples: Federico II University Press, 2018), 121-43; Maurizio Campanelli and Frances Muecke (eds.), *The Invention of Rome: Biondo Flavio's Roma Triumphans and its worlds* (Geneva: Droz, 2017).

Italy's dark history," and to render an unfamiliar (i.e. antique) geography recognizable to the modern reader. His project reflects an effort to unify Italy - a country of many languages, religious factions, and models of governance – through its shared topography. Seeking to forge connections between past, present, and future communities through the medium of landscape, Biondo's gargantuan scholarly effort is quite literally a project of nation-building through language and geography.

While the genre and intended audience of this work distinguish it from the other sources we have examined thus far, the efficiency of each – the *catasti*, the agricultural treatise, and the geographical chorography – relied on their ability to call up an image of a specific place and its relative location using only words. As with the *catasti*, literary structure is crucial here. Drawn largely from Strabo's ancient geography, Biondo's structure, which he calls "his plan," entails delineating each region first by what borders it, and then by entering and navigating its towns systematically, usually by water. Consider, for example, his introduction to the section on the Marches of Ancona (hereafter the Marche):

These are the boundaries of the March of Ancona: in the north, the Apennines, dividing this region, as I have shown, from the Duchy of Spoleto; in the east, specifically the northeast, the river formerly called Isaurus, now the Foglia; in the south, the Adriatic Sea, and after that the river Tronto which flows past Ascoli.⁶⁸

This pattern of identifying a location by its surroundings on all four sides calls to mind the relational spatial paradigm that underlies the *catasti* formula ("X on the first side, Y on the second side..." etc.). Like *catasti*, after delineating the territory Biondo then moves into a description of the terrain and its bounty.

⁶⁸ Flavio Biondo, *Italia Illustrata*, Vol. II, 175.

Once he has established that the Marche is nestled between the Apennines and the Adriatic and extends from the Foglia River to the Tronto, Biondo recounts Livy's description of the agricultural landscape as "abundant in every type of crop but teeming with opportunities for plunder." He then quotes Martial's poems about the Marche's culinary delicacies: olives, bread, and sausage. Following these comments on the region's agricultural abundance, he continues his "plan" by navigating along the waters of the Foglia, Metauro, and Tronto as well as the region's many fresh-water streams that run off from the Apennines. He stops at towns along the way to tell tales of battle, wonder at natural features like the Lago di Pilato (believed to be filled with demons), and to gossip about the hot-button issues of the day such as the illicit sex rituals of the Spirituals, a "heretic" sect that, according to Biondo, inhabited the Marche's many remote caves. While Biondo's modes of spatializing and describing the regional topography present direct crossovers with those seen in bureaucratic documents, they add two significant dimensions to the equation: time and movement.

To witness these effects, consider the following passage from the Marche section:

The Isaurus river, now called the Foglia, has its origin in the Apennines at the fortress of Cotulo. It flows past the walls of Pesaro, an ancient city, where it creates a harbor, but one which is too narrow for the regular use of ships. This city took its name from its location penes Isaurum, or "beside the Isaurus." Livy in book 39 writes that Pisaurum was, together with Mutina and Parma, a colony established by the Romans, and Eusebius in his Chronicle writes that the tragic poet Accius, born of freedman parents, was among the colonists sent to Pisaurum. I believe that the estate of Accius was near Pisaurum, where now is the corruptly named Farnazzano.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid, 175.

⁷⁰ Flavio Biondo, *Italia Illustrata*, Vol. II, 179 (Gola di Furlo), 199 (Lago di Pilato), 188-89 (Heretic Spirituals).

⁷¹ Ibid. 177.

Typical of the text, this passage begins by describing a place topographically and then outlining everything known about it from ancient and modern sources. It therefore presents both a geography and a history that do more than simply inform – they take the reader on a journey through the double axes of time and space. Using the present tense and an active voice, Biondo encourages us to imagine ourselves journeying with him. Seen this way, we begin in the Apennine foothills and follow the Foglia river to the coastal stronghold of Pesaro before it empties into the Adriatic Sea. With vivid maritime imagery and an etymology of the region's ancient name ("beside the Isaurus"), Biondo highlights the integrated nature of water sources to the region's social, historical, and economic functions. Then, guided by Livy and Eusebius, we flow back in time, visiting the tragic poet Accius, only to be spit back out into the present at "corruptly named Farnazzano." Bringing together mountains, ships, historians, oceans, harbors, fortresses, and poets, Biondo's chapter portrays geo-history as a form of knowledge in which social and natural ecologies are inextricable from one another, and the physical environment itself is the medium through which that knowledge is recorded and transmitted.

Biondo's evocative chorography of the Marche does not seek to document a single, agreed-upon reality. This Instead, it generates one from the landscape itself, consolidating ancient and modern narratives as it moves from town to town, powered by the force of rivers. This visually dynamic and temporally flexible approach is quite distinct when compared to the descriptive mode of the Venice chapter, for instance, which presents a comprehensive and chronological history of the empire more or less centered around St. Mark's Basilica. While the Venice chapter is primarily concerned with chronicling great men and their deeds, the Marche

⁷² H. Hofman "Literary Culture in Urbino," *Humanistica Lovaniensia: Journal of Neo-Latin Studies* LVII (2008): 40.

chapter focuses on the landscape and its features. In fact, Biondo's description of the Marche's most "illustrious men" takes up less than two sentences at the section's end. The effects of these diverse approaches are such that the Marche chapter reads as more of a travel diary/chorography – it captures a process of embodied and intellectual knowledge-formation – while the Venice chapter reads like a historiography of the Venetian Empire from the perspective of its rulers (i.e. from the fixed vantage point of St. Mark's).

The distinction between these chorographic and historiographic modes is likely due to the fact that Biondo had less literary source material from which to draw for his section on the Marche and, conversely, had been working on a multi-volume history of Venice.⁷³ Unlike his residency in Venice, he did not have stable patronage in the Marche, meaning he did not have long-term access to libraries and collections from which to generate an in-depth history of the region. Indeed, his classical references in the Marche chapter are significantly limited compared to those seen in other chapters. Pointing to this lack, scholars identify the Marche chapter as one of Biondo's least compelling, claiming he simply did not spend enough time in the region to write a thorough humanistic account.⁷⁴ Yet, I would argue that this perceived weakness is in fact one of its strengths. Because Biondo's primary source material was likely the physical environment itself, the Marche chapter presents a stimulating case study of environmental image-making. Filling space that might otherwise have been occupied by copious classical references, Biondo (re)constructs a palpable sense of place by describing his movement through the terrain and enlivening it with stories of local mythology, cuisine, and historical memories less remote.

⁷³Flavio Biondo. *Populi Veneti historiarum liber unus*, c. 1459-60 (unfinished).

⁷⁴ Catherine Castner describes the Marche chapter as "muted" and lacking "immediacy" compared to the other more researched chapters such as those of Lazio and Venice.

In 1453, Biondo was invited to the court of the Marchegiano city of Urbino for a brief period of time and it is hard to imagine he would not have taken this opportunity to explore its broader regional territory. Indeed, the chapter's organization reflects how someone new to the region and interested in generating a quick and comprehensive account of its history and geography would intuitively navigate the landscape, that is, systematically along rivers from north to south. This phenomenological method of generating knowledge about the local topography results in a chorographic description that is remarkably pictorial: it cultivates a mental image through spatial relationships, narrative, movement, temporality, and even perspective. The intense visuality of this enterprise lends itself to comparison with images produced in the same time and place. A fruitful example can be seen in Giovanni da Rimini's Madonna and Child from c. 1450⁷⁵ (Figure 1.15) which brings Biondo's Adriatic coastline to life with an aerial view of a ship-filled sea and a number of hill-top fortresses and walled cities populating the distance. The painting's sweeping aerial perspective creates similar effects to Biondo's descriptive mode, enabling us to visualize the topography from a distance, looking down from above, a literal birds-eye view. In both reading the text and beholding the image, we soar above the fertile landscape of the Adriatic coast, getting a sense of its primary topographical elements (hills and sea) while also zooming in on specific details – a distant fortress, a harbor, a cliff.

While these elements appear in an ordered and clearly defined context in Biondo's description, in the world of the painting, each one could have numerous associations and meanings. For a local viewer, the fortress could speak to power and security, the harbor to commerce, and the cliff to the local topography. Indeed, still today the Marche's coastlines are

⁷⁵ This painting is privately owned and largely absent from Renaissance scholarship.

distinguished by their jagged cliffsides with homes and boat stalls carved in their facades. Yet to another viewer, perhaps one unfamiliar with the local landscape, the fortress might signal an oppressive military presence, the cliffs a perilous and unfriendly terrain, and the harbor an open invitation to enemies from across the sea (*ultra marine*). This flexibility of meaning speaks to the challenges of describing, representing, and interpreting images of the physical environment; an entity that belongs to everyone, and that derives its meaning from the diverse experiences of those who move through and inhabit it. For an example of these representational problematics, let us turn one last time to Biondo.

After he has finished systematically navigating the towns along the Marche's four primary rivers, from north to south, Biondo arrives at point of crisis because he cannot manage describing the region's mountainous northern territory, which he has clearly left for the end, deviating from his plan. With remarkable candidness, he writes:

It is truly difficult to describe this kind of mountainous terrain, and the places located within it, because it is so full of woods, divided by streams and high cliffs, that there is no map [*pictura*] or verbal description [*verbum*] which can give a complete account of them.⁷⁶

In submitting that his "plan" and perspective cannot accommodate this rugged mountainous forest, Biondo elides the physical limitations of navigating unruly terrain with the representational limitations of describing it both verbally and visually. In this revealing elision, he lays bare the complex relationship between visualizing and inhabiting landscapes.

Seeking to theorize this relationship, W.J.T. Mitchell defines landscape as:

[...] a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Flavio Biondo, *Italia Illustrata*, Vol. II, 201.

⁷⁷ W.J.T. Mitchell, Landscape and Power, 5.

James Elkins puts it more simply in saying that, like the human body, "we are in it and we are it." I present these representational problematics in closing not to resolve them, but to indicate that they were felt and perceived just as much in the fifteenth century as they are today. Yet, during the fifteenth century, as gilded grounds gave way to lush landscapes, these representational challenges also presented significant creative opportunities. It is no surprise that artists during this period approached environmental imagery with unprecedented fervor, grappling with the optical reality, material presence, and emotive effects of their wonderous and familiar surroundings. The variety of pictorial strategies through which they described and reimagined their surroundings cannot be subsumed within a single aesthetic category (landscape background) or folded into the historiography of a genre (landscape painting) that emerged a century later within its own, distinctive socio-cultural context. As we have seen across a range of sources, the act of describing the physical environment is not a straightforward or simple enterprise. It combines observation of detail, mental mapping, and experiences of the outdoors – both optical and physical – in order to render a particular place visible to an audience: present, future, or imagined.⁷⁹ Because these modes of visualizing the environment are media-specific and culturally and historically defined, reconstructing historical understandings of the Renaissance environment is essential to understanding the diverse functions and meanings of its imagery.

In sum, liberating Renaissance painted landscapes from the teleological pull of landscape painting facilitates a richer understanding of how they were defined and spatialized in their own

⁷⁸ Rachel Ziady DeLue and James Elkins (eds.), *Landscape Theory*, 69.

⁷⁹ For a compelling analysis of how certain kinds of Renaissance images explicitly speak to future audiences, see Amy Powell's *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum* (New York: Zone Books, 2012).

time, opening fruitful connections between writings about art and vernacular documents related to bureaucracy, agriculture, and geography. Together, these insights enable us to perform the crucial task of describing the Renaissance environment in Renaissance terms.

Conclusion

In homage to W.J.T. Mitchell's nine "Theses on Landscape," I wish to conclude by distilling this chapter's primary contributions as a set of enumerated claims.⁸⁰

- 1. Environmental imagery is not a stable iconography but a medium of signification it surrounds figures (*figure*) within fields (*campi*) of meaningful and/or pleasurable visual content that communicates a specific place, real *and* imagined.⁸¹
- 2. In the Renaissance imaginary, architecture could be an environmental feature, and the physical environment could be architectural (we will see some explicit examples of this ontological fluidity in later case studies).
- 3. The Renaissance landscape (real and painted) was not a singular entity, but a dynamic environment constituted of many kinds of terrain (*terre culte*, *terre vignata*, etc.) situated in meaningful relation to one another.
- 4. In art and in life, the spatial relationships between these environmental features were understood in terms of proximity, distance, juxtaposition, and surrounding (never reduced to "background/foreground").
- 5. With regards to pictorial representation specifically, cartographic accuracy, "realism," and naturalism were not necessarily more valued than a painting's variety (*varietà*), narrative flow (*istoria*), and capacity to evoke a certain *kind* of place; distant, exotic, familiar, sacred.
- 6. The Renaissance landscape real and represented is not neutral. Its appearance, meaning, and function varies depending on who encounters it. Forms of identity are

⁸⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 5.

⁸¹ For more on notions of place with regards to landscape imagery, see Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place in Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

ideologically and physically embedded within the physical environment, and often appear in its representations, whether intentionally or not.

In the chapters that follow, this framework will be used to situate Renaissance paintings within their environmental contexts and complicate the straightforward symbolic interpretations of painted landscapes that dominate art historical analysis and that prioritize a singular viewer; usually male, Christian, and literate. Challenging these interpretations by revealing the modern biases they encode, the case studies that follow will excavate and integrate a new set of historical experiences into the field of Italian Renaissance art history.

CHAPTER TWO:

Jewish Bodies in Christian Land: A New Perspective on Giovanni Bellini's Niccolini Crucifixion

Summary

The previous chapter historicized the concept of landscape in fifteenth-century Italy in order to establish a framework for analyzing its representations. Applying this towards an iconographic approach to Italian devotional paintings with landscapes, this chapter reconfigures and enriches interpretations of works that, because they are structured around detailed landscapes, have long been understood as derivative of the landscape-rich Northern European paintings in circulation at the time. These Italian paintings, therefore, remain under-analyzed with respect to their specific environmental contexts. As this chapter shows, those contexts were culturally complex and cannot be encapsulated by the frameworks of Christological symbolism that dominate theories of Northern painting. Through a new reading of Giovanni Bellini's *Niccolini Crucifixion*, this chapter ultimately demonstrates how a dynamic iconographic approach – one that accounts for social and environmental as well as spiritual valences of meaning – can reveal new dimensions of history and attest to the presence of bodies long forgotten.

Introduction

Giovanni Bellini's Niccolini Crucifixion in Prato (Figure 2.1), completed around 1485

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¹ for an unknown patron and location, presents a unique iconography in European Renaissance painting: Christ's Crucifixion staged in a Jewish cemetery.² The vast and vivid landscape from which the soaring crucifix and the Hebrew-inscribed tombstones emerge includes recognizable buildings, topographies, and ecological features that situate the viewer simultaneously on Golgotha, the hill outside of Jerusalem's city walls where, according to the Gospels, Christ was crucified, as well as in the late-fifteenth-century cities of Vicenza and Ancona. In the painting, Golgotha, Vicenza, and Ancona converge in a single continuous landscape, unified in its pictorial ecology and topography. This image, of course, does not reflect a singular geographic reality. Nor does it represent a temporal coherence, given that one location evokes a biblical past and the other two a contemporary present. Here, Bellini has collapsed time and space to synthesize a familiar and yet uncanny environment for the crucifixion.³ The complex space in which this scene unfolds – the landscape – is no mere backdrop that is secondary in importance to the narrative scene. In fact, its complex imagery occupies more than two-thirds of the picture

¹ This painting was part of the collection of the Niccolini di Camugliano family and was first attributed to Giovanni Bellini in 1891. Various scholars had initially proposed dates in the early 1500s based on analysis of the Hebrew tombstone inscriptions, however a recent reexamination for the Getty's 2017 exhibition *Giovanni Bellini: Landscapes of Faith in Renaissance Venice* concluded that the inscriptions are incoherent pseudo-Hebrew. The Galleria degli Alberti dates the painting to 1480-85, which I agree with based on style and comparison with other works from this period. For more on the dating, provenance, and collection history of this work, see the exhibition catalogue *Bellini e Vicenza*, ed. Fernando Rigon (Vicenza and Venice: Banca Popolare di Vicenza, 2004); and the exhibition catalogue *Giovanni Bellini: Landscapes of Faith in Renaissance Venice*, ed. David Gasparotto (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2017).

² Enrico Dal Pozzolo calls Bellini's depiction of the Crucifixion in a Hebrew cemetery an iconographic "unicum." Fernando Rigon (ed.), *Bellini e Vicenza*, 23.

³ I am drawing here from the Freudian notion of the uncanny which posits an uneasy relationship between the *heimlich* (familiar, home-like, native) and the and the *unheimlich* (unfamiliar, estranged, uncanny). Essential to my argument is Freud's claim that the uncanny is not universal, but rather relies on personal experience. For a discussion of the uncanny as it relates to the representation of landscape, see Jean-Luc Nancy, "Paysage avec dépaysement," in *Au fond des images* (Paris: Éditions Galilée: 2003), 101-119.

and includes no less than fifteen defined buildings, eight figures, and four animals, a rich body of evidence to investigate the world in which this painting was conceived and experienced. How should scholars interpret this complex and unprecedented iconography? Whose experiences, memories, and fantasies does it reflect?

Since the painting's attribution to Giovanni Bellini in 1891, its few commentators have focused on three interrelated aspects of the work: its relationship to Northern models, its symbolic and metaphorical landscape, and its supersessionist message (that is, the obsolescence of Judaism in a Christian world). Bernard Aikema's assessment, quoted below, encapsulates this interpretation.

The Prato picture elaborates upon the model of the Eyckian Crucifixion in its dialectical structure, juxtaposing the upper part with the city of Jerusalem and the body of Christ, bathed in bright sunlight, with the lower area, which is largely in shadow, symbolising the transitoriness of nature (seven skulls, dead branches, the tombstones with Hebrew inscriptions referring to the mosaic law).⁵

At the center of this interpretation stands a Christian viewer, probably literate and wellversed in theology, who would likely identify a typological relationship between Christ and

⁴ Bernard Aikema, Keith Christiansen, and Augusto Gentile, and Mattia Vinco have all offered versions of this interpretation. See: Aikema's essay in *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Durer, Bellini and Titian*, eds. Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 210; and in *Bellini e Vicenza*; Mattia Vinco's essay in *Giovanni Bellini: Landscapes of Faith*, ed. Davide Gasparotto, 98-103; Keith Christiansen's essay in *Giovanni Bellini and the Art of Devotion*, eds. Ronda Kasl and Keith Christiansen (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2004); and Augusto Gentile's chapter "Landscapes" in *The Cambridge Companion to Giovanni Bellini*, ed. Peter Humfrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 167-182.

⁵ Bernard Aikema, "Netherlandish painting and early Renaissance Italy: Artistic Rapports in a Historiographic Perspective," in *Forging European Identities, 1400-1700. Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 125.

Adam (believed to have been buried on Golgotha) and, more specifically, a supersessionist message of Christianity displacing Judaism that the viewer might easily relate to their own cultural moment.⁶ Indeed, in the second half of the fifteenth century, the Italian peninsula experienced a wave of anti-Jewish rhetoric grounded in the theological justification that the messianic prophecy central to Judaism had already been fulfilled by the arrival of Christ, the purportedly-true Messiah, and that the Jews' continued faith was both invalid and an affront to Christian supremacy.⁷

This chapter argues that, while Bellini might have had a Christian viewer and an anti-Jewish supersessionist message in mind when he developed the painting's composition, his intention is ultimately unknowable, and, furthermore, it is not the only perspective at play in the game of meaning. The painting's size and subject matter is consistent with objects of private devotion and, displayed in the domestic interior of a wealthy patron – perhaps a merchant or clergyman – it could have been seen by a heterogenous group of friends and associates, not only erudite Christians. What other kinds of meanings might these viewers have observed in Bellini's uncanny hybrid landscape?

Accessing the perspectives of such hypothetical viewers may seem futile or ahistorical. Yet, this chapter contends that the standing interpretation of this painting is equally speculative.

⁶ For more on the typological justifications for supersessionist theology, as well as its relationship to anti-Jewish rhetoric, see Terrence L. Donaldson, "Supersessionism and Early Christian Self-Definition," in *Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting*, 3 (2016), 1-32.

⁷ The doctrine of supersession attests that the New Covenant with Christ superseded the Old Covenant that God made with the Jewish people. For a study of how supersessionist ideology informed discourses of art in medieval Europe, see Herbert L. Kessler, "Shaded with Dust: Jewish Eyes on Christian Art," *Judaism and Christian Art: Aesthetic Anxieties from the Catacombs to Colonialism*, eds. Herbert L. Kessler and David Nirenberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 74-114.

It operates on its own set of assumptions and contains a number of blind spots that have gone unchecked. Namely, it overdetermines the influence of Northern painting, thereby reducing Bellini's landscape to a field of abstract theological symbols and undertheorizing their connection to the actual physical environment towards which they refer. This conceals the fact that Bellini's painting, and many others from this period, mobilize a series of conventions and innovations that would have spoken to many kinds of viewers. When analyzed, these connections open onto a more expansive set of meanings in the painting and, in turn, enable the construction of a wider, more vibrant vision of its social, spiritual, and environmental contexts.

Because excavating this field of meanings requires deconstructing some of the critical assumptions that have obscured them, this chapter is divided into three parts that take on each aspect of the painting's traditional interpretation: its Northern influence, its symbolic landscape, and its supersessionist message. Part One examines the historiography of transalpine cultural exchange and its impact on the way fifteenth-century Italian painted landscapes have been described and interpreted. Part Two re-frames the *Niccolini* landscape as a product of its Adriatic context more than an index of its Northern influences, revealing an as-yet unexamined iconographic apparatus that specifically references the experiences of Jews in the fifteenthcentury Italian Adriatic. In Part Three, these new insights open questions about the painting's audience, which troubles the painting's seemingly straightforward supersessionist message. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the act of representing landscape involves choices of representation that inscribe some forms of identity and erase others. Crucially, so does the act of interpreting those representations.

Part One: Northern Influences

Generating a more capacious interpretive framework for understanding Italian Renaissance painted landscapes requires nuancing discourses of transalpine artistic exchange. By way of introducing some key concepts – both historical and historiographic – that connect these parallel inquiries, let us briefly detour to another Italian Renaissance painting with a contentious landscape and a connection to Northern art.

Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of a Gentleman* (Figure 2.2), completed around 1505, positions us across from the penetrating gaze of a man seated in a dark interior. A rectangle of vividly colored landscape in the upper left-hand corner is our only hint that the sitter is *somewhere*, and not staged before a placeless backdrop. As we break away from his gaze and follow our own out of the window, we enter a vibrant outdoor space. In the landscape seen through the window, two small figures animate a rustic environment. A woman toils away, her back bowed under the weight of packed wheat, while another figure tends to the cattle. In the world of this lush and inviting little rectangle – this painting within a painting – Ghirlandaio offers a privileged glimpse of daily life in the Italian Renaissance, or so it seems.

The conservation file for this painting reveals that it has undergone multiple interventions, lived many lives. By the time it arrived at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1933, it had been transferred from panel to canvas, heavily restored, and then subsequently treated (presumably to remove the old restoration). Once in Chicago, it underwent three additional treatments (1953, 1981, 1988/89) with the last one being a deep treatment involving a "largely conjectural reconstruction" of the landscape whose figures, foliage, and buildings were found to

be so damaged that "a truly accurate restoration [was] impossible." Head conservator Frank Zuccari approached this reconstruction by looking to contemporary examples of Northern Renaissance art because, as he writes in the 1989 treatment report, "the landscape had been observed to derive from Flemish examples." A sketch tucked into the report depicting architectural details from two Flemish paintings speaks to the thoughtfulness and precision of his work (Figures 2.3-2.5). In the end, he described the reconstructed landscape as "a pastiche which adopts its architectural form from these examples combined with the few indications of original which were preserved."

While this reconstruction captures the ambiguity of Ghirlandaio's landscape (it may have originally depicted a view of the Flemish or Florentine countryside, or, more likely, some combination of the two), it also materializes a persistent art historical narrative that originated in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550), was canonized in Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), and was naturalized within the discipline of art history through the work of Erwin Panofsky, most notably his book *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (1953). ¹⁰ That is, that the influence of Northern European painting and its associated spiritual movements explains the rise of vivid, individualized landscapes in Italian Renaissance devotional paintings and portraits. ¹¹ Within the historiography,

⁸ Frank Zuccari, "Treatment Report: Portrait of a Gentleman of Florence, August 1989." Conservation File for Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of a Gentleman*, Art Institute of Chicago, Accession Number: 1933.1009.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ For more on Erwin Panofsky's impact on the discipline, see Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

Another perspective focused on the Adriatic context attributes this development to the rising political capital of the Venetian *terrafirma* possessions. For more on this narrative, see Jodi Cranston, *Green Worlds of Renaissance Venice* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

this narrative turns on a binary between the Southern European sensibility for Greco-Roman principles, focused on idealized representations of bodies and architecture, and the Northern European inclination towards rendering earthly matter with particular attention to surface effects, ornament, and, crucially, landscape.

To be sure, over the course of the fifteenth century, Northern works and artists, particularly from Flanders and Antwerp, circulated throughout the Italian peninsula, popularizing new techniques (most notably oil painting) as well as new compositional models such as the so-called "plateau composition" – Millard Meiss's term for a religious scene set before a panoramic landscape, innovated by Jan Van Eyck (Figure 2.6). In fact, Bernard Aikema proclaims Giovanni Bellini's *Niccolini Crucifixion* as "the ultimate and most accomplished *aemulatio* of Jan van Eyck's prototype [...] paradigmatic for the art of Giovanni Bellini, always oscillating between the two poles of north and south." Integral to his assessment is the *devotio moderna*, a spiritual movement that originated in Northern Europe, became popular in Renaissance Italy through panel paintings like Van Eyck's and texts like Thomas à Kempis' *De imitatione Christi* (c.1418-27), and that encouraged devotees to project themselves into biblical narratives, imagining their own city as Jerusalem.

¹² For more on the interactions of Southern and Northern Europe during the Renaissance, see: Renaissance Venice and the North, eds. Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown; Art and Migration: Netherlandish Artists on the Move 1400-1750, eds. Dulcia Meijers, and others (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004); David Young Kim, The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Toward a Geography of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Paula Nuttall, From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400-1500 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and Millard Meiss, "Highlands in the Lowlands: Jan van Eyck, the Master of Flemalle and the Franco-Italian tradition," in Gazette des Beaux-Arts, May-June (1961): 273-313.

¹³ Bernard Aikema, "Netherlandish Painting and Early Renaissance Italy," 125.

¹⁴ For more on the ways that the *devotio moderna* impacted the production and reception of European Renaissance art, see Rebecca Zorach, "'Sweet in the Mouth, Bitter in the Belly':

Yet, while the influence of Northern models and the devotio moderna are certainly significant to understanding the evolution of fifteenth-century Italian painting, especially in the Adriatic, it does not preclude the fact that Italian artists tasked with painting landscapes would have likely taken inspiration from their own physical environments as readily as they could have consulted Northern prototypes. Indeed, they seem to have done both. Assuming that Italian artists could have only derived their understanding of landscape from foreign pictures and spiritual doctrines forecloses critical inquiry into the variety of interconnected visual resources from which Italian Renaissance artists drew when making their own compositions. Therefore, while the influence of Northern art must be considered when interpreting Italian Renaissance painted landscapes like Bellini's and Ghirlandaio's, when used as a default explanation – that is, to explain away complex landscapes rather than to delve more deeply into them – it can obscure important local associations that gave the imagery meaning in its own time. ¹⁵ Uncovering those meanings demands approaches that account for the entangled conceptions of belief, identity, and place that define a given landscape and, in turn, its representation. With this established, let us return to the Niccolini Crucifixion with fresh eyes.

Part Two: Symbolic Landscapes

The *Niccolini Crucifixion* is typically described as a dialectical composition where the upper register, populated with ecclesiastical structures bathed in a golden light, represents the

Seeing Double in an Eccentric French Renaissance Book of Hours," in Art History 36:5 (2013): 922-43.

¹⁵ Bernard Aikema discusses the risks of such generalized discourses of influence, advocating instead for a case-by-case approach. Bernard Aikema, "Netherlandish Painting and Early Renaissance Italy," 108.

heavenly realm and Jerusalem while the lower register, barren and marked with Jewish tombstones, represents the earthly realm, death, and the end of Mosaic law. ¹⁶ Seen this way, each environmental detail – from the distant churches (Figure 2.1b) to the lizard flitting across the rocky foreground (Figure 2.1f) – contributes to the visual metaphor of New supplanting Old. While insightful in many ways, this description presents a rather rigid view of iconography and spatial composition. As we saw in the previous chapter, Renaissance concepts of landscape blur the boundaries of spiritual and secular ideologies and entangle intellectual and embodied forms of knowledge. Therefore, bifurcating the pictorial field and parsing its symbolic elements suppresses the landscape's effects as a unified whole and belies the plurality of meanings that environmental imagery both constituted and conveyed during this period.

Described in more dynamic terms, Bellini's painting can be seen as consisting of Christ crucified as a solitary figure (*figura*) surrounded by multiple pictorial fields (*campi*). These fields break down into three main groups: 1) the crystalline cityscape that extends along the horizon, bisected by Christ's sinuous legs (Figure 2.1a); 2) the rural scene just below, featuring a group of buildings, three water wheels, several animals and figures, and an enclosed field of wheat (Figures 2.1c and 2.1d); and finally, 3) the hill – lush for the most part, with a rocky outcropping – populated by several Hebrew headstones, skulls, and the crucifix (Figure 1e). Unifying these fields is a representational *tour-de-force* of landscape featuring a consistent topography of rolling hills, verdant with multiple species of trees and botanical elements that resemble those indigenous to Adriatic Italy. Take for example the round plant that emerges from a headstone near the crucifix's base (Figure 2.1f). Though it resembles a generic radial plant and is commonly seen in paintings from both Italy and the Netherlands, the specimen depicted here

¹⁶ For examples of this interpretation, see footnote 4.

specifically resembles the *Plantago lagopus* that is native to rocky areas on the Adriatic coast including Ancona (Figure 2.7). Other notable indigenous plants here include the laurel tree snaking up the composition's left-hand side and the gnarled grapevine lower and to its right. Within the painting, both trees carry double weight as local botanical references as well as readily identifiable Christological symbols: the laurel signifies Christ's victory (*laurea*) over death and the grapevine evokes Christ's blood as materialized in the Eucharist. We will delve more deeply into this imagery later on.

Of equal importance to these individual identifications is the fact that the painting's broader, unified landscape resembles the Veneto and the Marche where Bellini lived and worked. That Bellini chose to portray the Crucifixion as if taking place in a modern Adriatic environment, replete with references to civic, rural, and spiritual life, is a significant and deliberate artistic choice. Furthermore, it is a choice that cannot be taken for granted in his practice. Indeed, he made a different choice some decades earlier when he painted the Accademia di Venezia's *Dead Christ Supported by Angels* (Figure 2.8). The environment pictured in the Accademia painting, with its relatively flat, arid landscape dotted with palm trees, is an imagined Levantine scene. Its painted cityscape combines generic architectural features of both Ancient Rome (in the amphitheater and triumphal double arch seen in the distance) and the Holy Land (in the rounded and domed buildings evocative of Jerusalem's architecture). Unlike the *Niccolini* landscape, there are no soaring churches, crenellated *castelli*, or water mills; no

¹⁷ Italian botanist Patrizio Giulini has identified over a dozen plant species in the painting. Based on the represented topography and ecology, he places the *Niccolini* environment at the end of spring in a hilly territory "decisamente italico" in an area that extends from modern-day Lombardy and Venice to Emilia-Romagna all the way south to Umbria, the Marche, and Tuscany. *Bellini e Vicenza*, ed. Fernando Rigon, 65-67.

rolling hills, or cultivated fields. Bellini's *Dead Christ* presents Jerusalem as an ancient Roman city set within a Levantine landscape.

Looking more closely at the *Niccolini Crucifixion*'s architectural imagery (Figure 2.9), we can see that, to the left of the cross, Bellini represents the bustling Adriatic port city of Ancona through an unmistakable depiction of its hill-top Cathedral of San Ciriaco (Figure 2.1b). Details from the scalloped ornamentation along San Ciriaco's roof line to the nested archways that form its monumental southwest entrance signal this identification to the viewer (Figure 2.9a). Bellini has even taken care to replicate the dome's unique dodecagonal configuration, with at least five ribs visible from the viewer's vantage point. Concentrated on the right side of the cross are buildings evocative of Vicenza's Duomo, which has a distinctive scalloped façade, the Torre di Porta Castello, and the bell tower of the Chiesa di San Vincenzo, among others (Figures 2.9b, 2.9c, 2.9d). Interspersed among these allusions to Vicenza are generic orientalizing and classicizing structures including a large domed rotunda, a round tower built of columns, and a pedimented temple, an architectural vocabulary that evokes biblical Jerusalem.¹⁸

It is tempting to read meaning into Bellini's placement of Ancona to Christ's right and Vicenza to his left. Yet, upon closer consideration, the seemingly straightforward spatial boundaries between these two urban zones begin to blur. Next to the Cathedral of San Ciriaco, for example, Bellini has included a three-tiered tower wholly foreign to Ancona's Renaissance skyline (Figure 2.1b). What otherwise might have been a topographically accurate place-portrait

¹⁸ There exists a vast bibliography on the representation of the Holy City's sacred architecture. Some key works include Kathryn Blair Moore, *The Architecture of the Christian Holy Land* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2017); Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 1-33; and Robert Ousterhout, "Flexible Geography and Transportable Topography," in *The Real and the Ideal Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1998), 393-404.

of Ancona, compositionally bound by the cross to its right and the tree grove below it, becomes an uncanny urban complex. What's more, the tower, while foreign to Ancona's urban topography, strongly resembles the Torre Bissara (Figure 2.9e), the tallest tower in Vicenza, with its characteristic tri-partite structure, gothic windows, and lantern. All that is missing in the painted version is the tower's distinctive clock. Bellini's assemblage of buildings – fictive and real – invites its viewers to make formal associations and mentally map these relational geographies.

While acknowledging the painting's many local references, art historian Enrico Dal Pozzolo describes the *Niccolini* cityscape matter-of-factly as "Celestial Jerusalem [...] – a garden of basilicas, churches, and bell towers that celebrate the victory of Christ's militancy." Yet, I would argue that, while Bellini's urban construction evokes certain aspects of sacred architecture (such as the domed rotunda which could bear reference to the Temple of Jerusalem), the cityscape's status as Jerusalem is not quite so self-evident. In fact, Bellini appears to push the established iconography for representing Jerusalem to its limits. In European art from this period, even the most essentialized representations of the Holy City would still include clear references to the city walls, the city gate, and the Temple of Jerusalem. The *Niccolini Crucifixion* leaves these essential references in the realm of ambiguity. The domed building *may* reference the Temple and the crenellated walls enclosing the right half of the cityscape *may* signify Jerusalem's walls, but Vicenza was also a walled city. And, in any case, where is the gate?

¹⁹ Bellini e Vicenza, ed. Fernando Rigon, 26.

²⁰ For more on the morphology of the temple in medieval and early modern art, see Yona Pinson, "The Iconography of the Temple in Northern Renaissance Art," *Assah*, *Studies in Art History*, Series B2 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996), 147-174; and C. H. Krinsky, "Representations of the Temple of Jerusalem before 1500," *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 133 (1970): 1-19.

Indeed, other than the fact that a viewer would expect to see Jerusalem in the background of a Crucifixion scene, there is little to confirm that it is represented here at all.

While, as summarized in the dissertation's introduction, by the last quarter of the fifteenth century it had become typical to use the arena of landscape as an opportunity to blend elements of the local present with those from a biblical past, Bellini's Niccolini Crucifixion goes well beyond this. Its painted environment is exceptional in the diversity, number, and specificity of its points of contact with the physical environment; and its omission of a clear reference to the biblical setting brings it dangerously close to portraying the Crucifixion as a current and purely localized event, untethered from its biblical past.²¹ The familiarity and immediacy of this imagery brings the world of the painting and the world of its viewers into close proximity, engendering processes of recognition and identification that serve to locate the viewer in three spatio-temporal locations at once: biblical Golgotha, Renaissance Vicenza, and Renaissance Ancona. As such, Bellini places the viewer in an uncanny environment that resembles, but is not, their own. In the space that opens up between recognition and unfamiliarity – between the real and imagined landscape elements, both local and universal – the viewer enters the painting and begins to form their own network of cognitive associations. The meanings that emerge from that mental exercise would necessarily vary depending on the viewer's particular life experiences, knowledge, and identity. Taking only one perspective into account – in this case, the Christian perspective – risks missing the spectrum of other meanings present in the work.²²

²¹ For more on the polemics of this mode of representation within the socio-political context of Renaissance Venice, see Arthur Steinberg and Jonathan Wylie, "Counterfeiting Nature: Artistic Innovation and Cultural Crisis in Renaissance Venice," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (1990): 54-88; and Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

²² It is important to note that Renaissance Christianity itself was not a monolith. It incorporated lay practices with official doctrine, adapting to various socio-cultural contexts.

To summarize before moving forward, this section suggested that traditional interpretations of the Niccolini Crucifixion have overdetermined the influence of Northern art and presented a singular, symbolic reading of the painting's iconography that privileges a Christian viewer. It then presented a richer and more spatially dynamic description that contextualizes the painting within the physical environment it depicts. Showing how this environment incorporates multi-faith perspectives, the next section will argue for a new interpretation of the painting that stands alongside (and perhaps complicates) the standard supersessionist reading.

Part Three: Supersessionism

Considerable efforts have been made to identify each of the *Niccolini* landscape's many real-world referents from entire cities to individual plant species, yet two crucial ones have gone overlooked. They are the Jewish cemetery which consists of four headstones inscribed with Hebrew-inspired text as well as six human skulls and a legbone (Figure 2.1e); and the isolated field of wheat located a short distance from the cemetery and in the painting's middle ground (Figure 2.1d). The cemetery has been discussed at length, but only in abstract, symbolic terms whereas the wheat field, to my knowledge, has never been discussed at all, even in a catalogue essay dedicated to the painting's many botanical references.²³ While both of these pictorial

Craig Harbison, for instance, has argued that fifteenth-century Flemish viewers likely experienced certain devotional paintings through the lenses of lay practice and private meditations more than traditional Catholic ritual. Craig Harbison, "Visions and Meditations in early Flemish painting, Simiolus 15 (1985): 87-118.

²³ Patrizio Giulini, "Il paessagio vegetale del Crocifissio," in *Bellini e Vicenza*, ed. Fernando Rigon, 65-67.

elements solicit symbolic Christological readings (wheat metaphors abound in Scripture and the Hebrew headstones literalize the obsolescence of Mosaic law), they also represent real sites and industries central to Adriatic Jewish life. ²⁴ In the fifteenth-century and beyond, the grain trade was an important source of income for Ancona's robust Jewish community. Notably, Ancona was also home to one of the largest Jewish cemeteries in the Renaissance Adriatic – the *Campo degli Ebrei* in the Monte Conero valley (Figure 2.10). When recognized as specific allusions rather than generic symbols, these pictorial components create a representational apparatus that attests to the continued visible presence of a Jewish community within the Adriatic. More broadly, they pose challenging questions about the place of Judaism (and Jews) in Christian lands.

The question of why these references have eluded scholars will be taken up more fully in the chapter's conclusion. For the present purposes, however, this oversight can be explained – at least in part – by the fact that traditional interpretations of the painting emphasize a dialectical relationship between its upper and lower registers (the churches and Christ's body over the Jewish cemetery, symbolic of obsolete Mosaic law), thus underemphasizing the crucial middle ground. Reorienting analysis along a perpendicular axis of iconographic elements – from the cemetery to the wheat field to the cityscape – facilitates a new interpretation by showing how the composition enables – perhaps even encourages – the viewer to embody a Jewish perspective. This new reading situates the painting squarely within its socio-political context: a turbulent time of Jewish diaspora.

David S. Areford has addressed wheat iconography derived from The Song of Songs
 ("Your belly is a heap of wheat"). See: "Multiplying the Sacred: The Fifteenth-Century
 Woodcut as Reproduction, Surrogate, Simulation," in *The Woodcut in Fifteenth-Century Europe*,
 Peter Parshall (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 118-153.

Interpreting the Niccolini Crucifixion's Christian iconography through a Jewish lens is not as controversial of an endeavor as it may initially seem, especially since so much of the painting is occupied by landscape. This is because Christianity in the Renaissance was not just a set of texts and symbols, but a complex practice fully imbricated in the experiences of bodies in the landscape. Crucially, not all of those bodies were Christian. Religious and ethnic minorities not only inhabited the landscape but played important roles in shaping its appearance and driving its essential functions, including those related to Christian doctrine. The Eucharist, for example, was both a sacrament (the body of Christ) and an agricultural product derived from the grain and wine trades which, in the fifteenth-century Adriatic, involved Jews from the countryside to city. Even supersessionist ideology was grounded in environmental issues like inter-regional diaspora (persecution, expulsion, and re-settlement) and perceived threats to public health (i.e. the idea that Jews brought special diseases to the places in which they were forced to re-settle).²⁵ These interconnected systems of belief, body, and ecology endemic to the physical environment are equally entangled in its visual representations. Therefore, while the *Niccolini Crucifixion*'s localized landscape displays Christian iconography and symbols, the physical environment towards which it refers is not inherently or exclusively Christian. For this reason, the painting presents a rich source of historical insight beyond its "intended" Christological meaning. Mining that resource demands close analysis and a certain amount of plausible speculation.

²⁵ Medieval and early modern Jews in Italy were often accused of poisoning wells and thus were associated with the spread of diseases including the black plague. Jewish diaspora – specifically, the re-settlement of displaced Jews – was also closely tied to environmental features. Access to a "living water" source was essential for the *mikvah*, the Jewish ritual bath used in purification ceremonies. Agricultural resources were also important as they allowed Jews to produce cheese and wine, and slaughter cattle according to their dietary laws. *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, ed. Richard S. Levy (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 763; Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), 55-56.

The Jewish Cemetery

The existing archival record cannot confirm that Bellini had first-hand knowledge of Ancona's *Campo degli Ebrei* as he is not documented outside of the Veneto. However, it is likely he traveled the Adriatic coast at least to Pesaro, where he was commissioned to paint a Coronation for the Church of Saint Francis. ²⁶ That San Ciriaco appears more than once in Bellini's oeuvre suggests the possibility that Bellini may have extended this trip a bit further south to visit Ancona, Venice's rival maritime stronghold. ²⁷ Had he spent time in Ancona, he would have surely been familiar with San Ciriaco and, by virtue of proximity, the Jewish cemetery which lies less than a mile downhill from it. Supporting the possibility that Bellini had personal knowledge of Ancona's layout is that in the *Niccolini Crucifixion*, he orients San Ciriaco in such a way that reflects its actual topographical relationship to the cemetery: the cathedral sits atop a hill and the cemetery lies in a valley below (Figure 11). Regardless of whether his knowledge of Ancona was first or second-hand, in the *Niccolini Crucifixion* it appears that Bellini has reimagined Golgotha – a place associated with the burial of Jews – with the Jewish cemetery of Ancona, conflating past and present, near and far. ²⁸

²⁶ Giovanni Bellini: Landscapes of Faith in Renaissance Venice, ed. Davide Gasparotto, 48.

²⁷ San Ciriaco can also be seen in Giovanni Bellini and Vittore Belliniano's *Martyrdom of Saint Mark* (c.1515). In a future article or expansion of the dissertation into a book manuscript, I plan to investigate the presence of San Ciriaco in a suite of Venetian paintings including this one, the *Niccolini Crucifixion*, and Vittore Carpaccio's *St. George and the Dragon* (1502).

²⁸ Golgotha was associated with Jewish burial because it was an execution site located beyond city walls and Jews buried their dead *ex muro*. Renaissance artists frequently make this association by including a single skull at the base of the cross in reference to Adam, Christ's precursor, who was believed to have been buried on or near Golgotha. However, Crucifixion

Scholars of this painting have long been intrigued by the cityscape's Vicenza/Ancona connection, though none have considered the cemetery as part of that discourse.²⁹ Doing so sheds crucial new light on this topographical relationship and connects it to socio-political issues surrounding the status of Italian Jews. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Italian Jews suffered a wave of violent persecutions and expulsions due to the anti-Jewish rhetoric promoted by Observant Franciscan preachers like Bernardino da Feltre.³⁰ These preachers went from town to town blaming Jews for society's ills, the most damning charges being those of usury and infanticide.³¹ Some of the most notorious expulsions that took place during this time were those of Trent (1475), Bergamo (1479) and, interestingly for the subject at hand, Vicenza (1486).

For expelled Jews of the Veneto and Marche, there were only a handful of nearby cities that would have been desirable places to settle and that were also willing to receive exiled Jews.³² Venice, perhaps the obvious choice, had become wary of accepting too many Jewish refugees because it risked disturbing the careful social and economic balance that the city had struck within its own ethnically-diverse community, which included merchants of Jewish, Turkish, Greek, and Ragusan (Croatian) origins.³³ After Venice, Pesaro, Urbino, and Ancona

scenes that include more than one skull at the base of the cross are rare, and, to my knowledge, are limited to two paintings by Antonello da Messina.

²⁹ Fernarndo Rigon believes the choice to represent Vicenza and Ancona can be explained by primarily formal concerns, while Enrico Dal Pozzolo perceives a possible reference to a patron with ties to both cities. *Bellini e Vicenza*, ed. Fernando Rigon, 34 and 26-28.

³⁰ For more on this and the impact of anti-Judaism on Italian Renaissance art, see: Dana Katz, *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

³¹Robert Bonfil, Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy, 127.

³² For a discussion of the determining factors of Jewish re-settlement during this period, see: Ibid, 55-77.

³³ Benjamin Ravid, "A Tale of Three Cities: Venice, Ancona and Livorno and the Competition for Jewish Merchants in the Sixteenth Century," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6:2 (December 1991), 138-162.

were the best options for resettlement based on the size and security of their Jewish communities. Ancona had one of the oldest, largest, and most successful Jewish societies in Italy. Jews were first documented there in the tenth century and by the fifteenth century, the community was thriving and well-established. Ancona's Christian government allowed Jews to practice their religion and participate in commercial activities and money-lending. They were able to purchase, rent, and cultivate land, which was important because they needed these agricultural resources to produce meat and wine in accordance with Jewish dietary laws (something Jews in much smaller towns lacked). But perhaps most importantly, the Jews of Ancona had their own cemetery.

Ancona's *Campo degli Ebrei* was established in 1428 and expanded in 1462, indicating the community had grown significantly, likely from an influx of refugees.³⁷ Jewish cemeteries in

³⁴ The earliest documentary evidence of Jews in Ancona dates to 967, when the archbishop of Ravenna granted a plot of land in Ancona to a Jew named Elia, cited in Maria Moscati Benigni, *Marche: Itinerari Ebraici: I luoghi, la storia, l'arte* (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), 24; Precise demographics for the fifteenth century are difficult to establish due to a lack of surviving documents. However, the fact that a Jewish cemetery was constructed in 1428 and expanded in 1462 suggests that Ancona's Jewish population was significant and growing throughout the fifteenth century. For background on the Jews of Ancona and the Marche more broadly, see Maria Moscati Benigni, *Marche. Itinerari Ebraici: i luoghi, la storia, l'arte*; Luca Andreoni, *Ebrei nelle Marche: Fonti e ricerche secc. XV – XIX* (Ancona: il lavoro editoriale, 2012); Carisio Ciavarini, *Memorie storiche degli israeliti in Ancona* (Ancona: Morelli, 1898); Viviana Bonazzoli, "La communita israelitiche," in *La provincial di Ancona: storia di un territorio* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1987), 127-143.

³⁵ *Comune* records from 1452-1475 feature several Jewish names among lists of merchants, brokers, and artisans. Archivio di Stato di Ancona (ASAN), Archivio Storico del Comune di Ancona (ACAN), Antico Regime, section four, Curia del Podestà di Ancona, Libri degli Straordinari, nos. 5, 6, 8, 10, 15.

³⁶ "[...] the possibility of having a cemetery of their own was one of the first things to be considered when deciding where to settle." Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 281.

³⁷ On November 7th of 1428, the Jews of Ancona were granted a land license for a cemetery plot beyond the gate of San Pietro ("*licentia [con]cessa Judeis faciendi cimiterium extra porta sancti petri*"). ASAN, ACAN, Consigli, Liber Reformatiorum, no. 13, 1428 1 Jan – 1428 31 Dec, fol. 64^{rv}. For reference to the 1462 expansion, se Luca Andreoni, *Ebrei nelle Marche*, 71. For more on the cemetery in general, see Alessia Bonci, "Il campo degli ebrei di

Renaissance Italy were few and far between because they required legal permits and land, upkeep and protection.³⁸ But the benefits were significant because Jewish burial rites call for burial within twenty-four hours of death and with prayers by a group of at least ten adult male mourners (called a *minyan*). Within this short timeframe, it was no easy task to transport the dead and their mourners to another town. Bellini's reference to the *Campo degli Ebrei* must be understood within this religio-social context. While the image of the Jewish cemetery might have symbolized the obsolescence of Mosaic law to a Christian viewer, a viewer close to the diaspora — say, a Jew who had re-settled in Ancona, perhaps from Vicenza — would have noticed something quite different: an indication of the prosperity and resources of the city's living Jewish community.

Without the *Niccolini Crucifixion*'s fifteenth-century provenance, it is impossible to speak with certainty about who would have had access to the painting. Nonetheless, inquiries into its patronage offer a clue. Scholars have leaned towards the possibility of a patron from Vicenza because Bellini completed commissions there and because, in the *Niccolini Crucifixion*, there appear to be more references to Vicenza than Ancona.³⁹ These readings, however, do not take the cemetery into account. In light of its identification as Ancona's *Campo degli Ebrei*, the possibility of a patron from Ancona merits further consideration. Bellini, a highly sought-after artist by this time, was especially known for his Venetian style which drew omnivorously from

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Ancona: Storia di un'area al margine, in vista del restauro e del recupero all'interno del parco del Cardeto," in *L'archittetura del cimitero tra memoria e invenzione*, ed. Paolo Belardi (Perugia: Edilprom, 2005), 27-32; Giuseppe Laras, "Il Cimitero ebraico di Monte Cardeto ad Ancona," *La rassegna mensile di Israel* XXIX (1963): 152-57. See also the *Chayim Sentieri Ebraici* database which is part of the ongoing Museo Diffuse di Ancona project through the Comune di Ancona. Many thanks to Giovanni Fedecostante for sharing this resource with me.

³⁸ In 1438, the Jewish community of Ancona requested permission to erect a protective wall around the cemetery. Luca Andreoni, *Ebrei Nelle Marche*, 71.

³⁹ Bellini e Vicenza, ed. Fernando Rigon, 15-18.

Byzantine, Northern, and Classical traditions. Thus, the person who commissioned the *Niccolini Crucifixion* was likely wealthy and cultured; and would have conceivably appreciated Bellini for both his name and his cosmopolitan flair. This fits the profile of a well-to-do maritime merchant, of which Ancona boasted many. The *Niccolini Crucifixion* was likely commissioned for a domestic setting as an object of private devotion. Yet, in Renaissance social life, objects of private devotion could also be objects of public display shown to friends, family, and associates. In the home of a wealthy merchant in fifteenth-century Ancona there is a reasonable likelihood that some of those associates – if not the merchant himself – were Jews or converts.

While these stimulating questions of viewership must be left in the realm of speculation, what is sure, and what is important, is that around the last quarter of the fifteenth century, Bellini made the unprecedented choice of staging the crucifixion in a Jewish cemetery set within a contemporary Adriatic landscape evocative of Vicenza and Ancona. The effects of that choice – intentional or not – are that the painting sparks dialogue about the place, both literal and metaphorical, of Jewish bodies in Christian land.

The Wheat Field

The legitimacy of Judaism in a Christian world was a live debate in the fifteenth century. Opinions varied by region as well as ruler and depended on many cultural factors. However, conversion was central to these cultural conversations, based on the idea that the transformative power of Christ's death was never-ending: all one had to do to achieve salvation was revoke their religion and be baptized in the name of Christ. Christ's death brought light to darkness, saved the unsaved, and brought about the New from the Old. The themes of transformation that connect

these concepts of supersessionism, salvation, and conversion pervade Bellini's painting in clear symbols like the light-bathed cathedrals looming over, as if supplanting, the shadowy Jewish cemetery; and the dead tree to Christ's left juxtaposed with the lush laurel on his privileged right-hand side, a symbol of victory over death. Less overt, however, are the themes of material and spiritual transformation that Bellini articulates through visual metaphors of agriculture and commerce. Like the cemetery, this network of imagery would have borne distinct connotations depending on the viewer's cultural background and experiences in the landscape.

Regardless of religious affiliation, a historical viewer with any basic knowledge of agriculture would recognize a field of wheat in the middle ground of the *Niccolini Crucifixion*. Occupying the terminus of a road that winds throughout the painting connecting the cemetery to the city is a patch of golden terrain defined by close-set wisps of right-leaning brushstrokes painted in a tawny yellow (Figure 1d). The field, which registers clearly as wheat, is enclosed by a single row of low shrubs. In the Renaissance as today, it was common agricultural practice to border crop fields with shrubs, trees, or vines as a means of keeping out animals and mitigating the effects of erosion.⁴⁰

Bellini's representation of the wheat field extends beyond a single patch of land – it includes machinery, power-sources, and workers (human and animal). To the left of the field and perched on the riverside is a small complex of buildings (Figure 1c), similar to the Memling millhouse conservators placed in Ghirlandaio's reconstructed landscape. In the *Niccolini* version, however, a large round millstone leans against the furthest edifice and three waterwheels churn with the power of the river. Animals and human figures roam the roads connecting the mill to the

⁴⁰ Emilio Sereni, *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape*, translated by Burr Litchfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 99 and 113-116.

trade centers in the distance, activating the painting with the movement of rural labor (Figure 24). In Bellini's time, farmers used pack animals to transport harvested grain from field to mill, where it would be ground into flour and prepared for the market. Thus, the painting presents a self-contained economic system where wheat is grown and harvested, transported by pack animals to the mill, processed into flour, and then weighed and sold by merchants in the city. This is not an idyllic and timeless scene of pastoral beauty – "the silent village with its mill" as one scholar describes it – but one alive with industry and productive energy.⁴¹

Compositionally, the wheat field and its country road serve to connect foreground to background, establishing a prominent iconographic axis between the painting's two references to Ancona: the *Campo degli Ebrei* and the Cathedral of San Ciriaco. In this location, the wheat field's conspicuous presence – large, solitary, and at the painting's center – invites parallel inquiries into the symbolism of wheat in a religious context as well as the status of the grain trade within the economy and culture of this painting's locale. Interpreted through these dual lenses, the wheat field delivers a message about the complex and often ambiguous ways that Renaissance communities envisioned the process and purpose of religious conversion.

From a doctrinal standpoint, there are clear connections between grain imagery and the Crucifixion. In Scripture, grain and wheat products are often analogized with Christ's body through concepts of the Eucharist and the Bread of Life. Consider the following passage from John 12.24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." The grain of wheat that bears fruit in death provides an apt metaphor for Christ's resurrection. This passage also analogizes grains of wheat

⁴¹ Giovanni Bellini: Landscapes of Faith in Renaissance Venice, ed. Davide Gasparotto, 102.

with the body of Christ in a manner consistent with Renaissance doctrine concerning the Host — the wheat-based wafer understood as the body of Christ.⁴² Art historians have readily noted the Eucharistic symbolism of the anthropomorphic grapevine on Christ's right-hand side (its bent branches splitting off from the trunk echo the curved, outstretched arms of Christ). The wheat field completes this symbolism. Together, the wheat field and the grapevine — Christ's "bodies" in the landscape — spur a contemplation of the Eucharist as the transformation of bodies and the consumption of bounty. Seen this way, the grain mill is no mere decorative element in the rural scenery, but the essential mechanism that converts raw materials (wheat/the body of Christ) into the end product (bread/the Host) that nourishes Christian bodies in the city (townsfolk/the Church).

Bellini's use of grain imagery to inspire contemplation of the Eucharist has added significance within Ancona's environmental context. Ancona, the Marche's primary outlet for agricultural exports, boasted a thriving grain industry that included the collaboration of farmers, merchants, and financers from the outskirts to the port. A 2018 conference in Ancona explored the idea that Jews were integral to this economy on multiple levels, not only on the financial end as had been previously assumed. There exists a robust archive of Ancona's grain trade in the sixteenth century and some of the surnames seem to suggest Jewish involvement on the

⁴² For a study of issues of labor, matter, and the body in the production of Eucharistic hosts, see Aden Kumler, "Manufacturing the Sacred in the Middle Ages: The Eucharist and Other Medieval Works of *ars*," *English Language Notes* 53:2 (Fall/Winter 2015), 9-44.

⁴³ Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews and the Mediterranean Economy:* 10th -15th Centuries (London: Variorum, 1983), 332.

⁴⁴ "A Maritime Market: Jewish Enterprises and Grain Trade in Early Modern Europe," 22nd annual European Business History Association Conference, Ancona: September 7-9, 2018.

agricultural and manufacturing ends.⁴⁵ It follows that this would have been true for the fifteenth century as well, since Jews had long participated in Ancona's rural economy.⁴⁶

The possibility that Ancona's Jews were readily associated with the grain trade adds new dimension to Bellini's iconography because the analogy between the Eucharist (the body of Christ transformed into consumable product that nourishes the soul) and the processing of grain (a field of wheat transformed into a product that nourishes the body) provides a model of transformation that would have resonated with the rhetoric of Jewish redemption through conversion. Scholars including dal Pozzolo have cited details like the nearly dead willow tree to the right of the crucifix and the pristine white dove perched on the gnarled grape vine (Figure 1g) as evidence that a message of conversion, peaceful rather than militant, underlies the painting.⁴⁷ He suggests that the patron was likely a Christian clergy member involved in campaigns of conversion and familiar with Jewish customs and the Hebrew language. 48 Regardless of patronage, it is surely significant that a narrative of production, transformation, and consumption suffuses the landscape where Christ stands crucified, and that it utilizes an agricultural and commercial visual vocabulary that would have resonated with both Christian and Jewish audiences. Pinning down that significance, however, proves more challenging an intellectual enterprise.

⁴⁵ASAN, ACAN, Sezione II, Atti di Ufficiale Magistrature Comunali Diverse, Trasporto dei grani e amministrazione del Mulino (1580-1585). These merchants' books document the names of the millers and the yields of their plots.

⁴⁶ Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 93; Luca Andreoni, *Ebrei Nelle Marche*, 85.

⁴⁷ Bellini e Vicenza, ed. Fernando Rigon, 26.

⁴⁸ Enrico Dal Pozzolo has suggested Giovanni Battista Zeno (d.1501) as the patron who commissioned the work. Zeno was the Bishop of Vicenza from 1470-1501 and had ties to Ancona. Ibid, 26-28.

Bellini's composition is so rich in detail and potential for signification that it seems to overgrow its seemingly clear supersessionist program and, as a result, any unambiguous argument for Jewish conversion. Readings of this painting's position with regard to Jewish/Christian relations rely on the compositional hierarchy of upper register (New) over lower register (Old). Yet these spatial boundaries blur under closer examination of the landscape, consistent in its topography and ecological features, and full of transgressive details. Notice the meandering road that cuts diagonally across the picture plane, collapsing the painting's distinct compositional fields and inviting narrative associations between the rural and urban zones. Looking further down at the cemetery's terrain, even the rocky area at the base of the cross – termed the "kingdom of death" by one scholar – celebrates the persistence of life in details like a plant flowering through the rocky soil and a delightful lizard flitting across the rock face (Figure 1f).⁴⁹ The stunning clarity of Bellini's painted landscape entices the viewer to believe its organizing principles are equally clear, yet through subtle games of substitution – for instance, placing one skull by the headstones and one headstone by the skulls; or stationing Vicenza's Torre Bissara beside Ancona's Cathedral of San Ciricao – Bellini creates moments of sympathy in the composition. These details do not fall into discrete symbolic fields, but rather they form a system of interdependent signs that open multiple interpretive impossibilities.

The stakes of this ambivalent representational mode are perhaps most significant with regard to the Jewish cemetery. To my knowledge no other scholars have associated Bellini's Jewish cemetery with Ancona's *Campo degli Ebrei*. However, the reference is critical because once we recognize the *Campo degli Ebrei*, a poignant dissonance emerges within the painting's

⁴⁹ Renaissance Venice and the North, eds. Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown, 210.

message. The cemetery is not only a symbol of a dead Mosaic law, but also evocative of an actual place with civic and spiritual significance – a place associated with real Italian Jews and not only faceless biblical ones. This presents a compelling contradiction. One could infer an anti-Jewish impulse in Bellini associating – or implicating, rather – a living Jewish community with Christ's execution. This would indeed be consistent with cultural attitudes of the time. But, on the other hand, one could also argue that if the painting's central message is the obsolescence of Judaism under Christianity, that message is somewhat undermined by the reference to Ancona's Jewish cemetery, a site that in its very existence testifies to the enduring presence of a thriving Jewish tradition.⁵⁰ Furthermore, surrounding Christ with Hebrew headstones serves as a poignant if uneasy reminder that Christ himself was a Jew. Crucial here, is that the painting places the viewer in the Jewish cemetery with Christ – in Ancona's Campo degli Ebrei looking up at San Ciriaco. The question then becomes: does the painting present a straightforward supersessionist message geared exclusively towards Christian viewers, a theological argument for Jewish conversion that was meant to appeal to Jews and Christians alike, or a somewhat radical case for the legitimacy of Jews within a Christian society? Indeed, in its richness, variety, and compositional complexity, Bellini's imagery accommodates all three possibilities at once. The painting's meaning could vary depending on the viewer's religious affiliation and experiences in the physical environment.

Focusing on Bellini's perspective, one might reasonably argue that in his effort to articulate the knotty concept of the Eucharist (i.e. transubstantiation) and relate it to

⁵⁰ Interestingly, many Jewish artists during World War II, including Marc Chagall and William Zorach, produced images of Christ as a response to the Holocaust. Rembrandt van Rijn's depictions of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries offer another fruitful point of comparison, as they embody a certain enigmatic ambiguity about the place of Jews in a Christian world.

contemporary politics of conversion, all through metaphors of agriculture and commerce, he likely anticipated a diverse audience, some of whom would have needed or appreciated this accessible metaphor as a touchstone into the painting. By celebrating life where death should be and by presenting the landscape from a Jewish perspective (literally, from the position of the cemetery looking up), Bellini represents an environment that, at the very least, is not explicitly antagonistic towards Jews and, at the very most, reflects their land, language, and livelihood as a legitimate and integral part of the Italian Adriatic landscape.⁵¹ Bellini's compositional choices and environmental references thus implore the viewer to consider the painting's imagery as an active system in which they participate, and not simply a set of disembodied symbols to be read from afar. Regardless of his intention, however, the painting presents modern interlocuters with a rich historical resource for understanding the physical environment and cultural communities of the Renaissance Adriatic. Harvesting that bounty involves challenging our assumptions about the function of landscape in Italian Renaissance devotional paintings and embracing the uncertainty that comes with speculative analysis.

Conclusion

In closing, I want us to consider why the traditional iconographic reading of the *Niccolini*Crucifixion makes it easier to map Christian symbolism onto Hebrew headstones – the markers

⁵¹ This would not be a casual gesture in the context of late fifteenth-century Adriatic Italy where church leaders avidly wrote and disseminated texts like *Consilia contra Iudeos foenerantes* (Vicenza: 1474, reprinted in 1489). Nor is it common across Bellini's oeuvre. Paul H. Kaplan, for instance, has noted explicitly anti-Jewish sentiments in Bellini's 1515 painting the *Drunkenness of Noah*. Paul H. Kaplan, "Old Testament Heroes in Venetian High Renaissance Art," in *Beyond the Yellow Badge: Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism in Medieval and Early Modern Visual Culture* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 277-303.

of Jewish bodies – than to imagine the real Jewish bodies in the world the painting depicts. Are different approaches necessary to historicize the presence of Jews in Christian lands? If so, what might those look like? Grappling with these questions, as I have throughout this chapter, opens onto a broader set of concerns about how the discipline of art history prioritizes its subjects and chooses which questions drive their interpretations.

It is not controversial to state that western art history perpetuates a Eurocentric world view oriented on Christian perspectives. For over four decades, postcolonial theorists from Edward Said to Dipesh Chakrabarty have articulated the ways in which European systems of value have dominated cultural and intellectual discourse on a global scale.⁵² A significant manifestation of Eurocentrism in the field of art history is, as artist Aja M. Sherrard aptly puts it, the "problem of singularity: the belief in a single canon, a single timeline, or a single hegemonic center."53 Much is lost in that act of singling out. In the case of the *Niccolini Crucifixion* the desire to read the painting primarily as a symbolic landscape derivative of Northern art decontextualizes the pictorial landscape from its real-world referents, reducing its capacious, materially grounded imagery to abstract symbol and metaphor. This overlooks an entire spectrum of historical realities, erasing some of the places and people essential to understanding the many ways this painting might have made meaning in its own time. This is not to criticize analyses of Bellini's painting that privilege a Christian perspective (this makes obvious sense), but to point out that in establishing this as the default perspective and not pursuing others, we participate in the systemic and often harmful ways that the field of art history determines which

⁵² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York City: Pantheon Books, 1978); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Through and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁵³ Aja M. Sherrard, "The Practice of Cartography: Imagining World Art Studies After Eurocentrism" (MA thesis: University of Montana, 2017).

historical experiences come to light and which remain obscured.⁵⁴ As exemplified by the Ghirlandaio restoration presented in the chapter's beginning, the effects of this system radiate beyond the academy, into the museum, and even into our very objects of study. The task at hand, then, is to find ways of generating histories of Christian art without adopting Eurocentric, Christian perspectives as the default subject-position. It has been the goal of this chapter to model one possible way forward: an iconographic approach drawn from multi-faith perspectives and grounded in the physical environment. Such an approach serves to broaden our understandings of the range of experiences and knowledge Renaissance individuals brought to a work of art, as well as the variety of individuals that might have encountered it. The next chapter will extend this approach to examine the role of gender within interpretive frameworks of identity, ecology, and place.

here is Ruth Frankenberg's definition of whiteness as "a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society [...] a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed." Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1. This question of the "default" is fundamental to critical race theory and sociology. For a summary of this discourse, see Teresa J. Guess, "The Social Construction of Whiteness: Racism by Intent, Racism by Consequence," *Critical Sociology* 32:4 (July 2006), 649-673. For the foundational text on intersectionality, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43:6 (July 1991), 1241-1299.

CHAPTER THREE:

Women in Landscapes: Property, Patriarchy, and Piero della Francesca

Summary

The last chapter considered the relationship between landscape and religion as visualized

in fifteenth-century Adriatic painting, showing how iconographic methods that integrate multi-

faith perspectives and epistemologies of the physical environment can also excavate historical

experiences that have long been overlooked. Turning attention towards questions of landscape

and portraiture, this chapter continues to analyze pictorial landscape in relation to power,

politics, and social relations, but it places a particular emphasis on questions of gender. Through

a new reading of Piero della Francesca's Double Portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino

(Figure 3.1), it shows how, during the Renaissance, concepts of landscape and gender functioned

as intertwined social constructs grounded in patriarchal systems of power. Applying this

analytical framework to Piero's double portrait, this chapter uncovers new dimensions of Battista

Sforza's biography, situates her within her social and environmental contexts, and ultimately

exposes the patriarchal forces that dictated the terms of her appearance in life, in art, and in

history.

Introduction

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Two painted panels, framed and hinged, form Piero della Francesca's *Double Portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino*. Today, it stands splayed open and encased in the center of a gallery in the Galleria degli Uffizi two hundred miles away from its original home in the Palazzo Ducale of Urbino. On its front panels, two profile figures face one another across the central hinge. At the viewer's left is the pale beauty of Battista Sforza [1446-1472], Countess of Urbino (she died before her husband received the title of Duke). To the right is her much older husband Federico da Montefeltro [1422-1482], identifiable by his distinctive broken nose and red *condottiere*'s hat. On the back of each panel, avatars of Battista and Federico ride in chariots driven by, for her, personifications of feminine virtues, and, for him, the cardinal virtues with a winged victory. Latin inscriptions below each Triumph praise the sitters in a humanist fashion. Suffusing both panels is a vast, continuous landscape that permeates from recto to verso.

Aside from its uncanny resemblance to Urbino's countryside (Figure 3.2), Piero's environmental imagery here is remarkable for two principal reasons: first, because the fifteenth-century double portrait, a short-lived but significant genre in Italian art, usually represented its subjects indoors;⁴ and second, because it was exceedingly rare in Italian art of this time to see an

¹ Federico only gained the title of Duke in 1474, two years after Battista died.

² Hers are: Hope, Time, Charity, and Faith. His: Justice, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude

³ "She who observed restraint in prosperity, honored by the praise of her great husband's deeds, now flies on the lips of all men." // "Illustrious he is born along in glorious triumph, the eternal fame of his virtues celebrates him as the equal of the greatest leaders, and fitting holder of the scepter." Translations from Margaret Ann Zaho, Imago Triumphalis: *The Function and Significance of Triumphal Imagery for Italian Renaissance Rulers* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 90-91.

⁴ The Renaissance profile portrait was popular among Florentine aristocrats and Northern/central Italian courts during the second half of the fifteenth century. This profile format was most common for portraits of women, but some men chose to be represented this way as it harkened back to ancient Roman imperial portraiture on medals and coins. Rare are double portraits of married couples in profile, and even rarer are double portraits of them depicted outdoors. For more on this, see Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," *History Workshop* 25 (Spring, 1988): 4-30.

extensive, unified landscape across multiple panels. What is more is that Piero's landscape not only continues *across* two panels (they share the same horizon line) but also *through* them: specific environmental features on the front, such as roads and bodies of water, continue onto the back. Air and sky dissolve this opaque wooden object as the viewer walks around it, transforming it into a kind of window. How do these intricate painted landscapes function within the genre of portraiture? What exactly do they portray?

Landscape and the Italian Double Portrait

Over the course of the fifteenth century, across devotional paintings and portraits, Italian painters were exploring the wide range of spatial and symbolic devices through which landscape could individualize commissions and enrich their interpretive complexity. As discussed in the previous chapter, the circulation of Northern paintings was an important catalyst of this artistic development. While the specific typology of Piero's painting – a double portrait with a landscape background – derived from Northern models such as Hans Memling's 1470 diptych of an elderly couple (Figure 3.3), Italian painters quickly pushed this format into new, experimental territory.

Filippo Lippi's c. 1440 *Portrait of a Couple at a Casement* (Figure 3.4) is believed to be the first Italian double portrait, as well as the first Italian portrait set before a landscape.⁵ In it, Lippi manipulates the composition's spatial barriers of windows and walls to cultivate visual metaphors for marital relations. Condensing the double portrait into a single pictorial space, he

⁵ Keith Christiansen makes this claim in the exhibition catalogue *From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master*, ed. Keith Christiansen (Milan and New York: Pinacoteca di Brera and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 150.

presents the male sitter as somewhat of an intruder to the woman's domestic realm. Typical of the genre, Lippi enhances the portrait's specificity and narrative potential by including a landscape seen through an open window.

In only a few square inches of panel, Lippi portrays a healthy urban environment replete with several terracotta-roofed buildings with their own plots of land, clean wide streets lined with planted trees, and a fresh-water source running into the city down from the distant hills. Manipulating aerial perspective, he presents this environment as if seen from a tower not unlike the one visible in the distance just below the female sitter's lips. This suggestion of elevation renders the man's appearance at the window ever more conspicuous, disrupting any consistent pictorial logic of figure/ground. Between the possibly floating man leering through the window, the extravagant woman looking past him, and the perspectival landscape that opens up behind her, the painting seems to present three distinct spatio-temporal worlds in mysterious co-existence. It is left to the viewer to interpret how these worlds relate.

Another example of the Italian double portrait genre that is even more closely related to Piero's can be seen in Ercole da Roberti's portraits of Giovanni Bentivoglio and Ginevra Sforza (Battista's half-sister) at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. (Figure 3.5). Here, the couple faces one another across two panels and, where one might expect to see a window, a curtain opens up instead, revealing a narrow band of topographically complex landscape on each panel. Divided into four horizontal registers connected by a series of rudimentary bridges and architectural thresholds, the two slivers of landscape culminate in a distant cityscape that evokes Giovanni's native Bologna as well as recalling the representations of Jerusalem commonly seen

in paintings of the Crucifixion.⁶ It is within the context of this burgeoning and experimental genre that Piero, likely in conversation with his patron and their advisors, made the decision to immortalize Battista and Federico as two profile figures before an open landscape. In doing so, he created a composition quite unlike anything that anyone had ever seen.

Differently from the aforementioned portraits by Memling, Lippi, or Ercole, Piero's diptych represents its sitters before a highly particularized outdoor environment with no hint of an interior space to ground them. There is no window, balustrade, or curtain – just two people facing one another in the endless outdoors. The illusion of atmospheric vastness this creates is indeed striking; and it would have been even more so in the painting's original context before the addition of a large, gilded frame in the nineteenth century. To borrow Martin Warnke's words, "[a] portrait had never before been set against a landscape with such immediacy."

At first glance, this continuous, pure landscape gives the effect of neutralizing the pictorial environment, rendering its two subjects as mirror-images of one another, as equals. For this reason, and because Battista occupies the privileged right side of the diptych (a place usually reserved for men), Piero's double portrait is often held up as an example of the power and status that well-educated, noblewomen of this time were able to sometimes achieve – a testament to the egalitarian ideals of Renaissance humanism. While not exactly a misrepresentation (indeed, Battista was celebrated for her intellect and leadership) this reading conceals the extent to which

⁶ Giovanni Bentivoglio was lord of Bologna from 1462 to 1508 and Paola Tinagli suggests that the background landscape depicts Bologna. Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 60.

⁷ Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 258.

⁸ Martin Warnke, "Individuality as Argument: Piero della Francesca's Portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino," in *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, eds. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 94.

the patriarchal systems endemic to Renaissance society asserted disproportionate control on women's behavior, mobility, and appearance, therefore making it impossible for women and men to experience and possess landscape in the same way, let alone appear before it in a portrait. As Patricia Simons showed in her watershed study on Renaissance portraits of women, the image of a woman – whether seen in a frame, through a window, or on the street – was defined by patriarchal anxieties surrounding modesty, luxury, and visibility. Contextualized within this social environment, Piero's choice to represent both sitters entirely outdoors is indeed remarkable and bears further scrutiny with attention to the ways that discourses of landscape, gender, and power intersected in Renaissance culture.

This chapter aims to present a new interpretation of Piero's double portrait by interrogating the ways that Battista's gender is constricted and constructed through the visual vocabulary of landscape. Part One – "Battista's Life" – begins by critically reassessing her archive in order to present a more authentic account of her experiences, and to show how such sources have been exploited to uphold modern fantasies about the moral virtues of Renaissance humanism. Applying these insights to an analysis of the painting, Part Two – "Battista's Landscape" – argues that Piero's egalitarian aesthetic masks the unequal gendered dynamics that are inscribed throughout the painting. It analyzes the portrait's painted landscapes as products of

⁹ "Era Battista, oltra le altre nobilissime qualita sue, ornate di scienze, e di lettere assai più che mediocremente, e perciò sopra modo amata, stimata, ed accarezzata dal Duca di Milano suo Zio: La medesima fu anche diligentissima nella cura delle cose domestiche, e nella educazione de' figliuoli, fu anche intendentissima di tutte quelle cose femminili, che s'aspettano a donna ben nata, e buona Madre di famiglia. Fu eziandio vigilantissima nel governo dello Stato, come ella fece conoscere nella lunga assenza del Marito." Bernardo Baldi, *Vita e Fatti di Federigo da Montefeltro* (1617) (Rome: Per Alessandro Ceracchi, 1824), 230.

¹⁰ See footnote 4. For another relevant study that is in dialogue with Simons's essay, see Chapter Two of Adrian Randolph's *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Fifteenth-Century Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014).

the political alliance forged through Federico and Battista's marriage; and argues that, within this dynastic context, both landscape and the female body are presented as topographies of territorial possession. 11 Part Three – "Battista's Power" – situates this reading within the intersecting discourses of gender, luxury, and virtue, ultimately arguing that the portrait constructs its sitters' identities in opposition to one another. Characterizing Battista's legacy as a mere function of Federico's glory, Piero's portrait participates in a broader campaign to undermine the brilliance and complexity of a woman who risked being seen as too powerful.

Part One: Battista's Life

Piero's double portrait is meticulously calibrated to achieve stylistic and compositional equilibrium across both sides. The continuous landscape sutures the two panels together and Battista mirrors her husband by facing him head on in strict profile and equal stature. Like two sides of the same coin, their gazes align but do not meet: they share an environment but occupy their own distinct worlds. In this aesthetic of mirroring and dualism, Piero's portrait gives pictorial form to the egalitarian ideals that abound in the written record of the couple's life, and that were often expressed through visual metaphor.

From the moment Battista died, a mythology about her life – and particularly her marriage – began to emerge. It did so within the mutually reinforcing realms of visual and literary culture, both of which emphasized, and surely overemphasized, the couple's intrinsic

¹¹ In thinking through some of these issues, I have been aided by Christopher Chitty's work on sexual hegemony which, in part, seeks to historicize early modern sexuality – and particularly homosexuality – as a history of property. Christopher Chitty, Sexual Hegemonv: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System, ed. Max Fox (Durham and London: Duke University Press: 2020), viii.

connection and equal love of one another. In Battista's funeral oration, for example, the Bishop Giannantonio Campano described Battista and Federico as twins ("gemelli"), a sentiment echoed by court poet Porcellio Pandone's in using the iconic double towers ("toroncini") of the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino as a metaphor for the couple. 12 These themes of dualism persist in the very syntax of contemporary chronicles which often use a "he to her and she to him" construction ("et lui ella similemente") to describe the couple's feelings for one another. 13 In his 1617 biography of Federico, the Bolognese humanist Bernardino Baldi would canonize the dualistic portrayal of the ruling couple in calling them "two souls in one body" ("due anime in una carne"), an epithet that continues to be cited ad nauseam. 14

It is true that in terms of civic and social responsibilities, Battista and Federico's marriage was more equal than most. Federico entrusted Battista with state affairs when he was away at war, and it is even possible that she orchestrated the 1462 defense of the fortress town of Mondavio against Sigismondo Malatesta's army. However, because of these facts, and because Federico openly grieved his wife's death and never remarried, Piero's diptych has been used to build up Battista and Federico into a kind of proto-feminist "power couple." For example,

^{12&}quot;stant geminae in coelum turres, quibus aureus orbis,/ Summa tenens, terras sole irridiante refulgent" // "si stagliano contro il cielo le due torri gemelli e il globo d'oro, occupandone le cime, risplende del sole che illumine le terre." Translated in Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, *Battista Sforza Montefeltro: una "principessa" nel rinascimento Italiano* (Urbino: Edizione Quattroventi, 1993), 123.

¹³ "Lei amò sempre, cum augumento de amore et fede, infinitamente il marito; et lui ella similmente, per la excellentia de tanta donna et per l'ardentissimo zelo de l'honestate." Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, "27. De Baptista Sforza duchessa de Urbino," in *Gynevra della clare donne* (1483), eds. Corrado Ricci and A. Bacchi Della Lega (Bologna: Romagnoli-Dall'Acqua, 1888).

¹⁴ Bernardo Baldi, *Vita e Fatti di Federigo da Montefeltro*, 229

¹⁵ This is cited in *Cronaca di Ser Guerriero da Gubbio*, ed. G. Mazzatinti, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 21:4 (Citta di Castello: S. Lapi, 1902), 69.

¹⁶ For a reference to Federico's grief, see Giovanni Gatti's 1472 condolence letter regarding Battista's death where he describes Federico's appearance as: "prolissa barba, oculis

historian Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti has suggested the diptych reflects Federico's desire to capture his and his wife's resemblances "with equal dignity" ("con pari dignità")¹⁷ and Marilyn Aronberg Lavin writes "No more devoted memorial could have been created for a proud, sad man who was openly committed to the memory of a partner with whom he shared an equal measure of love and respect." These readings rely heavily on the portrait's egalitarian aesthetic and play into the mythology that humanistic pursuits enabled women to transcend patriarchal oppression. However, the historical record, as well as centuries of feminist scholarship, have shown that this simply was not the case. ¹⁹ Given this discrepancy, it bears on us to consider where the modern trope of Renaissance gender equality came from, how it developed, and why.

Like so many problematic myths of western art, the modern narrative of Renaissance gender equality can be more or less traced back to Jacob Burckhardt's 1860 *The Civilization of the Renaissance*. The chapter "Equality of Men and Women" – found in Part Five of the book between chapters on "Music" and "Domestic Life" – opens with the following assertion: "To understand the higher forms of social intercourse at this period, we must keep before our minds the fact that women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men." As if this is not bold

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lacrimis suffusis, veste lugubri indutum." Adolfo Cinquini (ed.), "Spigolature da codici manoscritti del secolo XV. Il codice Vaticano Urb. lat. 1193," in *Classici e neolatini* II (Torino: Tip. Allasia, 1906).

¹⁷ Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, "Per una storia di Battista Sforza," in *Piero e Urbino: Piero e I corti Rinascimentali* (Urbino: Marsilio, 1992), 146.

¹⁸ Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca*, 265.

¹⁹ A definitive text in this discourse is Joan Kelly-Gadol's, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). For a thoughtful response that expands and complicates Kelly-Gadol's argument, see Theresa Coletti, "Did Women Have a Renaissance: A Medievalist Reads Joan Kelly and Aemilia Lanyer," in *Early Modern Women: An interdisciplinary journal* 8 (Fall 2013): 249-259.

²⁰ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, translated by S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Group, 1990). For more on its disciplinary impact over the course of the twentieth century, see Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?"

enough of a statement, he goes on to emphatically declare that "there was no question of 'women's rights' or female emancipation, simply because the thing itself was a matter of course." Burckhardt's confident declaration of gender equality raises eyebrows for several reasons, not least because there is an overwhelming amount of historical evidence that speaks to the contrary, some of which he even presents himself (though he does so through the guise of moral critique). He brings up Ariosto's satires, for example, only to note how they, "treat women as a dangerous grown-up child, whom a man must learn how to manage" and Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti* which, according to Burckhardt, unfairly characterize women as "an unhappy class." While it is admirable that he correctly identifies these male authors as bigoted (going so far as to label Aretino as "depraved"), in characterizing them as outliers he minimizes the systemic and overwhelming force of patriarchy that defined Renaissance culture and oppressed Renaissance women from the moment they were born to the day they died.

In many ways, Burckhardt's understanding of Renaissance gender dynamics aligns with the attitudes of Renaissance humanists who from one side of their mouth celebrated the intellectual achievements of women and from the other side aggressively dictated the terms of their wives' and daughters' existences. This can be clearly seen in Leon Battista Alberti's 1432 treatise *On the Family*, which portrays the ideal wife as "shapely, literary, adept in music, geometry, and philosophy" and, at the same time, wholly dedicated to domestic duties including (but not limited to) child-rearing, managing the home, and maintaining the family's reputation in the public eye.²⁴ Being the perfect balance of worldly and domestic was just one of the many

²¹ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 251.

²² Ibid, 250.

²³ Ibid, 253.

²⁴ Leon Battista Alberti, *Della Famiglia*, (Milan: Sonzogno, 1895). Alberti describes the ideal wife as Cornelia, the daughter of Metellus Scipione: "formosa, litterata, perita in musica,

dualities women were expected to accommodate and embody. In a single line of poetry composed for Battista's funeral, for example, she is described as being "beautiful, grave, easy, cheerful, modest, and pious" all at once.²⁵

While it is true and significant that some Renaissance women were able to garner new levels of education, power, and admiration (respect seems an overreach) within this patriarchal social structure, we do well to remember that these were small affordances reserved for only the most privileged of women. Furthermore, even this elite class of women could hardly be seen to stand on "equal footing" with their male counterparts. Indeed, when they came close, their power and intellectual fortitude was characterized as an approximation of masculinity rather than a feature of womanhood. This persists in Burckhardt's nineteenth-century account as well. Take for example his praise of Battista Sforza's granddaughter, the poet Vittoria Colonna.

[her poems] are so precise and definite in their character, and so far removed from the tender twilight of sentiment, and from all the dilettantism which we commonly find in the poetry of women, that we should not hesitate to attribute them to male authors, if we had not clear evidence to prove the contrary.

Here, Burckhardt holds up Colonna as the exemplar of female excellence, yet he praises her poetry exclusively in terms of its ability to conceal its author's gender. Unsurprisingly, only a few lines later he states outright that the highest praise a Renaissance woman could wish to receive was that she "had the mind and courage of men." From the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, gender equality seems to be understood as a woman's ability to be praised by men and described in terms of them.

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geometria, e filosofia," 132. He discusses feminine duties of child-rearing and household management throughout the text, but specific examples can be seen on pages 135 and 248.

²⁵ "bella, gravis, facilis, laeta, pudica, pia." Bib. Vaticanus, *Codex Urbinate-latino*, n. 373, cit., f. 119v.

²⁶ Ibid, 251.

From a historiographic standpoint, it is interesting that Burckhardt's patriarchal characterizations (of which his masculinization of Colonna is merely one example) consistently undermine his broader argument that, in the Renaissance, "women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men." This begs the question: why did he put forth such a weak argument in the first place, especially during a time when patriarchy was a generally accepted societal model?

An answer might be found in the book's broader intellectual project of locating the origins of humanistic modernity in Italian Renaissance civilization. Indeed, the reality of blatant, structural sexism in the Renaissance frustrates this teleology and presents an inconvenient contradiction to the virtuous ideologies of universality and egalitarian individualism that lie at its core. Contextualized this way then, Burckhardt's inclusion of gender equality as a Renaissance ideal is at best an aspirational, good-faith fantasy, and, at worst, a methodological silencing of women's voices in order to perpetuate the mythology of a benevolent patriarchal society, one in which the right kind of woman (wealthy, educated, and accomplished in masculine pursuits) could achieve "perfectly equal footing with men," but, of course, never stand on her own.

Given the patriarchal dynamics endemic to not only Renaissance womanhood, but also in the way it has been written about and understood over time, Battista's life begs analysis from a feminist perspective and through the dual lenses of cultural expectation and lived reality. Such a feminist critique of the documents surrounding Battista's childhood, marriage, motherhood, and death (the periods of her life that are best represented in the archival record) will open up new ways of understanding the politics of her representation in Piero's portrait.²⁷

²⁷ For more on the historiography of Battista, see Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, *Battista Sforza Montefeltro: una "principessa" nel rinascimento Italiano*. Mazzanti contests the "sposavittima-bambina" characterization of Battista that dominates nineteenth-century accounts such as Filippo Ugolini's *History of the Counts of Urbino*, 2 Vols. (Florence: 1859). Consistent with the feminist discourse of the 1980s-90s, Mazzanti focuses on Battista's agency rather than critiquing

Childhood

In order to generate a dimensional understanding of Battista's lived experience, it is necessary to first confront some uncomfortable facts about her life that are often minimized in both historical and modern accounts, if not altogether ignored. Most important among them is that Battista was thirteen²⁸ when her uncle negotiated her marriage to the thirty-seven-year-old Federico, and the primary expectation of their marriage was that she would produce him a male heir.²⁹ While none of this is particularly aberrant for the time, and, indeed, the wedding did not take place until Battista was fourteen (an adult by Renaissance standards), this union nevertheless raised eyebrows.³⁰

her oppressors. The present study seeks a balance between these dynamics of agency and oppression.

²⁸ Battista's exact birthdate is not documented, but there is good reason to believe she was born in January of 1446. This is because the death notice for her mother, Costanza Varano, notes that she had an eighteen-month-old daughter at the time of her death. While the day of her death is unknown, the cause was either childbirth or complications from childbirth that resulted from delivering her son, Costanzo Sforza, on 5 July 1447. Co. Bib. Apostolica Vaticano, *Codice urbinate-latino* n. 904, *Memorie di diversi signori e luoghi dello stato, et altre d'Italia dal 1408 fino al 1579*, f. 11 r.

Without passing moral judgement or villainizing Federico, I do think it is important to re-sensitize ourselves to the implications of such marriage practices rather than explaining them away as "of a different time." This is because abusers today invoke such historical precedents to justify and normalize their actions. In 2018, the notorious rapist and sex trafficker, Jeffrey Epstein, told New York Times reporter James B. Stewart (on background) that "criminalizing sex with teenage girls was a cultural aberration and that at times in history it was perfectly acceptable." James B. Stewart, "The Day Jeffrey Epstein Told Me He Had Dirt on Powerful People," *The New York Times* (August 12, 2019); In her article for *The Atlantic*, Megan Garber delves into this comment, showing how it symbolizes a broader culture of viewing rules of consent as "little more than prudishly narrow accidents of history." Megan Garber, "The Myth of the 'Underage Woman': One more shameful truth Jeffrey Epstein symbolized: a culture that continues to write girls out of its stories," *The Atlantic* (August 15, 2019).

³⁰ Here, I ascribe to the legal designations as indicated in notarial documents from Urbino during this time. They frequently describe young women as "adultus maior xiiii Annis [et] minor

Accounts from around the time Battista became engaged to Federico reflect a preoccupation with justifying the couple's age difference through demonstrations (and surely exaggerations) of the young girl's physical and mental maturity.³¹ In a 1458 letter to Bianca Maria Visconti, Battista's aunt who was considered to be her *de facto* mother, the family doctor wrote:

For her age, Battista appears as a large woman, much taller than the normal height. Her clothing, manners, gestures, manners, and poise [...] She has so much prudence that in terms of age she is a girl but in terms of costume and life she is like a woman of perfect age (donna de perfecta etade).³²

Here, the word "perfecta" translates to the Latin participle for "*perficio, perficere*," which means to finish or complete, in this case, with regards to Battista's womanly development.³³ Battista's supposed physical maturity at a young age was a point of obsession among men throughout her lifetime and is even referred to in her funeral oration. Narrating the period of her life that preceded her marriage (that is, between the ages of ten and thirteen), the orator describes Battista as "nearly grown," and notes that by this moment in her life she had already "taken stock of the

xxv." Examples of this can be seen in the following three documents: Archivio di Stato di Pesaro-Urbino (AsPU), Sezione Urbino, *Fondo Notarile*. Notaio Simone Vanni, no. 13 (1480-1491), f. 100; AsPU, Sezione Urbino, *Fondo Notarile*. Notaio Nicola...Cola, no. 42, f. 46a; Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), *Fondo Urbinate*, Classe Prima, Filza XI, f. 17 (a parchment insert discussing the transfer of holdings after Guidobaldo Montefeltro's death in 1508).

³¹ Following Mediterranean models, Italian Renaissance marriages were characterized by a significant age difference between husband and wife with women being, on average, between eight and fifteen years younger than their husbands. Even though the largest age gaps were found among the noble classes, Federico being twenty-three years Battista's senior was noteworthy. For more on this, see the exhibition catalogue for *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Andrea Jane Bayer and Beverly Louise Brown (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 10.

³² "La Baptista secondo la sua età mostra farse grande donna, molto più della communa statura. Li costume, li modi, li gesti, le maynere, le continentie, [...] Ma e' tanta la sua prudentia che, quantunque la sua etade sia puerile, li costume et la vita sonno come de donna de perfecta etade." Transcribed in Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, *Battista Sforza Montefeltro: una* "principessa" nel rinascimento Italiano, 36.

Thanks to Rebecca Zorach for assistance with this translation.

fact that she was born a woman (*nata donna*), [and] learned with great diligence all of the things a grave and honest lady must know."³⁴ His use of the word "*donna*" (woman) rather than "*femina*" (female) to describe the young Battista seems to suggest yet another subtle reference to Battista's physical development beyond her years.

Marriage

It is hard to imagine that there is much truth to these descriptions of the young Battista. Indeed, her wedding was postponed several months most likely because she had not yet started menstruating; and this would have been two years after the doctor likened her to a "donna di perfecta etade." Reading between the lines of these sources, then, it becomes clear that the people involved with setting up this marriage were trying to manage its bad optics from the start. Federico must have been desperate. A fertile, high-born wife could ensure his legacy through male heirs; and quite frankly, age, beauty, and heredity were not on his side. Born a bastard, his legitimacy was constantly questioned, and in terms of looks, he had suffered injuries in a joust

³⁴ "[...] gia alquanto cresciuta, rendendosi conto d'esser nata donna, tutte le cose che a grave et honest signora s'appartenevano di sapere da lei furono con molta diligentia imparate." Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana di Firenze, Codice Ashburnam 968, A. Campano, *Funebris oratio pro Baptista Sfortia Urbini Comitissa* (1483 copy by Federico Veterani for Ottaviano degli Ubaldini), ff. 287v-310v (296v).

³⁵ For the reason behind the postponement, see: Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, *Battista Sforza Montefeltro: una "principessa" nel rinascimento Italiano*, 70, note 55.

³⁶ Federico had two sons with his first wife, Gentile Brancaleoni, but both were not deemed legitimate for the purposes of political succession. The first son, Buonconte, died young of the plague, and the second, Antonio, served in the military for King Alfonso V of Aragon. Cecil H. Clough, "Federico da Montefeltro and the Kings of Naples: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Survival," *Renaissance Studies* 6:2 (June 1992): 113-172.

that left his face badly disfigured.³⁷ In 1459, Battista's uncle, Francesco Sforza, the Duke of Milan, began to broker the marriage between his niece and Federico as part of a strategic alliance between the Duchies of Urbino and Milan.³⁸ The couple was officially engaged in November of 1459 after receiving Papal approval which was necessary due to consanguination laws (Federico's aunt was Battista's great grandmother), yet when the wedding date kept getting postponed, Federico began to get frustrated.³⁹ His letters during this period express concern that he would have to leave for battle soon and that there would be further delays due to Advent and Easter. Federico was eager to move forward with the contract – perhaps out of hopes of impregnating Battista before he left town – and he seems to have threatened Francesco with abandoning the deal altogether if things were not arranged quickly.⁴⁰ His threats must have worked, because the wedding took place two weeks after his last letter, on the eighth of February 1460. Battista had just turned fourteen.

³⁷ Federico's paternity was initially recorded as "unknown," but in 1424, Pope Martin V officially recognized him as a legitimate son of Guidantonio, first Duke of Urbino. Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Fondo Urbinate*, Cl. I, Div. B, Filza 8, f. 2.

³⁸ For more on the institution of marriage in Italian Renaissance culture, see: *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Andrea Bayer and Beverly Louise Brown; Thomas Kuehn, *Family and Gender in Renaissance Italy 1300-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Julius Kirshner, *Marriage, Dowry, and Citizenship in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); and T. Dean and K. Lowe (eds.), *Marriage in Italy 1300-1650* (Cambridge, 1998).

³⁹ The *nozze* ceremony took place in November, the wedding was on 8 February 1460, and the marriage was consummated two days later. Bernardo Baldi, *Vita e Fatti di Federigo da Montefeltro*, 69.

⁴⁰ Letter from Alessandro Sforza to Federico da Montefeltro regarding the wedding. January 23, 1460: "[...] la qualcosa molto adgrava ad esso Signor Messer Federico, perché gli poteria sequire che gli bisognaria cavalchare o per altro, et s'el non se trovasse havere la Baptista a casa seria troppo mal contento et gli parerià non doverla havere mai più. Senza che lui dice che gli ne seque mille altri inconvenienti." Transcribed in Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, *Battista Sforza Montefeltro: una "principessa" nel rinascimento Italiano*, 142.

Motherhood

Shortly after the wedding, Battista left her sea-side home of Pesaro and headed out for her husband's court in Urbino. Despite the fact that Federico was absent for most of the first two years of their marriage, he got her pregnant almost immediately and continued to do so "one after the other" ("I'una dietro l'altra"). Hattista gave birth to nine daughters in a row, and the colossal pressure to produce a male heir must have increased exponentially with each one. Battista's fifteenth-century chronicler Sabadino degli Arienti relates that the young Countess prayed intensely for a son; and Federico confirms as much in a letter to his friend Camillo dei Barzi on the occasion of Camillo's son's birth. "Of the son you have just acquired," he writes, "I am as pleased and content as possible, as is my wife, however she is also a bit envious [...] and she has this envy for everyone that has had sons." Without her own words, it is impossible to know whether Battista's prayers for a son came from a place of desire, envy, or fear; or some combination of all three. In any event, her prayers were answered when, on January 17th of 1472, she gave birth to her first son – Guidobaldo. He would also be her last, as she died from complications resulting from the delivery. She was twenty-six years old.

⁴¹ The "una dietro l'altra" phrasing comes from Giovanni Sabadino Degli Arienti, *Gynevra della clare donne*.

⁴² Three of Battista's children died in infancy. Any miscarriages she may have had are not recorded. Cecil H. Clough, "Daughters and Wives of the Montefeltro: Outstanding Bluestockings of the *Quattrocento*," in *Renaissance Studies* 10:1 (March 1996), 31-55; Cecil H. Clough "Federico da Montefeltro and the Kings of Naples: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Survival," *Renaissance Studies* 6:2 (June 1992), 126-127.

⁴³ "Del figliolo che voi avete acquistato ne ho tanto piacere et content quanto fosse possible et cusi mia moglie, ma un poco è invidiosa che vorria incominzato lei et questa Invidia ha cum tucte le altre che hanno havuto li maschi." Transcribed in Walter Tommasoli, *La vita di Federico da Montefeltro* (Urbino: Argalia, 1995), 214-215.

Death

Battista's primary function in this marriage was to successfully deliver Federico legitimate male heirs, and because she died achieving this goal, her death was mythologized as nothing short of a martyrdom.⁴⁴ That Battista's own mother had died under the same circumstances – delivering the family a male heir – only enriched this narrative. Completed in 1474, Piero's painting almost certainly participates in this posthumous campaign, visualizing the Montefeltro dynasty for their progeny – and especially Guidobaldo – who would never get to know his mother. In the painting, the smooth, egg-like form of Battista's face occludes any discernable physiognomy, and her plaster-like complexion is more of a "bianchezza" (a deathlywhite pallor) than a "candida" (a healthy white glow). For these reasons, scholars generally agree that her likeness was derived from relief sculptures and possibly even her death mask while Federico's, on the other hand, was taken from life. 45 His sanguine, olive-toned skin bears distinctive constellations of moles and wrinkles; and his muscles relax naturally around the eyes and mouth. Battista and Federico are far from "gemelli," they exist in the divergent realms of the dead and the living. Seen this way, Battista does not meet Federico's gaze with active reciprocity, but rather she is objectified by it.⁴⁶

In enumerating the ways patriarchal oppression impacted Battista's life, I do not mean to deny that she had agency in constructing and navigating the terms of her existence; or that she

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⁴⁴ Alberti puts this plainly in *Della Famiglia*, 28: "la prima [cagioni di prendere moglie e'] estendersi in figliuoli."

⁴⁵ These terms come from Firenzuola's lectures on female beauty as recounted by Jacob Burckhardt in the section "Description of the Outward Man," *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 223-24.

⁴⁶ Here, I am thinking about notions of the male gaze as theorized by Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3 (Autumn 1975), 6-18.

found genuine joy and fulfillment in motherhood. The documentary record – both the letters written in her own hand and the biographies, elegies, and chronicles composed by others – paints a clear picture of a truly brilliant, decisive, and beloved person who garnered for herself what was for women in this period an exceptional amount of political power.⁴⁷ In addition to effectively running state affairs in Federico's stead, she instituted the Monte di Pieta di Urbino, a loan-by-credit financing system that remained in use through the nineteenth century to help those experiencing poverty.⁴⁸ She also traveled and met prominent people, even delivering a highly-celebrated oration to Pope Pius II.⁴⁹ She achieved all of this while carrying ten nearly-consecutive pregnancies to term, and raising six healthy daughters. By many measures, she lived a fulfilling and dignified life.

Yet, to confidently claim (as Maria Bonvini Mazzanti does in her 1993 biography), that Battista was "happy in this final period of her short life: she had all she had ever wanted," is a baseless assumption that projects impossible ideals of womanhood onto a historical figure that can no longer speak for herself.⁵⁰ Battista's triumphs should not be held up in isolation,

⁴⁷ The two main sources of Battista's own voice are her correspondences which are conserved in the Archivio di Stato di Milano (ASM), *Fondo Sforzesco*; and Martino Filetico's *Jocundissimae disputazione*, a humanist text in which Filetico, Battista's Greek and Latin instructor, documents their three-day discussion of Cicero's commentary of *Paradoxica*. This discussion would have taken place in the winter of 1462-63. See: Guido Arbizzoni, "Martino Filetico alla corte feltresca: le '*Iocundissimae disputationes*' e l'educazione del principe," in *Citta e Corte nell'Italia di Piero della Francesca*, ed. Ciera Via Claudia (Venezia: Marsilio, 1996), 375-97.

⁴⁸ The archives of the Monte di Pieta are conserved at the AsPU, Sezione Urbino.

⁴⁹ "Et poi se transferitte ad Roma dove fece reverentia a Pio Secundo, pontifice maximo, orando cum tanta flagrantia et eloquentia, che la sua sanctità ne hebbe singular dilecto, et admiratione de la facundia de tanta donna; et in sua comendatione celebrò lei de molta laude, verso quilli che gli erano intorno, dicendo che credea de tale aetate Italia non havesse simile donna de costei." Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, *Gynevra delle clare donne*.

⁵⁰ "Battista e' felice in questo ultimo period della sua breve vita: ha tutto cio' che ha sempre desiderato." Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, "La Politica Culturale di battista Sforza," in

tokenized and celebrated as if they somehow allowed her to transcend the pain of her experience as a woman subjected to the patriarchal mechanism of the Italian noble classes. These, too, are historically significant realities for which we should not allow ourselves to become desensitized. As we will see, these realities shaped Battista's legacy in many crucial ways that bring new meaning to bear on Piero's portrait.

Transitioning from text to image, this next section will argue that the egalitarian aesthetic of Piero's double portrait – just like the narrative of marital harmony that pervades in the written record of Battista's life – has its own kind of agenda: it works to naturalize and neutralize the patriarchal power dynamics that are inscribed within the composition and that manifest most clearly in its landscapes.

Part Two: Battista's Land

It should be said outright that the level of realism conveyed by Piero's landscape remains a contentious issue. Some believe it is pure artistic invention while others claim to have identified nearly every detail in today's Marchigiano landscape. 51 Indeed, there is even an entire tourist industry devoted to showcasing the "veri paesaggi" of Piero della Francesca.⁵² Having

Bartolomeo Corradini (Fra Carnevale) nella cultura urbinate del XV secolo, ed. Bonita Cleri (Urbino: Chiesa di San Cassiano-Castelcavallino, 2002), 59.

⁵¹ Not everyone agrees this is the Marche. For example, Marilyn Aronberg Lavin describes the painted landscape as "more placid and earthy than the stony territory around Urbino, and it looks as if it has been tamed by the benevolent rulers who float above." Piero della Francesca, 258. For a comprehensive summary of the different interpretations of Piero's landscape, see Rosetta Borchia and Olivia Nesci, Il Paesaggio Invisibile: La Scoperta dei Veri Paesaggi di Piero della Francesca (Ancona: Il lavoro editorial, 2013), 55-56.

⁵² The book *Il Paesaggo Invisibile* spawned several touristic and cultural projects in the region, including "I Balconi di Piero della Francesca," which installed informative placards at several of Piero's supposed landscapes throughout the Marche and Arrezzo. The book also

conducted my fair share of "landscape hunting" (*caccia di paesaggi*, as research pair Rosetta Borchia and Olivia Nesci call it) during my field work in Urbino, I feel confident that Piero is not overtly referencing any specific town, monument, or site in this painted landscape. Instead, he is combining a careful observation of nature with a capacious and flexible visual vocabulary in order to create a profound and detailed sense of place that does not rely on cartographic naturalism. This allows him to play with the ambiguity of real and ideal, specific and generic, and naturalism and symbolism, ultimately creating pictorial topographies that demand two things at the same time: to be compared to the local environment as well as contemplated on a symbolic level. This duality is what makes Piero's paintings so enigmatic and layered in meaning.

All this considered, the landscapes that unfurl behind Battista and Federico almost surely represent a panorama of Urbino's countryside, the heartland of the Montefeltro court. During the second half of the fifteenth century, Montefeltro territory – located in the Marca d'Ancona (today called the Marche) – more or less extended from the Apennine mountains to the Adriatic Sea and from the Esimo River up to the Foglia. Traveling along the road from Sansepolcro to Urbino, Piero could not have helped but to marvel at the way the rocky mountainside transforms into blankets of lush, green mounds before breaking off into cliffs on the Adriatic Sea (Figure 3.6). Still today, this region is known for its *dolce colline* and the undulating blue horizon they produce in the eye from a distance.

Piero captures this topography of verdant valleys and rolling hills through a birds-eye perspective and a careful attention to atmosphere, color, and pattern. Looking more closely, a variety of cultivated land parcels blanket the terrain, comprised of hedged plots, rotating fields,

contributed to the Montefeltro Veduti Rinascimentali (MVR) project which offers guided tours of the landscapes seen in Renaissance paintings from Piero's portraits to the Mona Lisa.

and tree groves of all sorts (Figure 3.7). In addition to this agricultural bounty, the landscape also showcases important elements of civic infrastructure like the bastions that jut into the waterways on Federico's side (Figure 3.8); and the wide, paved roads that wind through throughout the landscape, connecting urban centers to the distant countryside. Through such details, Piero portrays Federico and Battista's land holdings as bountiful, secure, and well-connected through the virtues of their *buon governo*. At least that is how these landscapes have been traditionally understood.

Without contesting this reading, I want to suggest that another crucial layer of meaning underlies it. While at first glance, Battista appears to lord over Montefeltro territory as an equal steward of the land, upon closer consideration, however, another message becomes apparent: these lands may belong to her in a sense, but, ultimately, she *and* the lands belong to her husband. Far from a disaffected vignette of the couple's shared territory, Piero's landscape instead presents a carefully constructed visual argument that differentiates between the two sitters, playing down Battista's agency and power over the realm and defining her exclusively in terms of her feminine roles as wife and mother. That the portrait depicts her in death and him in life only further enhances the sitter's unequal agency in the scene.

Political Context

Through Piero's exceptional command of visual world-building, the civic prosperity of Urbino's countryside comes across as natural, timeless, and self-evident. It appears as if it could never be otherwise. In reality, however, this was far from the case. It took decades of effort and

strife for Federico to develop the thriving countryside immortalized in the double portrait.

Crucially, however, he did not do it alone.

Federico became the lord of Urbino in 1444 at the relatively young age of twenty-two. While the region prospered under his leadership, the first two decades of his rule were marked by personal and political turmoil. On the personal front, Federico suffered severe battle wounds six years into his rule and lost his first wife – Gentile Brancaleoni – six years after that. The highborn Gentile had played a crucial role in elevating Federico, the promising but illegitimate *condottiero*, into the ranks of nobility. Her death, and the death of their only legitimate son, Buonconte, in 1458, put Federico's dynastic legacy at grave risk. ⁵³ On the political front, Federico faced near-constant attacks from Sigismondo Malatesta, the lord of nearby Rimini, who openly contested Federico's legitimacy as a ruler and sought to seize his land holdings on more than one occasion. ⁵⁴

In 1460, facing an increasingly unstable political landscape due to Angevin incursions backed in part by Sigismondo, the Duchies of Urbino and Milan solidified an alliance, an important part of which was Federico and Battista's marriage, brokered a year earlier by Battista's uncle, the Duke of Milan.⁵⁵ In Federico's official biography, Baldi roundly states that

⁵³ Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, *Battista Sforza Montefeltro: una "principessa" nel rinascimento Italiano*, 50.

⁵⁴ For more on Sigismondo's and Federico's rivalry, see: Bernardo Baldi, *Vita e Fatti di Federigo da Montefeltro*; Cecil H. Clough, "Federico da Montefeltro and the Kings of Naples: a Study in Fifteenth-Century Survival"; Maria Grazia Pernis and Laurie Schneider Adams, *Federico da Montefeltro and Sigismondo Malatesta: The Eagle and the Elephant* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003).

⁵⁵ A good summary of Federico's long-standing relationship with the Sforza family can be found in Margaret Ann Zaho, Imago Triumphalis: *the Function and Significance of Triumphal Imagery for Italian Renaissance Rulers*, 85. For a broader view of the geo-politics of this time, see Vincent Ilardi, "The Italian League, Francesco Sforza, and Charles VII (1454-1461), *Studies in the Renaissance*, 6 (1959): 129-166.

the Sforzas gave Battista to Federico as "almost a prize" ("quasi in premio") for his aid to the family.⁵⁶ At this tumultuous time in Federico's personal and political life, the marriage to Battista solved the problems of his legitimacy and legacy that emerged with the death of his first wife and also ensured, through strategic alliances, the security of Montefeltro lands.

The prosperity commemorated in Piero's landscapes – cultivated, secure, and accessible – was a direct function of the "political equilibrium" that Battista and Federico's marriage forged, not only through the alliance with Milan but also through Battista's shrewd leadership in Federico's absence. The state of two days after consummating the marriage, Federico set off on an extended military campaign, leaving Battista responsible for maintaining the Duchy's affairs. During that first summer in court, the newlywed fourteen-year-old (who was also newly pregnant) had to deal with multiple threats and acts of aggression from Sigismondo's armies which culminated in a violent skirmish over the contested stronghold Castello Uffogliano. In a series of three letters to her uncle, Battista relates this escalating tension. "Since the departure of my husband," the first letter reads, "it has happened that Sigismondo [...] has invaded towers

⁵⁶ "[...] doversi Battista a Federico quasi in premio del matrimonio," Bernardo Baldi, *Vita e Fatti di Federigo da Montefeltro*, 67-68. Similar language appears in Campano's funeral oration: "hanc clarissimam puellam primo puerperio editam iure illi tamquam premium quoddam deberi conciliatae affinitatis: quasi cum de illorum egisset matrimonio, de suo iam tunc praevidisset." Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti claims that the notion of Battista as a "prize" is a gross misinterpretation because Battista had many male suitors before getting engaged to Federico and was therefore in a position of power to select whichever one of them she preferred (*Battista Sforza Montefeltro: una "principessa" nel rinascimento Italiano*, 47). This claim cannot be substantiated by primary evidence, and it also ignores the fact that Federico was likely always a first pick for the Sforzas. They had worked closely with him for decades and had much to gain by unifying their families.

⁵⁷ Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti notes that the marriage coincided with a period of "politico dell'equilibrio." *Battista Sforza Montefeltro: una "principessa" nel rinascimento Italiano*, 57.

and taken cattle from my husband's men through multiple routes and locations." ⁵⁸ By the second letter, things had gotten significantly worse.

Sigismondo – a threat to my peaceful mode of living, and in the absence of my husband (your noble son and servant), and during a time when there are no soldiers in the countryside, neither ours nor yours – has sent his soldiers to field at one of our Montefeltro castles called Uffogliano, [...] which in recent days was starting to be fortified.⁵⁹

The Montefeltro and Malatesta families both believed they had claim to the strategically located Castello Uffogliano. Therefore, when Battista authorized her men to begin working on it, the Malatesta retaliated violently. When they began terrorizing the locals as well, Battista called on Francesco to de-escalate the situation, which he did, but not without scolding her for authorizing construction on the castle in the first place. In his opinion, it was a contentious site that should have been left alone to keep the peace. Rather than rolling over and accepting the blame for this conflict, the young Battista responded boldly to her uncle. In the third letter of the exchange, she justifies her decision by citing Sigismondo's dishonorable and violent tactics as well as the castle's "ancient jurisdiction and dominion of the House of Montefeltro." Through political diplomacy, tactful communication, and conviction in her beliefs, Battista staved off the first wave of attacks in her husband's absence, sending an important message to Urbino's enemies: the Countess of Urbino was not to be taken advantage of.

⁵⁸ "Da po la partita del mio Signore [...] è seguito ch'el Signor Sigismondo [...] per più et diverse vie et in divresi luochi ha innovato et facto torre bestiame a gli huomini del mio Signore." Letter from Battista Sforza to Francesco Sforza, May 5,1460. ASM, *Fondo Sforzesco*, *Potenze estere*, *Marca*, b.145.

⁵⁹ "El Signor Messer Sigismondo, invido al mio quieto vivere, in absentia del mio Illustrissimo Signore, vostro bono figliolo et servidore, a questo tempo che non è per lo paese gente d'arme nè vostre nè nostre, ha mandate le sue gente a campo ad uno nostro castello de Montefeltro chiamato Uffigliano del quale dubito perché era debole et pur in questi di se comenzava a fortificarlo."ASM, *Fondo Sforzesco, Potenze estere, Marca*, b.145.

⁶⁰ "El castello de Uffigliano de antiqua jurisdictione et dominio de Casa de Montefeltro et del Illustre mio Signore." ASM, *Fondo Sforzesco*, *Potenze estere*, *Marca*, b. 145.

The security of the duchy's countryside through strongholds like Castello Uffogliano was essential to the health of its agricultural landscape and, in turn, its economy. As Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good Government* fresco (analyzed in Chapter One) visualizes, the security of the countryside was ostensibly what enabled citizens to settle and cultivate the land to its full potential. This agricultural and economic effects of this *securitas* are what appear in Piero's painting as well. The regular geometry of the cultivated fields in the painting suggest that farmers were acquiring land parcels through a centralized, and therefore taxable, system. Such bureaucratic initiatives – established decades earlier through land reforms – ensured that the revenue from the rural economy would filter back into communal and civic projects.⁶¹ It was through such initiatives that Federico was able to expand his military, bolster infrastructure, and support public works. These developments made the countryside more secure and accessible, which, in turn, supported the economy.

While Battista, by virtue of her diplomacy and leadership, was a primary cause of Urbino's burgeoning prosperity, she herself had little claim and authority over the very lands she helped to protect, shape, and grow. Like any other political marriage of the time, Battista's and Federico's was essentially a contract in which assets – goods, land, and women – were exchanged between men with the purpose of producing a male heir who would later consolidate and grow the holdings of both families.⁶²

⁶¹ To what extent Federico was associated with these reforms, which were already well-established by the 1470s, remains an open question. For more on this topic see Emilio Sereni, *The History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape*, translated by Burr Litchfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁶² Territorial exchange was central to marriage negotiations. Relevant examples include Federico's first marriage to noblewoman Gentile Brancaleoni in 1437 which resulted in him inheriting twenty castles and the territory of Massa Trabaria (Margaret Ann Zaho, Imago Triumphalis: *the Function and Significance of Triumphal Imagery for Italian Renaissance Rulers*, 84); and the dowry documents related to the marriage of Elizabeth Gonzaga and

Fifteenth-century dowry practices in Central and Northern Italy ensured that the transmission of property in a marriage moved along patriarchal lines.⁶³ To give an example, despite the fact that Battista had six daughters, most, if not all, of her fine jewels (such as those she wears in the portrait) would pass on to her son's wife, her daughter-in-law. Similar rules applied to the inheritance of land. Even in the case of a husband's death, the family land typically went to his children (and, above all, his sons) before his wife.⁶⁴ She, then, had to count on her children to provide for her, or otherwise, actively petition for rights to the land; and such claims were frequently unsuccessful.⁶⁵ The women that did own land during this period almost always did so in the name *of*, or in close connection *to*, male relatives. This dynamic can be seen in the language used by notaries in land-sale affidavits and tax records which consistently refer to women landowners as "wife of" (*uxor/moglie di*), "daughter of" (*filia di*), or "former wife of"

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Guidobaldo da Montefeltro which show that he gave her family several territories and buildings. Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), *Fondo Urbinate*, Cl. I, Div. B, Filza 11, f. 4.

⁶³ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy (Chicago and London: 1985), 214. Most scholarship on early modern marital and property relations focuses on Tuscany. For a study of the Venetian context, see Linda Guzzetti, "Dowries in fourteenth-century Venice," in Renaissance Studies 16.4 (Dec. 2002): 430-473. For an overview of the historiography of marriage in the Italian Renaissance, see, Deborah L. Krohn, "Marriage as a Key to Understanding the Past," in Art and Love in Renaissance Italy, 9-15.

⁶⁴ In Renaissance Venice, widows were entitled to their husband's money and property for only one year after his death. *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, p. 13.

⁶⁵ The question of how and to what extent widows were able to control family wealth after a husband's death remains highly contentious and there is still much work to do in articulating regional differences. Klapisch-Zuber argues that widows were sometimes able to secure financial autonomy, but, by and large, relied on the will of their children who were entitled to the majority of the family's wealth. Scholars Nino Tamassia and Manlio Bellomo argue differently, that widows rarely recovered their dowries in court and therefore were left with little control over family property after the death of a husband. See Giovanni Tamassia, *La famiglia italiana nei secoli decimoquinto e decmosesto* (Milan: Sandron, 1910), 223; and Manlio Bellomo, *La condizione giuridica della donna. Vicende antiche e moderne* (Torino: Eri, 1970), 44.

(*gia moglie*). While the legal technicalities varied case by case, overall, land in fifteenth-century Italy was property exchanged by men, often *through* and in exchange *for* women.

Within this cultural context, Piero's portrait cannot be seen as simply representing a ruling couple lording over shared land. The land did not belong to her in the same way that it belonged to her husband. This was true when they were both alive, and even more so when she predeceased him. The moment she bore Federico a son – and died doing it –, everything that appears to be "hers" in the portrait – from the pearls on her neck to the lands that surround her – passed out of her control and began to move down patrilineal lines. In life and in death, Battista was never an equal stakeholder of Urbino's territorial possessions, but rather an extension of them.

In the painting, Piero visualizes this dynamic, perhaps subconsciously, by analogizing Battista with the landscape, portraying both entities as territories to be surveyed, admired, and possessed. She and the landscape share an earthy palette of yellow ochre, deep green, pale blue, and stony beige while Federico, wearing a vibrant red garment that jumps against the verdant green and icy blue behind him, registers clearly as the painting's vital force: sanguine and alive. Formal rhymes further enmesh Battista's with her surroundings. Note, for instance, the broad hill that begins at her left shoulder and follows the contour of her body, anchoring her to the land as it comes out on the other side and slopes down above her breast. Furthermore, the silvery *cittadella* on its horizon echoes the string of lustrous pearls plunging from her neck (Figure 3.9). These pearls, each one a careful study of how light reflects on curved surfaces, quite literally lie at the threshold of body and landscape. As symbols of her dowry, they also reinforce the painting's broader theme of marriage as a patriarchal exchange of women and property.

Another instance of blurred boundaries between land and body can be seen in Battista's brocaded sleeve (Figure 3.10), itself a painterly triumph of detail, texture, and illusion. Strikingly frontal and large in scale, the sleeve presses into the picture plane while its lush organic imagery – an intricate pattern of leaves and petals – spread around the swell of Battista's upper arm and plant her into the landscape like a root system. ⁶⁶ She and the landscape, both idealized and frozen in time, embody Federico's greatest desires and most valuable possessions.

In teasing out these subtle, but significant, stylistic distinctions between Battista's and Federico's representations, it becomes clear that Piero is thinking critically and carefully about what it means to portray his sitters, not only as individuals but in relation to one another. While we might understand the stylistic analogies between Battista's land and her body as an unintentional expression of the artist's internalized perceptions of gender, a more explicit agenda seems to emerge in Piero's iconographic treatment of the landscapes which, like the portraits, are equally preoccupied with processes of differentiation and particularization.

While there is a clear effort to unify the sitters' environments through the continuous landscape, there are also crucial distinctions in the *kinds* of landscape imagery that appear on Federico's and Battista's respective sides. Whereas Battista's panel (both recto and verso) is defined by buildings and cultivated lands, Federico's showcases bodies of water, boats, and roads. Because the landscape features minimal references to architecture (concentrated, notably,

⁶⁶ With this particular configuration of vegetal patterns, the brocade also inspires interesting parallels with local architectural motifs. Without pressing the point too far, it is worth nothing that Leon Battista Alberti was working on the Palazzo Ducale renovations during this time and introduced a new kind of column capital that combines palmettes (in the place of acanthus) with small, round radial flowers. For more on Alberti's non-canonical architectural order, which was first designed for the Tempietto Rucellai in Florence, see. Gabriele Morolli, "Federico da Montefeltro e Salomone: Alberti, Piero e l'ordine architettonico dei principicostruttori ritrovato," in *Citta e Corte nell'Italia di Piero della Francesca*, 344-45.

on Battista's side), scholars have characterized the landscape background as "empty," "abstract," and "purely visual." It is indeed notable that Piero does not reference any of the 140 building projects Federico commissioned during his rule, especially given the well-established castle-on-a-hill trope in paintings of this period and region. Yet to equate this architectural minimalism with pictorial "emptiness" is to evacuate the painted landscape from its potential for signification. Far from empty, Piero's landscapes are judiciously composed to focus attention on the defining features of each sitters' environmental surroundings: namely, the *cittadella* (for her) and the lake (for him). Taken together, these symbolic forms constitute a complementary semiotics wherein Federico's lake engages with patriarchal notions of mobility, power, and access while Battista's *cittadella* forms associations with feminine virtues, particularly wifely chastity.

Real or Symbolic?

The *cittadella* and the lake have never, to my knowledge, been analyzed in direct relation to one another. Independently, however, they have been subject to significant debate. With no viable analog in Urbino's contemporary or historical countryside, Federico's enormous lake has been identified as either the flood plain of the Valmarrechia near Pieve del Colle (Figure 3.11) or, more likely, the Barca Ducale (Figure 3.12), Federico's hunting ground that, according to

⁶⁷ Marilyn Aronberg Lavin remarks upon the "abstract" quality of these paintings, writing: "the eulogies remain curiously abstract. No names are mentioned; no armorial emblems appear. Identification on both sides of the diptych is purely visual." *Piero della Francesca*, 265. Philip Hendy offers a similar estimation in *Piero della Francesco and the Early Renaissace* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

legend, was sometimes flooded to attract birds.⁶⁸ While it is impossible to disprove these identifications, a body of water of such scale that it dwarfs boats and has its own island and tributaries is practically unimaginable in Urbino's land-locked and hilly countryside.

Furthermore, supposing it was meant to be a testament to Federico's hydraulic engineering for the Barca Ducale, for instance, the literalism such a reference would presume does not align with the painting's broader pictorial logic, especially when one accepts its connection with the *cittadella*: an iconographic feature that is clearly symbolic with no direct connection to the Montefeltro landscape.

Over the years, scholars have posited a number of identifications for Battista's *cittadella* including Mondavio (the town she is said to have defended at age sixteen), Maiolo (a small Montefeltro town that was destroyed in a sixteenth-century landslide), and Volterra, where, in 1472, Federico brutally quelled a local uprising and restored Florentine control.⁶⁹ However, each of these possibilities, while compelling, ultimately breaks down when one considers the presence of the same *cittadella* in one of Piero's earlier paintings – the Amadi altarpiece (Figure 3.13) – where it references his hometown of Sansepolcro.⁷⁰ If Piero had wanted to evoke a specific city

⁶⁸ Olivia Nesci, the geomorphologist who co-wrote *Il Paesaggio Invisibile*, has confirmed that such a lake did not exist in the fifteenth century. The authors argue that the painting depicts Valmarecchia flood plain. Others, including a gas station attendant I spoke to in Urbania, claim the painting represents the Barca Ducale. I have found no primary sources that mention Federico flooding the Barca Ducale, or any other hunting ground, and furthermore, I do not think such a literal reference would make much sense in this context.

⁶⁹ Art historian Dante Bernini has suggested Mondavio (mentioned without citation in Rosetta Borchia and Olivia Nesci, *Il Paesaggio Invisibile*, 55). Borchia and Nesci make the case for Maiolo (*Il Paesaggio Invisibile*, 113-126). While it is tempting to identify Battista's *cittadella* as Volterra (it was the site of Piero's last victory before Battista's death), there are many problems with this, not the least of which is that its skyline looks nothing like that of Volterra. It lacks any distinguishing features of the city such as its unmissable domed baptistery; and furthermore, the painted topography is distinctly Marchigiano, not Tuscan.

⁷⁰ Both have thick city walls, feudal towers (both conical and squared), and fortified, crenellated bastions. In addition, the cityscape's basilica church with a large round window

in the double portrait, he would have made that obvious. One has to look no further than his careful description of Arezzo in the *Vera Croce* fresco cycle to know that he was more than capable of doing so (Figure 3.14).

Rather than serving as references to specific sites or events from the couple's history, I suggest that the lake and the *cittadella* are part of Piero's expansive and evocative formal vocabulary of landscape. As such, they constitute generic, isolated, and conspicuous interventions into the otherwise-familiar landscape, thus inviting interpretation as symbolic pendants. Seen this way, the lake and the *cittadella* speak to the oppositional and gendered discourses of mobility (for him) and confinement (for her), recalling Alberti's dialogue of a husband to his wife, "do at home as I do everywhere beyond the home."

Federico's vast lake, as it were, penetrates from recto to verso, spilling through the hills and enveloping a small island. Boats roam through the waters on both sides of the panel, imbuing the entire landscape with a sense of an energy and movement that is echoed by the roads that trace its shore and connect the valleys in the distance. As a poetic device, the lake glorifies Federico's ability to harness the forces of nature and transform the physical environment to suit his needs, provide him mobility and access, and perhaps even entertainment. Indeed, the notion of a flooded plain – imagined or real – calls to mind the spectacle of the naval battles hosted in the Roman colosseum. It is significant that this mesmerizing and active watery network does not cross the threshold into Battista's side except for a small patch of blue that bleeds onto her

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resembles Sansepolcro's Chiesa San Francesco. Rosetta Borchia and Olivia Nesci make this connection in *Il Paesaggio Invisibile*, 119.

⁷¹ This is not to say that both could not be true. As this dissertation demonstrates, artists from this period often played with the ambiguity of architectural imagery to invite multiple associations.

⁷² "fa in casa come fo io nel resto fuori di casa." Leon Battista Alberti, *Della Famiglia*, 245.

Triumph scene. Virtually devoid of the waterways and winding roads that define Federico's landscape, Battista's portrait is surrounded instead by a fertile landscape marked by enclosed fields, evenly planted fruit trees, and dense groves, accessible only by a single road that culminates in the *cittadella*. The road forks at the guard tower with one arm looping behind Battista's body and the other extending to Federico's, virtually enclosing Battista like the fields that radiate from her breast. The guard tower literalizes Federico's watchful command over who and what passes through.

While Federico's landscape plays on themes of taming and navigating the physical environment, Battista's landscape emphasizes her status as wife and mother through homologies between herself and the fertile, ordered landscape and through symbols like the *cittadella*, an architectural metaphor for Battista's feminine virtue. Metaphors of the virtuous woman as a walled fortress or city abound in medieval and Renaissance literature and visual culture. Personifications of cities were often gendered female (i.e. Roma, Venezia, Florentia) and the iconography of walls was foundational to *topoi* of chastity like the *hortus conclusus*. An extended literary example can be seen in Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) which deploys complex metaphors between women and walled cities to show both as *loci* of feminine virtue. In one particularly captivating passage, a female personification of Reason

⁷³ For a brief history of this *topos*, see: Anne J. Cruz, "The Walled-In Woman in Medieval and Early Modern Spain," in *Gender Matters: Discourses of Violence in Early Modern Literature and the Arts*, ed. Mara M. Wade (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 349-367.

⁷⁴ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982). For more on architectural metaphor with regards to Christine de Pizan, see Chapter Three in Simone Celine Marshall's, *The Female Voice in the Assembly of Ladies: Text and Context in Fifteenth-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

tells Christine how to build the City of Ladies, a kind of intellectual utopia in which women strive for knowledge in community with one another. She writes:

[...] lay the sturdy foundations and [...] the lofty walls all around, high and thick, with mighty towers and strong bastions, surrounded by moats with firm blockhouses, just as is fitting for a city with a strong and lasting defense. Following our plan, you will set the foundations deep to last all the longer, and then you will raise the walls so high that they will not fear anyone.⁷⁵

The passage's almost militaristic emphasis on security and defense speak to the conception of feminine virtue as something that must be vigilantly protected from forces of misogyny. These same themes of fortification and protection pervade discourses of chastity, what might have been considered the most important feminine virtue with regards to Battista. Here, I am defining chastity as modesty and sexual restraint beyond the bounds of wedlock.

In Renaissance art, allegories of chastity often deploy architectural symbolism similar to what is described in Pizan's *City of Ladies*. Take for example Hans Memling's fanciful *Allegory of Chastity* (Figure 3.15) where a woman stands encased in a perilous crystalline rock formation that spills water into sinuous river guarded by two lions. The well-fortified, walled city in the background further emphasizes this already explicit literalization of chastity. Another particularly relevant example is Giotto di Bondone's c.1320 *Allegory of Chastity* (Figure 3.16) for the Lower Church of San Francesco of Assisi. In this multi-figure scene, a woman labeled "*Castitas*" prays in a fortified tower guarded by personifications of Purity (*Munditia*) and Fortitude (*Fortitudo*). Ascending the road to the tower are three Fransciscans who will ostensibly be washed and dressed by the angels shown in the middle of the scene before being granted access to Chastity. To their right, a virtuous battalion wards off demons, communicating a clear message that protecting chastity is an arduous and ongoing battle between good and evil.

⁷⁵ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 12.

Appearing in profile through a "window" constructed of spiral columnettes and an inscribed pediment, Giotto's *Castitas* recalls the Marian images in elaborate architectonic frames that adorned so many street corners and churches throughout medieval and Renaissance Italy (Figure 3.17). Given Mary's status as Chastity's exemplar, this is a fitting and sophisticated metapictorial reference.

While chastity was often conceptualized through the language of walls, fortresses, and windows, such spatial and architectural devices were also integral tools for preserving and enforcing chastity in practice. Indeed, throughout Battista's life, the spaces she was allowed to move through and occupy were highly regulated with a mind towards "protecting" her virtue, even if it meant physically isolating her from men outside of her immediate family. For example, in a 1458 letter to Bianca Maria Visconti, the family doctor assures her that the twelve-year-old Battista rarely leaves the house except for important festivals ("rare volte va fora de casa salva ad qualche festa principale"), and, at home, interacts with only a handful of approved men, whose names he gives in the letter. This policing did not subside when Battista entered the court of Urbino as Federico's wife two years later; and the cycle would continue with her own daughters as well. Vespasiano da Bisticci describes that Battista and Federico's daughters were...

[...] kept in a part of the house accompanied by many noblewomen of the cloth [...] and that in that room of the house no one went besides Signor Ottaviano and his son. As he came to do the door where they were, everyone that was with him went away from the door and waited for him to return. In every case he was observant and proper.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Letter from Piersante Bosi da Sarnano, August 23, 1458. *Fondo Sforsezco, Potenze estere, Marca*, b. 143.

⁷⁷ "Le sue figliuole femine teneva in una parte della casa, accompagnate da molte donne nobili, di tempo e di laudabili costume: e nella stanza di casa non v'andava persona, se non il Signor Ottaviano e l'figliuolo. Com'egli giungeva all'usscio dove elle stavano, tutti quegli ch'erano con lui rimanevano di fuori dell'uscio; andavano alla stanza loro, ed aspettavano tanto

These examples speak to an intense preoccupation with regulating women's movements, behaviors, and interactions in the name of protecting their virtue.

Piero's painting is both a product of and an actor within this cultural context. As such, the cittadella and the lake are not mere decorative details in a "purely visual" landscape, they are charged symbolic images that cultivate distinct environments that differentiate between Battista and Federico in accordance with their complementary, though unequal, gendered roles. On one side, Federico's environment celebrates his command of vast territorial possessions and unfettered mobility in accessing them, all the while characterizing Battista as yet another possession to admired, monitored, and controlled, even in death. On the other side, Battista's environment reinforces this visual argument through stylistic and iconographic analogies between her body and the well-ordered fruit-bearing landscape, as well as through symbolic references to chastity such as the cittadella and the surveilled road accessible to her husband alone. In this context, the *cittadella* serves as a semiotic transposition of the domestic architecture and interior spaces that define the genre of Renaissance women's portraiture, and that are noticeably – and, at first glance, delightfully – absent in Battista's portrayal.

Despite its formal equilibrium and egalitarian veneer, this portrait does not equally glorify both members of the ruling couple, but rather it commemorates their governance as a unified front with Federico at the head. These patriarchal power dynamics are articulated clearly in the inscriptions that appear below their respective Triumph scenes as well. In them, Federico is glorified as "the equal of the greatest leaders" while Battista is "honored by the praise of her great husband's deeds." Using both text and image, this portrait mounts a clear argument that

che tornasse. In ogni sua cosa era osservante come si conveniva." Vespasiano da Bisticci, Vite di Uomini Illusti del secolo XV, Vol. I (Bologna: Romagnoli-Dall'Acqua, 1892), 307.

Battista's legacy should be understood as little more than a function of Federico's glory. The next section will interrogate the motivations and circumstances of that visual argument, ultimately showing that Piero's painting participates in a broader campaign to "domesticate" Battista's legacy by mitigating her well-documented sense of luxury, fortitude, and autonomy and, instead, playing up her feminine virtues of chastity and modesty. Considering the patriarchal politics entailed in beholding an extravagantly dressed woman outdoors, this section will also explore how conceptions of landscape and gender intersect as social constructions grounded in visuality.

Part Three: Battista's Power

In a letter dated January 1, 1486 the neo-Latin humanist Laura Cereta weaves together themes of gender, luxury, nature, and landscape all through the language of artistic activity and pictorial representation. 78 Using intensely visual language, she describes a woman's shawl that she has been sewing each night for three months, guided only by lamplight and her own imagination.⁷⁹ Cereta's skilled ekphrasis renders the subject matter – two beasts in a landscape – vivid in the reader's eye. "Beyond the beasts," she writes:

⁷⁸ There are no surviving autographs of Laura Cereta's *Epistolae*, but they were initially copied into two manuscripts: Marciano Latino XI, 28 (4186) in Venice and Vaticano Latino 3176 in Vatican City. The first print edition was Jacopo Filippo Tomasini's 1640 publication, which includes seventy-one documents. Here, I am working from Diana Robin's 1997 English translation and edition, Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). For more on the relationship between natural imagery and themes of femininity and abundance, see Rebecca Zorach, Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁷⁹ It is unclear if she is referring to embroidery or needlepoint. In the letter, she specifies only that she is making a woman's shawl ("oblongulus cohoperturae panniculus"). Laura Cereta, Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist, 32, footnote 37.

...the lofty face of a mountain with twin peaks rises in the distance, and from it a river flows down in the opposite direction, coursing down through the valley that lies in between. Basketweave stitching encloses the equal areas where the two mountain ridges lie, and joins the two in a curving place between them. Bare overhanging rocks frame the plain on one side, and some of these rocks are piled one over another, from the rugged summit of this promontory, smoke and flames erupt in fiery billows.

After establishing the landscape's general topography, she describes the makeup of its lush terrain.

Meadows blooming with flowers and every herb, on hillock after hillock, clothe the plain on the other side. A wooded glade with shadebearing cover shelters both sides of the mountain, where first edible fruits ripen in their boughs, and then olive trees droop under the gentle burden of their berries. A field surrounds them, and vines are stretched and linked to one another all around, curling upwards and downwards with gracefulness. Among these, the creeping tendrils of the vine contain in their leaves darkening grapes.⁸⁰

From the distant mountains to the drooping olive berries, Cereta's landscape presents a natural ecology that is both spatially complex and deeply sensual. It evokes multi-sensorial experiences of fragrance, sound, and the touch of cool air on skin. While her wild, untamed landscape presents a world without (or before?) human industry, Cereta's labor in creating the shawl is constantly in the fore. In reading about Cereta's "forbidden work," one cannot help but imagine her strong and skillful hands flying about the embroidery hoop, choosing colors and threading needles by a flickering lamplight. Indeed, she closes the ekphrasis with a jarring pivot to the shawl's materiality and construction, as if to remind the reader of her role as its innovator, creator, and interpreter. After describing the "tangled thread of silver sprouts" that adorn the composition's border, she writes:

But I cannot include here a lengthy discussion of how the down used to make yarn is knitted together after being stretched thin and twisted. Nor do I need

⁸⁰ Ibid, 32-33.

mention that the Arabian silkworm is imported for the smooth and consistent quality of its thread.

In taking her reader from the mental image of a wild, volcanic landscape to the tangled threads that create its image and finally to the exotic material that creates the thread itself, Cereta portrays herself as a creative force capable of transforming the stuff of Arabian silkworms into the powerful imagery of textiles as well as text. On the heels of the letter's introduction which contextualizes why she does this work at night (because she has to run her father's affairs during the day), this brief description of a woman's garment becomes a proud declaration of her diverse talents, intellectual prowess, and societal worth. "But ah," she concludes, "these are the meaningless concerns of women."

As a rhetorical device, Cereta's shawl – a woman's garment adorned with a fertile, untamed landscape – exemplifies the common sexist conceits of her day; namely that women are wasteful of time, covetous of luxury, and that both of these vices are rooted in immodest, sensual indulgence. Turning this conceit on its head, Cereta paints a picture of an industrious and virtuous woman whose daylight hours are dedicated to serving her family but who, in the dark of night, claims time for herself, indulging not in material luxury itself, but in the creative pleasures of invention, imagination, and handwork that bring it into being.

I include Cereta's letter because, while Cereta and Battista were not quite contemporaries (Cereta was three when Battista died), there are compelling resonances between their lives and legacies. Both came from prominent Italian noble families and showed intellectual promise from a young age. Both learned Latin, wrote humanistic texts, and worked on behalf of their patriarchs in times of need, Cereta for her father and Battista for Federico when he was away at war. Both were married by the age of fifteen. Yet, while Battista went on to raise a large family, Cereta, widowed at sixteen and childless, dedicated her life entirely to intellectual pursuits, among them,

investigating the complexity of women's experiences in an unjust, patriarchal world. While Battista's painted landscape speaks to such patriarchal oppression, Cereta's poetic landscape functions as a radical display and celebration of female autonomy.

Women in Landscapes

Together, Cereta and Battista's landscapes speak to both sides of an intense cultural (male) anxiety around the way that Renaissance women related to, appeared in, and moved through the landscape. As Patricia Simons has convincingly argued, these anxieties had palpable effects on the ways that women were represented in art, producing a display culture that was "keen to engage in impression management." Within this context, the image of an extravagantly-dressed woman at a window – or, in Battista's case, before an open-air landscape – walked a fine line between decorous beauty and indecent exposure. Piero addresses these concerns in numerous ways throughout the portrait.

In stark contrast to Federico, who wears an austere *condottiere*'s uniform, emphasizing his role as a public servant rather than a courtly figure, Battista appears extravagantly dressed in a black silk dress with sleeves heavily worked in gold brocade. 82 Her characteristic blond hair is wound around a strip of ivory-colored silk and fastened with two large gold ornaments laden with pearls and precious gems. Around her neck, she wears an impressive double-rowed pearl collar with garnet and sapphire-studded golden plaques. Yet another string of pearls descends

81 Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames," 15.

⁸² As a point of comparison, consider Piero della Francesca's 1451 portrait of Sigismondo Malatesta, which represents the Lord of Rimini wearing a silk doublet rather than military regalia.

from the collar supporting a short chain with a reliquary pendant. ⁸³ With reference to inventories from this time period, it is possible to estimate the value of Battista's clothing and jewels at roughly 3800 *ducati* (about 350,000 USD in today's money). ⁸⁴ Battista indeed had a reputation for luxury. Sabadino degli Arienti's 1483 chronicle notes that the young Countess was known to dress herself and her daughters with "*magnifica pompa*," ornamenting themselves with various illustrious garments and gems. While such dress was not in and of itself indecorous, when worn outdoors, such as Piero depicts in the portrait, it cannot be divorced from the patriarchal anxieties about Battista's chastity that followed her from childhood to death, and that are well-documented in the written account.

With Federico gone much of the time, Battista's chastity was of primary concern to those tasked with monitoring her movements and managing her image in the public eye. 85 Indeed, infidelity, either initiated by a married woman or imposed on her by force, was not a rare occurrence in Renaissance court culture. Sabadino speaks directly to this anxiety by following up his description of Battista's "magnificent pomp" by asserting: "But it was the opinion of nearly every man that, no matter how much pleasure she got from her pomp, she wore under her stately

⁸³ Joan Evans, A History of Jewelry, 1100-1870 (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 86-87.

⁸⁴ In generating this estimate, I draw from the inventory of Elizabeth Gonzaga, Battista's daughter in-law, which includes similar items such as silk dresses ("vestiti del dalmasco"), a pair of gold-brocaded crimson sleeves ("maniche de broaca dor cremesino"), a bejeweled golden pendent such as the ones seen in Battista's hair ("uno pendente de uno zafiro cum una perla grossa pendente") and a pearl collar ("uno colaro cum balassi 17 e perle cinquantuna"). The inventory is conserved in AsPU, Sezione Urbino, *Fondo Notarile*, notaio Simone Vanni, no. 12, *February, 20 1488*. It is published in *Federico di Montefeltro*, *Battista Sforza*, *Elisabetta Gonzaga: Mostra documentaria*, eds. Anna Falcioni and Antonello de Berardinis (Urbino: Archivio di Stato di Pesaro Sezione di Urbino, 2010); Money conversion done through the International Institute of Social History website.

⁸⁵ Leon Battista Alberti's *Della Famiglia* offers insight into how a woman's behaviors and appearance impacted her reputation. In Book II, he cites "modesty and cleanliness" as the primary qualities of a "highly-praised" woman and says that a dishonest woman is one of the gravest threats to the family unit. Leon Battista Alberti, *Della Famiglia*, 129.

clothing a hair shirt to remember God in the absence of her husband." ⁸⁶ It is worth turning to the original Latinate Italian for a moment to see the telling way that Sabadino orders his thoughts here. The final sentence reads: "sotto le signorile vestimente, in absentio di marito, per non dimenticarse Dio, portasse el cilicio." This construction places emphasis on the hair shirt and situates her need to think about her husband right before her need to remember God.

One might infer here a subtle suggestion of impropriety on the part of Sabadino, especially in his use of the word "but" ("ma") to transition from his description of her taste for luxury to his assurance that every man ("ogni homo") knew deep down, that she was pious. Regardless of whether or not he is hinting towards an actual scandal here, Sabadino is clearly making a concerted effort to reconcile Battista's reputation for luxury with her role as a faithful wife. Piero's painting also engages with this "problem" by balancing Battista's extravagant and unfettered outdoor presence with a landscape charged with symbolic references to wifely chastity and motherhood. In this light, the formal rhymes between the cittadella and the pearl necklace take on new meaning as they crystallize the luxury/chastity paradox. The walled city of feminine virtue defends against the imminent threat of indecorous display, advancing like a row of pearly soldiers.

While such gendered tropes are not uncommon in Renaissance depictions of women, Piero's portrait seems particularly preoccupied with constructing Battista's identity in narrow, gendered terms – reducing her into a "chaste emblem," to quote Simons's description of Battista in the portrait. ⁸⁷ As I have shown, this characterization responds to an anxiety about Battista's faithfulness to a husband who was rarely around. Indeed, the question of legitimacy – that he

⁸⁶ Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, Gynevra della clare donne. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁷ Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames," 16-17.

was, in fact, the father of his children – was crucial to his legacy. Yet, there is another anxiety that must have emerged in the wake of Federico's absence, that is, the possibility that Battista – high-born, well-educated, and well-connected – had more political clout and power than he did. Seeing Urbino flourish in the years following their marriage, and in Federico's absence, people must have wondered who really was in charge.

Battista was, by the standards of the day, incredibly independent and powerful, perhaps troublingly so. Federico relied on her to rule in his absence (always in his name, of course), appeal to her powerful family when he needed a favor, and ultimately ensure the legitimacy of his children. It was no secret that Federico was rarely in court, and that this left a lot in Battista's hands. Baldi speaks to this directly, noting that Battista "was vigilant in the government of the State, which she had come to learn through her husband's long absences." 88

Yet, while the written record occasionally acknowledges Battista's fortitude and intelligence, it also exhibits strategic characterizations and portrayals that serve to undermine her significance beyond the domestic realm. For example, Sabadino mentions Battista's scholastic pursuits only up to the time she is married, at which point he characterizes her almost exclusively in terms of her piety and devotion to her husband. The brilliant child becomes the pious motherwife. Vespasiano da Bisticci, Federico's biographer, does not even mention her name until Chapter thirty-four of his *Life and Acts of Federico da Montefeltro*, and it is only in the context of mentioning the couple's son Guidobaldo:

[Federico] had a legitimate son of admirable virtue, who was named Count Guido; and more legitimate daughters, born to the mother Battista, daughter of

⁸⁸ "Era Battista, oltra le altre nobilissime qualite sue, ornate di scienze, e di lettere assai piu' che mediocremente, e perciò sopra modo amata, stimata, ed accarezzata dal Duca di Milano suo Zio[…] Fu eziando vigilantissima nel governo dello Stato, come ella fece conoscere nella lunga assenza del Marito." Bernardo Baldi, *Vita e Fatti di Federigo da Montefeltro*, 230.

Alessandro da Pesaro, [she was] an exceptional woman (una singularissima donna).⁸⁹

While it is unremarkable that authors would leave out and minimize a woman's contributions, the totality of Battista's portrayals, both written and visual, evidence more than exclusion. Rather, they demonstrate a carefully curated personal mythology that seeks to domesticate this *singularissima donna* into the *uxoris Federicus*. Piero's portrait is an essential part of this enterprise. It commemorates Battista as part of the Montefeltro domain: important and worthy of admiration, but only for her achievements as wife and mother, and only after her death.

Conclusion

Without the domesticating machinery of Piero's landscape – which literally surrounds

Battista's face and body with symbols of feminine virtue – this diptych might have toed the line
of showing the Countess as Federico's equal, which is to say, too powerful. She faces him head
on, in equal scale and occupies the privileged right-hand position in the diptych. Ultimately,
what restores the appropriate power balance (or rather *im*balance) here is the fact that Battista is
presented to the viewer not as a living, individualized woman, but as a dead, idealized projection
of male desire disguised as admiration. Seen this way, Piero's portrait is the visual culmination
of an extensive campaign to manage Battista's public image in relation to her husband's. From
her doctor's letters claiming that she looked "mature for her age" to Sabadino's chronicle

⁸⁹ "Aveva il signore un figliuolo maschio legitimo di mirabile virtu, il quale ha nome il conte Guido; e più fanciulle legitime, nate, per madre, di madonna Battista, figliuola del signor Alessandro da Pesaro, singularissima donna." Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite di Uomini Illusti del secolo XV*, 306.

describing an assuredly fictive hair shirt worn under all of her clothing, to Baldi's claim that she and Federico were "two souls in one body," and finally, to Piero's portrait, the official narrative of Battista's life reinforces a singular message: that Battista was a faithful wife whose greatest achievement – more than delivering a Latin oration at age four, defending against Sigismondo at fourteen, or even raising six healthy daughters – was her successful delivery of Guidobaldo, the "bello e desiderato figliuolo." Indeed, one wonders if these interlocutors, Piero included, would have commemorated Battista at all had she not ultimately fulfilled this essential duty.

⁹⁰ Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, Gynevra della clare donne.

CHAPTER FOUR:

"Qualche Lontani" e Altre Mani: Secondary Spaces and Secondary Hands in the Renaissance (Painted) Landscape

Summary

Thus far, this dissertation has established that from c.1450-1500 in Northern and Central Italy, environmental imagery became increasingly essential to the broader pictorial program of both religious paintings and portraits. Previous chapters explored how cultural understandings of the physical environment informed the way painted landscapes made meaning in dialogue with figural imagery, as well as with the viewers that beheld it. Turning attention from reception to production, this chapter examines how this particular mode of representing landscape developed and evolved throughout the design process. Tracing the production of painted landscapes from artists' contracts to artists' workshops and finally to the modern conservation lab, this chapter brings together the crucial questions of landscape, labor, and visual art that fifteenth-century painted landscapes both embody and mediate. The result is a new and more dynamic lens through which to analyze the art of the Italian Renaissance.

Introduction

This inquiry begins with a puzzling discrepancy between the visual and documentary records of Renaissance painted landscapes. A survey of fifteenth-century Adriatic paintings

makes it clear that environmental imagery was an increasingly important and complex element in the development of painting's relationship to the environment. It demanded technical skill and invention, as well as careful observation of natural topographies, architecture, and ecology. It seems logical that patrons, desiring to personalize their commissions, would have played some part in driving this development. Yet, artist's contracts from the period stay practically silent on the pictorial requirements of landscape; and instead, focus increasingly on human figures. How can this silence be explained?

Shifts in contractual language over the last half of the fifteenth century show that patrons were beginning to specify that master artists should be responsible for painting certain parts of the painting in their own hand (*in sua propria mano*). However, these stipulations almost never extended to the landscape, implying that patrons viewed the imagery surrounding human figures as secondary in importance. Four questions follow: If patrons felt that painted landscapes were secondary in importance and could be painted by any "hand" in the workshop, why are they so visually appealing and interpretively complex? Why do they draw the eye and hold it for so long? If patrons were not demanding this personalized imagery, where did it come from; and if master artists were not executing it in their own hand, then who was?

This chapter will take on these questions in two parts. Part One elucidates how iconographies of landscape were decided upon in the design phase by examining contracts, preparatory drawings, and correspondences between artists and patrons. Arguing against Michael Baxandall's suggestion that painted landscapes emerged as a result of *clients* wanting to see more "hand" and "labor" in a given work, this chapter maintains that it was the artists themselves that drove the shift from gold to green with their assistants leading the charge. Part Two outlines the production practices surrounding the design and execution of environmental imagery.

Highlighting the environmental context of artistic labor, this chapter shows that the landscape functioned as a kind of sourcebook for artists as well as an outdoor workshop where important aspects of training took place. This condition of artistic work connects the experiences of artists – and especially workshop assistants – to the outdoor imagery they so frequently and attentively represented during this period. Finally, it will argue that the Renaissance painted landscape was a locus of professional and economic upward mobility for workshop assistants because it generated new opportunities for them to prove themselves as independent artists. Thinking of the ways that assistants could have contributed to the development of painted landscapes over the course of the fifteenth century enriches the discourses surrounding landscape painting, first of all, but also challenges modern conceptions of labor hierarchies within the workshop, and, relatedly, notions of Renaissance originality and authorship. The dissertation's epilogue will extend this discussion into the modern era, considering the implications of conservation projects that seek to re-construct the Renaissance landscape, both real and represented. Seen this way, the Renaissance painted landscape is a site of trans-historical artistic collaboration. The creative process is ongoing.

Part One: Secondary Spaces

"There were various ways for the discerning client to switch his funds from gold to 'brush'. For example, behind the figures in his picture he could specify landscapes instead of gilding. A contract might even itemize what the client had in mind for his landscapes. When Ghirlandaio contracted in 1485 to paint frescoes for the Tornabuoni in the choir or S. Maria Novella at Florence he agreed to include 'figures, buildings, castles, cities, mountains, hills, plains, rocks, costumes, animals, birds, and beasts of every kind.' Such a demand ensured an expenditure of labour, if

not skill." – Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (1988) ¹

In a few brief paragraphs in *Painting and Experience in Renaissance Italy*, Michael Baxandall introduced the still-dominant explanation of the shift from gilded to landscape backgrounds. Citing two contracts that describe environmental imagery (both for Florentine commissions) he characterized the development of fifteenth-century painted landscapes as a function of the broader shift "from gold to brush" whereby paintings became more valued for their demonstration of labor and skill than for their material opulence. In this configuration, clients requested landscapes less for their subject matter and more to increase the amount of skill and labor artists dedicated to the commission. While Baxandall's broader argument about the social and economic factors at play in Renaissance painting boasts an impressive range of historical and visual sources, this specific argument about the emergence of landscape backgrounds presents a number of problems. Most importantly, it extrapolates from a severely limited and exceptional body of evidence, leading to an overestimation of the patron's involvement in determining landscape imagery.

Baxandall's two sources are the contracts for Domenico Ghirlandaio's Tornabuoni frescoes and for Pinturicchio's Santa Maria de'Fossi altarpiece. The Ghirlandaio contract, detailed in the passage above, calls for a variety of environmental imagery to be included in the scene. In its list-like format and emphasis on *varietà*, it recalls Bartolomeo Fazio's and Leon Battista Alberti's descriptions of painted landscapes surveyed in Chapter One. More intriguing, however, is the Pinturicchio contract, which calls for the artist to "paint landscapes and airs [paese et aiere] in the empty part [vacuo] of the paintings, or really the fields around the figures,

¹ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 17-18.

and all other fields too where color is put, except for the frames, where gold is to be applied."

Chapter One showed how such language of figure/field was typical of the period. What stands out here, however, is the author's use of the word "empty" to describe the space where environmental imagery should go. It is certainly tempting to read these two sources as indicative of a new way of conceptualizing the relationship between landscape and pictorial ground.

However, this would need to appear more widely in the archival record in order to justify such a generalization. To my knowledge, these two contracts are the only ones from this period that dictate specific pictorial requirements for a background landscape; and even so, their specifications are focused on adding variety and ornament – even labor and skill. Therefore, while they might shed light on why landscape became preferred to gold categorically, they cannot explain why landscape became a site for increasingly complex personalized iconographies, often bringing together local topographies, architectural portraits, and religiopolitical symbols. Indeed, these are the very qualities that make painted landscapes from this period so distinctive and visually compelling.

² "Anche promette nel vacuo delli quadri o vero campi de le figure pengere paese et aiere et tutti li altri campi dove se mette colore except li cornicioni dove se ha a ponere loro." Pinturicchio and S. Maria de' Fossi: G.B. Vermiglioli, Bernardino Pinturicchio (Perugia, 1837), vi (Appendix II). Cited in Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 158.

³ For scholarship on workshop practices, see: Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Andrew Ladis, Carolyn H. Wood, and William U. Eiland (eds.), *The Craft of Art: Originality and Industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque Workshop* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Anabel Thomas, *The Painter's Practice in Renaissance Tuscany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Hannelore Glasser, *Artists' Contracts of the Early Renaissance* (dissertation: Columbia University, 1965); David Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971); Carmen Bambach, *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop: Theory and Practice, 1300-1600* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, developments in landscape imagery during the Italian Renaissance differed from region to region. Speaking in general terms, art of the Veneto and the

Consider Ghirlandaio's Visitation fresco (Figure 4.1) in light of the commission's contract. Here, the primary figures' surroundings activate the narrative in crucial and specific ways that transcend the contract's generic list of imagery requirements. More than simply "including" animals and trees, Ghirlandaio presents pairs of trees and birds (ostensibly mothers with their young in tow) that echo the pairing of Mary and Elizabeth with Christ and John within their pregnant bellies. More than "buildings, castles, cities, mountains, and hills," Ghirlandaio creates a hybrid topography evocative of both Florence (his patrons' locale) and Biblical Judea (the scene's setting according to the Gospel of Luke). Allusions to Florence's topography can be seen in the architectural references which, from left to right, evoke, albeit subtly, the Porta Niccolò, the Torre di Palazzo Vecchio, the campanile of Santa Maria Novella, and the façade of the Palazzo Rucellai located just in front of it (Figures 4.2-4.5). This arrangement aligns with a view of the city from the northeast. References to the biblical setting – the hill country of Judea – can be seen in the emphatically hilly urban topography (quite un-Florentine except for the surrounding hills) and the ancient Roman elements like the round colosseum-like structure above the city gate and the small female figure walking through it. Her posture and marmoreal clothing allude to the Dovizia (Abundance), an archetype of Classical statuary that was also a familiar emblem of Florentine daily life. During Ghirlandaio's time, Donatello's now-lost sculpture representing a version of the same ancient archetype stood on top of a column in the Mercato

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Marche demonstrates a particularly robust interest in landscape imagery while the art of Tuscany, especially from the 1430s onward, is defined by exercises in linear perspective, a spatial paradigm that does not enable significant pictorial space and detail for the depiction of landscape. I defer to Florentine contracts in this chapter, however, because they are the examples that survive and are most readily accessible. Finding more Adriatic contracts would enable me to determine if the regions in which painted landscapes flourished most had specialized language for it.

Vecchio (Figure 4.6).⁵ In sum, the richness of Ghirlandaio's landscape cannot be sufficiently explained by its patron's contractual demands. There is a gap between what the contract stipulates (a varied natural landscape) and what Ghirlandaio delivers (a personalized iconography that ties his and his patron's locale to the narrative's biblical setting). Illuminating this gap is the task at hand.

It is, however, important to note outright the limitations of this line of inquiry. Few fifteenth-century paintings survive accompanied by their contracts and preparatory materials, and much communication that took place between artists and patrons was in-person, informal, and therefore not recorded. As a result, teasing out each layer of the design process and exploring the relationships of the parties involved requires a certain element of inference and speculation.

Sometimes what is not explicitly stated is often just as important as what is. Though every workshop operated differently and not all patrons were the same, relatively consistent training techniques and corporate structures across Italian Renaissance workshops make it possible to establish general practices while acknowledging that a variety of deviations and experiments could happen within them.

Extrapolating from a set of key primary sources, ranging from contracts to correspondences, this section will ultimately argue that when patrons *did* choose to weigh in on a painting's iconography (and they rarely did), their specifications were almost always focused on the human figures, leaving the rest of the painting's composition outside of legal obligations, giving painters an important and precious space of independence to do what served the painting

⁵ For more on Donatello's *Dovizia*, see: Sarah Blake Wilk, "Donatello's 'Dovizia' as an Image of Florentine Political Propaganda," *Artibus et Historiae* 7:14 (1986), 9-28; David G. Wilkins, "Donatello's Lost *Dovizia* for the Mercato Vecchio: Wealth and Charity as Florentine Civic Virtues," *The Art Bulletin* 65:3 (Sept. 1983), 401-22.

– or the painter – best. Two possible corollaries follow: that secondary imagery was worked out elsewhere either in a preparatory drawing (*modello*), in conversation, or some combination of both; and that secondary imagery was the purview of artists, not patrons.⁶ These possibilities will be taken up in turn.

Visual References in Contracts

In addition to generating written descriptions, artists and patrons worked out the details of a commission through visual references called, variously, *modelli* (models), *disegni* (designs/drawings), and *squizi* (sketches). The meaning of these terms depends on context, however, when attached to a contract, they constitute the official agreed-upon version of the commission. Few such objects survive from this period, though the frequency with which they are referenced in contracts indicates that they were more prevalent in the design process than the material record might suggest. The rare surviving examples shed crucial light, however, on the ways that text and image supported one another in contractual procedures related to artistic commissions. Indeed, commissioning artwork was as much a legal matter as it was a creative endeavor. It involved notaries, witnesses, and, in many cases, even a guarantor. All of this can be seen in an exceptionally rare artifact conserved at the Getty Research Institute (GRI). The GRI's *Scripta of Bartolomeo Sanvito* (Figure 4.7) is one of a handful of extant fifteenth-century artist's contracts with an accompanying *squizo*. Folded along a central axis with text and drawing facing

⁶ Creighton Gilbert presents a convincing argument against crediting patrons with creative content in "What did the Renaissance Patron Buy?" *Renaissance Quarterly* 51:2 (Summer, 1998): 392-450.

⁷ For more on *modelli*, see Hannelore Glasser, *Artists' Contracts of the Early Renaissance*, 115.

one another, the document stipulates the 1466 commission of an altarpiece from the Paduan painter Pietro Calzetta for the nobleman Bernardo de Lazara, to be installed in the de Lazara funerary chapel in St. Anthony's Basilica in Padua. The contract for the altarpiece reads as follows:

And in this altarpiece, Master Piero has to paint a narrative (*istoria*) similar to the sketch (*squizo*) that is below this page, and that is taken from a drawing/design (*desegno*) [owned by] Master Francesco Squarcione and which was made by the hand of Nicolo Pizolo. [This altarpiece] is to be made similarly to this [drawing/design] and with more things (*piu cose*) than are in this aforementioned sketch.⁸

This brief excerpt outlines a complex professional and creative network between Pietro Calzetta (the painter), Nicolo Pizolo (the designer), Francesco Squarcione (the owner of the design), and Bartolomeo Sanvito (the scribe who sketched the design in the contract). Pizolo had been murdered thirteen years prior, which was likely how Squarcione, who ran the most prolific workshop in Padua, came to acquire the drawing. While the contract is relatively long, it says little about the imagery desired for the painting other than other than that it should "have more things" ("far piu cose di quello") than the sketch. This phrase is particularly intriguing with regards to landscape imagery because in this sketch (which is the only surviving visual record of

⁸ "E in la dicta tavola de depenzere el dicto maistro Piero una historia simile al squizo che e suso questo foglio, el quale e ritrato da un desegno de maistro Francesco Squarzon el qual fo de man de Nicolo Pizolo. El qual de fare simile a quelo e far piu cose di quello e nel dicto squizo [...]." For the full transcription, see Maddalena Signorini in "A *Scripta* of Bartolomeo Sanvito," *Getty Research Journal* 3 (2011): 151-162.

⁹ Madalena Signorini attributes the sketch to Sanvito's hand.

¹⁰ These relationships are outlined in Catherine Puglisi and William Barcham, "Milling the Bread of Salvation: Art, Patronage and Technology in the de Lazara altarpiece in Padua." *Artistic Practices and Cultural Transfer in Early Modern Italy: Essays in Honour of Deborah Howard. Ed. Nebahat Avcioglu and Allison Sherman* (London: Routledge, 2018).

this commission) the background landscape appears to be the only space in which an artist could possibly add "more things." To clarify this, a closer look at the sketch is in order.

Pizolo's design, as recorded by Sanvito, depicts the Mystic Mill, an iconography that is common in popular medieval art of Northern Europe, but exceedingly rare in fifteenth-century Italian painting. Indeed, the sketch might have served to acquaint Calzetta with this unfamiliar iconography. Visualizing the exegetical epithet of Christ as the Bread of Life, this iconography typically shows the body of Christ entering a watermill and being ground into grain. As Catherine Puglisi and William Barcham point out, Pizolo's version of this scene departs from Northern models in critical ways, namely in its ambitious attempt to render this mechanically, temporally, and compositionally complex iconography within a unified pictorial space: a grain mill set into a mountainside.¹²

Pizolo's sophisticated design turns around a central axis reserved for divine figures. Along this sacred vertical axis, "grain" in the form of light rays descends from God the Father, washes over a figure of Christ Triumphant, and pours into an ornately decorated hopper upon which is staged an Annunciation. The light rays passing over Mary and Gabriel and into the hopper recall the rays of light that conventionally point towards Mary's womb in such scenes. Below the Annunciate pair, a millstone rotates in a large square vat held up by the four Church Doctors. The "grain" that flows out takes the form of Christ as the Man of Sorrows. The Eucharistic metaphor continues around this central axis. Two prophets on the mountain dig troughs for rainwater to flow down and power the waterwheel which, in turn, powers the millstone. A ring of youthful angels (labeled "anzoleti") and devotees (labeled "populo")

¹¹ Pizolo's drawing is lost, and the de Lazara chapel was destroyed in 1530.

¹² See footnote 10.

surround the grain vat. The *popolo* in the foreground appear larger and turn their backs to the viewer while the front-facing *anzoleti* in the distance diminish in scale, enhancing the composition's sense of three-dimensional space and perspective. Impressively, this circular figural arrangement around a perpendicular axis mimics the mechanics of the grain mill itself: a round instrument powered by a vertical pole at its center. It is no surprise that Pizolo's drawing, a brilliant design and invention, was valued by artists and patrons long after its maker's death.

Considering the pictorial complexity of the sketch itself, featuring no less than thirty figures and a commendable amount of detail in the architectural and mechanical components, it seems likely that the patron's call for "more things" pertained primarily to the landscape, the "emptiest" part of the sketch. As the least defined part of the composition, the landscape would have presented Calzetta with the most amount of work in terms of invention and execution while the primary subject matter could remain "similar" to the sketch. Yet this burden would have also been an important opportunity to make the work his own. In the process of translating this composition from sketch to painting, this area of the composition would have gained significant complexity and detail, especially considering that the altarpiece was designed to stand at roughly ten feet tall and the landscape would occupy roughly one third of the picture plane.

While Sanvito's rendering of the landscape is vague, its basic forms – rocky outcroppings framing a sinuous passage – give a good sense of what the final product could have looked like. A similar topographical trope can be seen in a number of other paintings executed by artists from Squarcione's circle. Examples include Andrea Mantegna's *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1450-51) (Figure 4.8), Marco Zoppo's *Penitent St. Jerome* (1465) (Figure 4.9), Alvise Vivarini's *Crucifixion* (c. 1470) (Figure 4.10), and Carlo Crivelli's *The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* (c.1489) (Figure 4.11). In each of these paintings, a winding road offset by jagged rock

formations activates the landscape and connects distant and proximate scenes. This pictorial construction serves to draw the eye deeper into the picture and call attention to peripheral narratives and significant details. Following the road in Crivelli's painting, for example, leads to a vividly rendered sea-side town with strange and enigmatic figures along the way including two men in conversation and a bizarrely scaled hooded figure who seems to emerge from the treetops in a nearby forest. Paduan-trained artists during this period clearly understood that landscape was fertile ground for enriching and personalizing a seemingly straightforward iconography. De Lazara must have had this in mind when he chose to commission an artist and design connected to Squarcione's workshop.

The GRI *Scripta* shows that the importance of landscape imagery is not always explicitly stated but is often implied. Interpreting these implications requires some reading between the lines. For example, while de Lazara did not specifically articulate requirements for landscape in text or in image, his choice of artist (Squarcione's pupil) and iconography (a religious metaphor of agricultural industry) divulge an expectation for a painting with elaborate and prominent environmental imagery worked by industries both human and divine. The lack of detail in the contract or the accompanying *squizo* with regards to landscape suggests that this crucial aspect of the painting was left to the artist's discretion.

Because it provides written and visual instructions as well as a functional context, the GRI *Scripta* presents enough evidence to make a reasonable assumption about the patron's expectations and the artist's degree of creative freedom. However, it is also important to note that artists and patrons discussed iconographic programs without always committing the details to contractual language. For example, the 1500 contract for Raphael's Sant'Agostino altarpiece

simply calls for "figures according to the verbal indications of Andreas." Such verbal communications rarely find their way into the written record, making it hard to prove definitively what they may have entailed. Epistolary correspondences between artists and patrons, however, present a tangential source that can shed light on what such "verbal indications" may have entailed.

Correspondences

The ambitious and well-documented collecting practices of Isabella d'Este, *marchesa* of Mantua, offer unique insight into the relationship between Renaissance artists and their patrons, particularly as it related to pictorial design.¹⁴ Shortly after her marriage to Francesco Gonzaga in 1490, Isabella began her *studiolo* project for the Ducal Palace in Mantua, commissioning a suite of "painted narratives and inventions" (*istorie e invenzione*) from Italy's most renowned painters including Giovanni Bellini, Pietro Perugino, and Andrea Mantegna.¹⁵ Collaborating with

¹³ "cum illis figuris quibus dicet idem Andreas." Transcribed and published in Hannelore Glasser, *Artists' Contracts of the Early Renaissance*, 30.

¹⁴ There exists a vast bibliography on the life and patronage of Isabella d'Este. I draw primarily from Stephen Campbell's book *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance mythological painting and the "Studiolo" of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006). Other essential bibliography includes: Molly Bourne, "Renaissance Husbands and Wives as Patrons of Art: The Camerini of Isabella d'Este and Francesco II Gonzaga," in *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2001), 93–123; Sarah Cockram, *Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga: Power Sharing at the Italian Renaissance Court* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013).

¹⁵ Letter from Isabella d'Este to Giovanni Francesco Malatesta. January 19, 1503. Translated and published in Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance mythological painting and the "Studiolo" of Isabella d'Este*, 173. For more on these terms see Martin Kemp, "From 'Mimesis' to 'Fantasia': The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts," in *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8 (1977): 347-398;

humanists such as Pietro Bembo and Paride de Ceserara, Isabella developed several elaborate pictorial programs of mythological and allegorical subject matter. In her many letters to the artists whom she sought for these commissions, she expressed a clear and confident vision of the project. For visual coherence, each painting would be the same size, have its primary figures in the same scale, and share a uniform light source. In most cases, she also detailed the subject matter and how it should be treated. Considering her high level of involvement in determining format and iconography, it is somewhat remarkable that she says so little about pictorial landscape, a prominent feature of each painting in the *studiolo* group. Isabella's extensive specifications relate almost entirely to the human figures – their expressions, feelings, attitudes, and even clothing. In one letter she expresses ambivalence about whether the painters should use tempera or oil, writing: "this is less important than the figures being good and worthy of their maker." Nevertheless, the paintings' non-figural imagery appears to have been deeply thought through by the artists, if not the patron. Isabella's correspondences with the *studiolo* artists

Anthony Grafton, "Historia and Istoria: Alberti's Terminology in Context," in I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance 8 (1999): 37-68.

¹⁶ Isabella's confidence and business acumen have historically been characterized in negative and sexist terms. Important revisions to this portrayal can be seen in the following scholarly works: Rose Marie San Juan, "The Court Lady's Dilemma: Isabella d'Este and Art Collecting in the Renaissance," Oxford Art Journal 14:1 (1991): 67-78; Deanna Shemek, "In Continuous Expectation: Isabella d'Este's Epistolary Desire," in *Phaethon's Children: The Este Court and Its Culture in Early Modern Italy*, eds. Dennis Looney and Deanna Shemek (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2005), 269-300; Deanna Shemek, "Isabella d'Este and the Properties of Persuasion," in *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700: Form and Persuasion*, eds. Ann Crabb and Jane Couchman (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 123–40; Evelyn Welch, "Women as Patrons and Clients in the Courts of Quattrocento Italy," in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), 18–34.

¹⁷ The specifications for size, scale, and light come up in the letters regarding Lorenzo Costa's painting (Stephen J. Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros*, 192) and Perugino's painting (Stephen J. Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros*, Appendix II, 290; Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Busta 2993, Libro 14, cc. 16v-17). This suggests she was organizing the entire program around this set of unifying formal features.

¹⁸ Stephen J. Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros*, 192. I have adjusted the translation.

confirm a phenomenon witnessed in the GRI *Scripta* – that even when patrons took an active role in designing compositions, environmental imagery seems to have been left to the artist's discretion.

Because the *studiolo* paintings share a number of constants – patron, context, size, theme – they present an opportunity to analyze how and why artists under similar creative constraints approached environmental imagery so differently. Isabella's early negotiations with Giovanni Bellini constitute an opportune point of entry into these questions of landscape and creative freedom.¹⁹ In 1501, Isabella asked the famed Venetian painter for a mythological historia of a now-unknown subject. Whatever it was, however, Bellini responded that he could not "devise anything good" from it.²⁰ Committed to securing a painting from the highly sought-after artist, Isabella (reluctantly and on her agent's advice) granted Bellini creative freedom for the project so long as he "paints some story from antiquity with a beautiful meaning." Bellini agreed initially, but never followed up. This must have disappointed the savvy patron because, soon after, she rescinded the commission and asked for her money back. Bellini refused to return the deposit but offered her a devotional painting in place of the mythological one he had promised. Isabella accepted this deal, but not one for things ordinary, requested that the devotional scene represent the unusual iconography of the Nativity with St. John the Baptist. To this, Bellini responded that the Baptist's presence would make no sense in a Nativity, and that instead he

¹⁹ This correspondence is glossed in Stephen J. Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros*, Appendix II; Creighton Gilbert, "What did the Renaissance Patron Buy?" 417-419; and David Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance*, 126-50. Quotations come from Gilbert, who uses Chambers' transcriptions.

²⁰ Creighton Gilbert, "What did the Renaissance Patron Buy?" 417.

²¹ Ibid.

could offer her a Holy Family with St. John and "some distances (*lontani*) and other fantasies (*fantaxie*)."

This passage, which was briefly touched on in Chapter One, has become a significant point of interest among art historians, most notably Brigit Blass-Simmen who argues that "lontani" ("distances") is one of the earliest designations for a contemporary landscape background and, therefore, is the missing conceptual link between techniques of perspective and the emergence of landscape painting. 22 Blass-Simmen's work is important because she was the first to call critical attention to Bellini's lontani which, until then, had often been translated as "something in the background," 23 belying the term's complex spatial and environmental implications. Using Blass-Simmen's understanding of the term it becomes possible to ask: were the "qualche lontani e fantaxie" (i.e. the elaborate landscapes Bellini had become to be known for) meant to appease Isabella's wishes as a patron, or Bellini's demands as an artist?

In 1504, Bellini rejected yet another one of Isabella's detailed proposals. According to the parties' messenger, Bellini "does not like to be given many written details, which cramp his style; his way of working, as he says, is always to wander at will in his pictures, so that they can satisfy him as well as the beholder." Looking at Bellini's works during this time — predominately devotional scenes set within richly detailed outdoor environments — it is clear that the landscape is where he "wandered" most. The messenger's comments, Bellini's rejections, and his paintings themselves show that landscape was an important site of creative freedom for

²² Brigit Blass-Simmen, "'Qualche lontani': Distance & Transcendence in the Art of Giovanni Bellini" in *Examining Giovanni Bellini: an art more human and more divine*, ed. Carolyn C. Wilson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 77-91.

²³ One example of this translation can be seen in Creighton Gilbert, "What did the Renaissance Patron Buy?" 417.

²⁴ Ibid.

multiple interactive iconographies that, together, eluded any singular meaning. The large-scale, esoteric, multi-figure *historia* that Isabella desired was simply not suited to the kind of work Bellini seems to have preferred. Indeed, the enigmatic, distant details of a painted landscape register differently on the tactile surface of an intimate panel painting than stretched across a two-meter canvas covered in monumental, active figures.²⁵ Whereas the former invites viewers to shift perspectives, zoom in and out, and, ultimately, get lost in the details, the latter impresses upon the viewer where they stand, resisting a plurality of phenomenological engagements.²⁶

Correspondences between artists and patrons are just as much political as they are practical. Therefore, in the absence of a diary or first-hand account, Bellini's personal preferences must remain in the realm of speculation. Nevertheless, Bellini and Isabella's fraught and well-documented business relationship reveals some compelling points of friction between the desires of patrons and artists, clients and makers. Isabella put it best in lamenting, "We only wish that we could be as well served by painters as we are by men of letters. But we know that the wish is vain. We must be content to take what they choose or are able to give us." In order to explore how these points of friction manifested in the paintings themselves, it is necessary to look at the *studiolo* paintings Isabella was actually able to realize. Perugino's *Battle of Love and*

²⁵ Creighton Gilbert interprets this decision as a primarily pragmatic decision, suggesting that Bellini, a savvy businessman who was deeply engrained in the family workshop, must have recognized that a standard religious iconography with a few figures in a landscape was easier to produce "in his own hand" than an original *historia* filled with dozens of figures. While I follow Gilbert's logic, I believe that Bellini's creative preferences were also likely at play. Creighton Gilbert, "What did the Renaissance Patron Buy?" 418.

²⁶ For a compelling theoretical approach to scale, see Andrew Hamilton, *Scale and the Incas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

²⁷ Isabella to Paride de Ceserara, cited in Julia Cartwright's *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474-1539: A Study of the Renaissance* (London: John Murray, 1903), 163.

Chastity (Figure 4.12), commissioned after Bellini's initial rejection, presents a revealing example of what it looked like when Isabella got her way.

An older artist with many young competitors, Perugino was eager for the *studiolo* commission and amenable to fulfilling his patron's wishes. Isabella outlines those wishes in great detail in a 1503 letter to Perugino that was originally accompanied by a drawing conveying the mood the painting should have ("*vole havere quel aiere che ha el schizo*").²⁸ Measurements, she instructs, would follow. In the unfortunate absence of the drawing, it is necessary to focus on the descriptive text. "Our poetic invention [*poesia*], which I wish to see you paint," she writes, "is the *Battle of Love and Chastity* – that is to say, Pallas and Diana fighting against Venus and Love." She goes on to describe her idea for the composition in extraordinary detail, beginning with the dispositions and dress of the primary figures:

The conflict between Diana and Venus must appear more doubtful. Venus' crown, garland and veil will only have been slightly damaged, while Diana's raiment will have been singed by the torch of Venus, but neither of the goddesses will have received any wound.

Advancing further and further into the picture plane, she writes:

After [doppo] these four divinities, the chaste nymphs in the train of Pallas and Diana will be engaged in a fierce conflict – in such ways as you can best imagine – with the lascivious troop of fauns, satyrs, and thousands of various Cupids. These will be smaller than the first Cupid, and will carry neither gold bows nor silver arrows,

²⁸ This was sent through one of Isabella's agents, Vincenzo Bolzano. Archivio di Stato di Mantova (ASMn), Busta 2993, Libro 14, cc.53v-54. Transcribed in Stephen J. Campbell, *Cabinet of Eros*, 291.

²⁹ For a full transcription of Isabella's letter, see Stephen J. Campbell, *Cabinet of Eros*, 172-173. I have also located a version of the letter, either the original or a copy, in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), *Rogiti di Ser Francesca di Ser Maccario di Ser Andrea Maccari*, Protocollo 2, 284. M.13 (1497-1503), c. 284, 285, 286 r. My translation aligns mostly with Campbell's, though I have reviewed some of the paleographic details in the ASF version and made adjustments accordingly.

but darts of some baser material – either wood or iron, as you please.

She then goes on to discuss the environmental imagery as it relates to the narrative:

In order to give full expression to the story and for the ornament (orname[n]to della pictura) of the picture, the olive tree sacred to Pallas will rise out of the ground at her side, with a shield bearing the head of Medusa, and the owl, which is her emblem, will be seen in the branches of the tree. At the side of Venus, her favorite myrtle tree will flower, and to increase [the painting's] value (per maggior valo[ro]sa), a suitable scene in the distance [uno acomodato luntano]³⁰ like a river or the sea where one can see fauns, satyrs, and loves hastening to the help of Cupid – some flying through the air, others swimming on the waves borne on the wings of white swans, but all alike eager to take part in the Battle of Love. On the banks of the river, or on the shore of the sea, Jupiter will be seen in his character as the enemy of Chastity, changed into the bull that carries off the fair Europa.³¹

Though Isabella's composition is quite complex, featuring multiple figural groupings layered within a unified pictorial topography, she does not articulate what that topography should look like beyond noting a few key botanical elements and a body of water. Whether it is a river or a sea did not matter much to Isabella, so long as it presents a convincing sense of distance (*luntano*). This, she says, will increase the painting's artistic value (*per maggior valo[ro]sa*), making it even more worthy of praise. Paradoxically, Isabella's instructions show that landscape was an essential part of the painting, and also practically the only aspect of the composition she

³⁰ The transcription of "acomodato lontano" comes from Stephen J. Campbell, *Cabinet of Eros*, 172-3 (Note: In the text, I have adjusted the spelling to "*luntano*" because that is how it appears in the ASF document, f. 24). However, another expert (who prefers to remain anonymous) suggests a different transcription altogether: "uno ac[c]omodato fontano." If correct, it means Isabella said nothing about landscape besides the presence of an outdoor fountain. I tend towards Campbell's transcription, though the alternative presents interesting possibilities.

³¹ Ibid, 172-3. For clarity and flow, I have made minor adjustments to Campbell's translation.

was willing to leave up to the artist. Note that in closing she only insists on her creative control over the painting's figures:

[...] I send you all these incidents, in a small drawing (*picholo di segno*), which may help you to understand my explanations. If you think there are too many figures (*figure*) for one painting (*quadro*), you can reduce the number, as long as the principal ones remain [...] but do not add anything to them."³²

While the painting's figures were clearly more important to Isabella than its landscape, for Perugino, thinking through the pictorial topography would have been critical to the effective spatial organization of a composition so densely populated with figures in action. Indeed, Perugino expressed such concerns, citing Isabella's specifications for the figures' scale as a point of confusion and a potential compositional problem. In response to Perugino's misgivings, Isabella directed him to use Mantegna's *Parnassus* (Figure 4.13) as a model for scaling and staging figures in a landscape.

Completed five years prior as the *studiolo*'s first addition, Mantegna's tour-de-force canvas includes fifteen expressive figures, each in a distinct pose, interacting within a fantastical richly detailed topography. The number and diversity of the painting's environmental features surpasses that of its human figures. The landscape includes cliffs, mountains, plains, hills, and rock formations, some jutting out like crystals and others bending into arches. Enlivening the terrain is a kaleidoscopic array of flora and fauna. Unfortunately, no documents survive that can attest to Isabella's specific demands for Mantegna's painting, though the two probably discussed much in person, since he was frequenting the Mantuan court during that time. However they communicated, Isabella clearly requested a similar kind of painting as she had from Perugino: a multi-figure mythological scene with consistent light and scale. In fact, displayed side by side as

³² Ibid, 173.

they likely were in the *studiolo*, Mantegna's and Perugino's paintings reveal a similar horizon line and a semi-continuous landscape, albeit shown in diverse perspectival modes.³³ While both paintings share similar objectives and pictorial constraints, they achieve dramatically different results that, as the next section will show, have almost everything to do with the artists' diverse approaches to landscape: one of the *studiolo*'s unifying pictorial elements as well as the one least determined by the patron.

Land Space

Mantegna's *Parnassus* and Perugino's the *Battle of Love and Chastity* differ in their stylistic approaches to spatial organization and environmental imagery. Both aesthetic categories are bound up in the interrelated concepts of perspective, landscape, and distance that Blass-Simmens brings into view with her work on Bellini's "*lontani*." In both paintings, the outdoor topography is organized first and foremost to accommodate the complex figural arrangements. Each artist, however, tackles this problem differently. In the *Battle of Chastity and Love*, Perugino sets his figures in an expansive, verdant plain with some elevation at right, a limpid body of water at center, and a few low mountains in the distance. The primary figures appear in a frieze-like band across the plain in the foreground. The remaining figures are slotted in along three orthogonals set at equal intervals of distance. The figures diminish in scale according to the rules of linear perspective, culminating in the minute couple at center that mark the painting's vanishing point. While this perspectival approach produces a convincing illusion of outdoor

³³ This is according to the reconstruction presented in the Isabella d'Este Archive (IDEA) "Virtual Studiolo" project.

space all the more enhanced by the mountains' bluish haze, it restricts the artist's freedom to adjust the figures' scale and establish formal hierarchies that could clarify the narrative. Here, the viewer is presented with an overwhelming number of relatively homogenous figures, the most distant ones wearing emblems and engaged in activities that are difficult to make out due to their small scale. An example of this can be seen in the cupid-bearing swans approaching the lakeshore. In translating Isabella's poetic imagery of "cupids [...] borne on the wings of swans" into two dimensions, the figures shrink and appear mundane. They lose the whimsy of their verbal description. A similar effect can be witnessed in the figure of the Bull of Jupiter, another compelling element of Isabella's *poesia* that fades into the distance, losing its potential for dramatic force and expression.

While Perugino struggled with reconciling a convincing perspectival space with the legibility of a multi-figure outdoor narrative, Mantegna found a solution in using environmental features to create multiple variously elevated "stages" for his figures (admittedly fewer in number than Perugino's), thereby keeping all of them more or less in the foreground.³⁴ Most innovative and prominent among these is the organic archway, ambiguously stone and earth, that supports Venus and Isabella's husband (depicted in the guise of Mars) and opens onto a distant landscape. This environmental architecture allowed Mantegna to work against the diminishing force of linear perspective, creating a dynamic triangular composition with clear hierarchies and narrative flow, all while showcasing his skill for perspective (evident in the expertly rendered "luntani" visible through the archway).³⁵ A similar device can be seen in his *Suite of Cardinal*

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³⁴ Perugino's struggle with the figures' small scale is stated outright in his correspondence with Isabella. Stephen J. Campbell, *Cabinet of Eros*, Appendix II, 286.

³⁵ It is important to note that some parts of the distant landscape around the horizon line were retouched around 1520, probably by Mantegna's pupil Lorenzo Leonbruno. Barbara

Francesco (Figure 4.14) – also in the Ducal Palace – where he uses a natural archway to elevate important imagery (in this case, two representations of locally-resonant architecture), and reveal a perspectival landscape in the distance. In the *Parnassus*, he even marks the painting's vanishing point at the archway's center with a pair of figures. This perhaps inspired Perugino to do the same in his own painting five years later.

Beyond their diverse approaches to spatializing figural groupings within a perspectival landscape, these paintings diverge in their stylistic treatment of environmental imagery. Perugino uses atmospheric effects to cultivate a neutral, muted topography that disappears behind the figures who are his (and Isabella's) absolute priority. Figures are rendered to a higher degree of detail, variety, and finish than environmental imagery while flora and fauna are scant and repetitive in form. In simplifying the landscape this way, he successfully offsets the compositional busyness generated by the painting's many interacting figures. A different set of priorities are at play in Mantegna's painting where landscape vibrates with crisp detail and dramatic lines, competing with the figures for attention. Human and non-human forms are rendered harmoniously such that setting and subject fold into one another. Consider the anthropomorphic rock formation above Vulcan that echoes his triangular pose as well as the twin terraced hills that virtually extend the bodies of Mercury and Pegasus. Such details convey the potential of landscape to be figural, expressive, and poetic. Yet, Mantegna's anthropomorphism works both ways. Mountains are corporeal, bodies are marmoreal, and hair, foliage, fur, and clothing are rendered with egalitarian precision. Each tendril of Apollo's hair is outlined in a fine graphic line, as are the individual leaves of the fruit bush behind him. Mantegna indulges his

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Furlotti and Guido Rebecchini, *The Art of Mantua: Power and Patronage in the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 96.

proclivity for studying and stylizing natural forms by depicting an array of animals, plants, and geological forms lining the privileged position of the foreground. Chunks of a strange, conglomerate sedimentary stone break down into pebbles and particles that snake around an opening in the earth, a dark crevasse guarded by porcupines and rabbits. The sedimentary stone, fabulously textured with convex and concave forms, rhymes with the orange-speckled stone to its right which, in turn, forges affinities with Pegasus' elegantly spotted legs. The geological poetry of this painting is perhaps a reference to its lithic subject matter – Mount Parnassus. Whereas Perugino cleaves a spatial and stylistic distinction between figure and environment, Mantegna collapses that ontological divide.

The contrasts between these paintings would have been all the more apparent in viewing them side by side. Though linked by a single horizon line, the two landscapes clearly function differently for each artist. Whereas Perugino, echoing his patron, treats landscape as an opportunity to enhance a painting's beauty through ambient effects that are important but ultimately secondary to the narrative, Mantegna expresses a deep investment in exploring the potential for environmental imagery to actively participate in narrative. For him, landscape is a means of demonstrating skill in perspective, a flexible architectonic medium, and a boundless resource of textures and forms.

Conclusions

Taken together, Isabella's correspondence, the Ghirlandaio contract, and the Sanvito *modello* suggest that environmental imagery took form through a triangulation of the patron's demands, the requirements of the subject matter, and the artist's personal style. Analysis of these

discursive media (contracts, modelli, and correspondences) in light of the paintings they initiated, referred to, and produced suggests that even when the business of painting entailed strict designations for material, scale, and iconography, pictorial landscape remained an arena of creative freedom and opportunity. While this meant less to artists trained in Albertian aesthetics and therefore inclined towards spatial and stylistic hierarchies between human and environmental images, for artists working beyond that tradition (and indeed, that was the majority of Italian artists) it offered the occasion to experiment with the range of interpretive possibilities presented by environmental imagery.

This question of creative freedom is crucial because it means that the elaborate ecologies of landscape and labor visualized in so many paintings from this period derive less from the demands of patrons than from the artists' own imaginations. Therefore, in these painted landscapes, it is possible to see the world through their eyes. Analyzing the conditions, implications, and desires of that gaze is important for a number of reasons. As previous chapters have shown, painted landscapes inscribe notions of identity, security, and power. Furthermore, because painted landscapes present some of the best "evidence" of the historical landscape, they continue to drive approaches to environmental conservation and restoration today. For both of these reasons, the artist's relationship to the environment is salient to understanding how and why they represented it. The following section will historicize and contextualize the relationship between Renaissance artists and the physical environment, necessarily opening onto questions of class, labor, and economics.

Part Two: Secondary Hands

"The average layman would not have thought it wrong to enjoy nature; he would simply have said that nature was not enjoyable. The fields meant nothing but hard work (today agricultural labourers are almost the only class of the community who are not enthusiastic about natural beauty); the sea coast meant danger of storm and piracy. And beyond these more or less profitable parts of the earth's surface stretched an interminable area of forest and swamp." – Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art* (1976)³⁶

Building on the findings of Part One – that artists rather than patrons had primary responsibility for deciding what would populate their painted landscapes – this section will consider how the relationships between painters and the physical environment might have informed the artistic process from the design of painted landscapes to their execution in the workshop. This expands the context of artistic labor beyond the workshop walls, which, in turn, offers new insights on the labor dynamics and hierarchies within them. I begin Part Two with Kenneth Clark's matter-of-fact introduction to Landscape Into Art because, together with the Baxandall passage that opened Part One, it crystallizes the historiographic framework into which the present study intervenes. While Clark and Baxandall propose different explanations for the shift from gold to green (Clark cites spirituality and class while Baxandall points to the market value of pictorial skill) both of their explanations situate painted landscapes in relation to questions of labor and aesthetics. Neither, however, considers the physical environment itself as an active agent in the equation. Clark's argument turns on two flawed assumptions: that natural beauty precludes any evidence of human industry or work; and that class, particularly as it positions people in relation to nature, determines their ability to appreciate landscape imagery and visual aesthetics more broadly. In setting up binaries between those who engage the landscape intellectually rather than manually – those who contemplate the landscape rather than tend it – Clark reveals his own cultural position more than providing a useful framework for

³⁶ Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976), 3-4.

thinking about Renaissance art. Indeed, such binaries break down in the Renaissance painted landscape.

While the dense urban centers like Florence, Padua, and Urbino boasted little more green space than the occasional garden or knoll, their broader landscapes – the fertile countryside, the wilderness, the mountains, lakes, and sea – were constant features of the Renaissance painter's social and professional experience. Writings from Cennino Cennini to Giorgio Vasari show that painters often worked outdoors studying from nature and sourcing materials. They traveled throughout the peninsula and beyond, and frequently came from rural backgrounds. The painter's engagement with the physical environment was both physical and intellectual. Together, these modes of engagement comprised the foundation of knowledge and experience through which painted landscapes took form and made meaning.

Painted landscapes present the occasion to consider new aspects of artistic labor such as its environmental context (artists working outdoors), its relationship to other forms of outdoor work (which are commonly depicted and thematized in paintings from this period), and its internal social hierarchies. Exploring each of these phenomena, this section will establish a connection between the increasing complexity of Renaissance painted landscapes and the compartmentalization of duties in the workshop, suggesting that this resulted in landscape imagery being executed, and possibly even designed, by the workshop members required to work the most outdoors, that is, apprentices and assistants. If true, this challenges traditional narratives about the fifteenth century marking a shift in the status of the painter from collaborative artisan to individual artist painting everything "in his own hand." Such narratives,

³⁷ Similar issues of craftsmanship and the Burckhardtian myth of originality have been explored in *The Craft of Art: Originality and Industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque Workshop*, eds. Andrew Ladis, Carolyn H. Wood, William U. Eiland.

which are espoused to different degrees by Baxandall and Clark, are rooted in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, which traces an evolution of the status of the artist from the rural craftsman (Giotto) to the master of large workshop (Filippo Lippi), and finally to the solitary intellectual whose genius is partly defined by his ability to work without assistants (Michelangelo).³⁸

In countering this narrative with and through Renaissance painted landscapes, this chapter brings together discourses of landscape, labor, and visual art in new ways. For example, by situating artistic practice within a spectrum of professions that rely on and engage with the physical environment, it narrows the conceptual gap between fine arts and manual labor, thereby historicizing the nature of artistic work by grounding it in a set of material/practical constraints. This contributes to the substantial critical discourse surrounding concepts of artistic originality, as well as to eco-critical studies located at the intersection of art, labor, and ecology.³⁹

Artists Together Outdoors

The painter's professional engagement with the physical environment began from the moment they entered the workshop as an apprentice, or, in some cases, even earlier. In Vasari's biography of Giotto, for example, he romanticizes the artist's rural upbringing as a critical

³⁸ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, translated by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford Univesity Press, 1991).

³⁹ These ideas are informed in part by Grant H. Kester's book on contemporary collaborative art. Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); For more on concepts of originality in the Renaissance workshop, see Megan Holmes, "Copying Practices and Marketing Strategies in a Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painter's Workshop," in *Italian Renaissance Cities: Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation*, eds. Stephen Campbell and S. Milner (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Unuiversity Press, 2004), 38-74.

feature of his origin story. 40 According to Vasari, Giotto was born in the countryside fourteen miles from Florence to a father called Bondone. Vasari describes the patriarch as a "a tiller of the soil and humble person" who "raised [Giotto] properly and according to his station in life." 41 As the story goes, Giotto's artistic formation begins when Bondone entrusted him with a flock of sheep:

And while they wandered about the farm, grazing in one place or another, Giotto, led on by his natural inclination towards the art of drawing, would continually sketch something from the world of nature or something that he had imagined upon flat stones or upon the ground or sand.⁴²

Here, Vasari illuminates a pedagogical practice – sketching on stones and in the sand – that transcends the confines of the studio, instead relying on the physical environment as both medium and subject matter. While Vasari's words must always be taken with a grain of salt, this passage confirms similar forms of outdoor training described in other historical sources. For example, Cennino Cennini's *Il Libro dell'Arte* – a popular artists' manual that instructs its readers on everything from grinding pigments to painting a convincing dead body – describes the elaborate processes of sourcing organic materials, preparing surfaces, and executing imagery for panel and fresco painting. ⁴³ These materials include rabbit skin (for glue), burnishing stones (for gilding), and natural pigments such as *terra verde* (literally "green earth"). While artists might have purchased more specialized materials from vendors (ex. gold sheets and *lapis lazuli*), for more basic materials like earth-based pigments, freshwater, and stones (either for burnishing or studying as natural forms) they likely would have bypassed the middleman, going out into the

⁴⁰ Many thanks to Rebecca Zorach for calling my attention to this story.

⁴¹ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 15.

⁴² Ibid, 15-16.

⁴³ Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte* (Venice: F. Le Monier, 1859).

environment themselves or – more likely – sending an apprentice. According to Cennini, a crucial aspect of artistic labor (and therefore artistic training) was the ability to procure and manipulate tools and materials. This not only required familiarity with global markets, but intimate knowledge of the local landscape and its ecology.

That the work of artists, and especially apprentices, involved significant engagement with the physical environment remained true through the fifteenth century as well. Evidence for this can be found in Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks which more than once instruct young artists to study outdoors "from nature" using organic, found materials. 44 For example, in a passage about learning foreshortening he writes: "draw a straight line at random on a wall, and each of you, taking a blade of grass or straw in his hand, try to cut it to the length that the line drawn appears to him to be, standing at a distance of 10 braccia."45 Such directives paint a picture of young artists meeting outside of the studio to hone their craft, using the physical environment as a resource of imagery and materials as well as a site in which to build community with their peers. While Leonardo advises that studying alone is better than dealing with chatty distracting colleagues, he ultimately advocates for group-learning because it stimulates the mind, generates healthy competition, and ensures mutual accountability. He writes, "I say and insist that drawing in company is better than alone [...] [A] wholesome emulation will stimulate you to be among those who are more praised than yourself, and this praise of others will spur you on."46 Contrary to the Renaissance mythologies of genius curmudgeons like Michelangelo, artistic practice was collaborative and communal by nature. Furthermore, much of it took place outdoors.

⁴⁴ Leonardo Da Vinci, *Leonardo's Notebooks: Writing and Art of the Great Master*, ed. Anna H. Suh (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2005), 46.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 46.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 388.

Beyond serving as a pedagogical resource and a site in which young artists fostered social ties, the physical environment also presented an endless bounty of formal models. Leonardo seeks to enumerate these in yet another musing on artistic formation:

Do you not see how many kinds of things there are besides those made by men? Do you not see how many different animals, trees, flowers, varieties of places – mountainous and flat –, springs, rivers, cities, buildings – public and private –, instruments used by humans, various clothes and ornaments and arts? All of these things belong of equal operation and goodness to those of you who wish to call yourselves good painters.⁴⁷

Lamenting the artist "who only knows how to paint figures well" ("che solo una figura fa bene"), Leonardo makes an impassioned call for young artists to value pictorial landscape for its variety (varietà) and diversity (diversità) of forms, which, as we have seen, was a common refrain among artists, writers, and patrons of the time.

While copying images from nature had significant theoretical and theological stakes during the fifteenth century (as has been robustly addressed in scholarship on naturalism⁴⁸) it also had practical constraints and physical realities that merit incorporation into the vast discourse on art and nature.⁴⁹ To elucidate this intersection of practical and theoretical concerns,

⁴⁷ Translation mine. "Or non vedi tu quanti e qual[i] atti sieno solo fatti da li omini? Non vedi quanti diversi animali e così albori, erbe, fiori, varietà di siti montuosi e piani, fonti fiumi, città, edifizi pubblici e private, strumenti opportuni all'uso umano, vari abiti e ornamenti e arti? Tutte que[ste] cose appartengano d'essere, di pari operazione e bontà usate da quell oche tu vogli chiamare bon pittore." Leonardo da Vinci, *Manoscritto A dell'Institut de France*, 105v (Digital Copy: https://www.leonardodigitale.com)

⁴⁸ For a review of this historiography, see Sarah Guerin, "The Nature of Naturalism: A Trans-Historical Examination," in *Canadian Art Review* 41 (2016): 5-16. See also: Edward J. Olszewski, "Renaissance Naturalism: The Rare and the Ephemeral in Art and Nature," in *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 1:2 (Winter 1982), 23-28; James S. Ackerman, *Origins, Imitation, Conventions: Representation in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

⁴⁹ There is an extensive bibliography on Renaissance theories of art and nature that I can only gesture towards here. Some key texts include Otto Pächt, "Early Italian Nature Studies and the Early Calendar Landscape," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1950), 13-47; Mary Garrard, *Brunelleschi's Egg: Nature, Art, and Gender in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, and Gold:*

let us compare two more Leonardo passages about copying from nature. The first instructs artists to take inspiration from natural accidents:

[...] when you look at a wall spotted with stains, or with a mixture of stones, if you have to devise some scene, you may discover a resemblance to various landscapes, beautified with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, wide valleys, and hills in a varied arrangement; or again you may see battles and figures in action; or strange faces and costumes, and an endless variety of objects, which you could reduce to complete and well-drawn forms. And these appear on such walls confusedly, like the sound of bells in whose jangle you may find any name or word you choose to imagine.⁵⁰

Describing a collaborative mode of invention between artists and their surroundings, this passage is both a poetic excursus on creative inspiration as well as evidence for the outdoor context of creative work. If based in a real practice, this passage describes a situation in which artists spend significant time before a building studying, imagining, inventing, and then committing those designs to paper before bringing them back to the workshop for transfer to panel. Such a procedure is confirmed by yet another passage by Leonardo, in this case one that is explicitly practical in nature. Instructing on how to accurately represent a "place" ("un sito") he writes:

[...] have a nice piece of glass as large as half a sheet of royal folio paper and set this firmly in front of your eyes, that is, between your eye and the thing you want to draw; then place yourself at a distance of 2/3 of a *braccia* from the glass, fixing your head with a machine in such a way that you cannot move it at all. Then shut or entirely cover one eye and with a brush or red chalk draw upon the glass that which you see beyond it. Then trace it on a paper from the glass, afterwards transfer it on to paper, and paint it if you like, carefully attending to the aerial perspective (*prospettiva aerea*).⁵¹

Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005); Jan Biolostocki, "The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity," in *The Renaissance and Mannerism* 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁵⁰ Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo's Notebooks*, 47-48.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 379. For Leonardo's definition of aerial perspective, see Leonardo da Vinci, *Manoscritto A dell'Institut de France*, 105v (Digital Copy: https://www.leonardodigitale.com).

In addition to showing that artistic work demanded significant time and experience outside of the workshop, Leonardo's passages elucidate two distinct approaches to painting "from nature." The first takes inspiration from naturally occurring forms, which are then completed and re-arranged in the artist's mind through processes of *invenzione* while the second seeks to restrict the artist's creative input and facilitate a sort of "direct transfer" from landscape to glass to paper to panel. Leonardo's two forms of naturalism present a productive framework through which to interpret iconographies of landscape, which interlocutors too-often reduce to a set of discrete pictorial forms emptied of their physicality and material presence. Take, for example, Clark's passage on the iconography of mountains in early Renaissance ("Gothic") art.

The mountains of the Gothic landscape, those strange, twisted rocks, which rise so abruptly from the plain, are in fact part of a very ancient pictorial tradition. They certainly go back to Hellenistic painting, and survive in manuscripts, like the Utrecht psalter, which are based on antique models. They were common in Byzantine art, as it has come down to us in mosaics and illumination; and they become the central motive of those icons which represent the desert of Sinai. [...] They survive simply because they were a convenient symbol; and if we ask why it was still necessary to use a sort of ideogram for mountains when other natural objects were treated realistically, one answer is that mountains were so large and inapprehensible." ⁵²

While Clark shrewdly identifies an iconographic and stylistic continuity across centuries and media, in doing so, he flattens the mountain's looming physicality into tidy two-dimensional contours. He zeroes in on the *idea* of the mountain at the expense of reckoning with its physical properties and presence, "so large and inapprehensible." This does not align with historical perspectives on representing the physical environment. As a point of comparison, consider Cennino Cennini's instructions for "The Way to Copy a Mountain from Nature."

If you want to acquire a good style for mountains, and to have them look natural (*naturali*), get some large stones, rugged, and not cleaned up

⁵² Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art*, 18-19.

(scogliose e non polite); and copy them from nature (del' naturale), applying the lights and the dark as your system requires.⁵³

Cennini's passage is brief, but suggestive. Let us pause and imagine the scenario for a moment. The panel is prepared, the gilding is done, and now it is time to paint a mountain. The artist heads out to a riverbed on the Arno, or perhaps a bit further to the Apennine foothills (Cennini wrote in Florence). He fills a satchel with several hard "rugged" stones, carefully selecting those with the most interesting surface effects – fractures, speckles, moss, and dirt. Perhaps he holds up the rock to compare its surface with that of the distant mountain face, contemplating how the two are different and alike. Satisfied with his selection, he dons his satchel, which now sags with the heft of stones, and heads back to the workshop, bringing the outdoors indoors. With its invocation of the organic and its metonymic poetry of a rock as a mountain, Cennini's passage describes a mode of "realistic" painting (to repeat Clark's language) that is far more complex than Clark's framework of "ideograms" vs. "natural objects treated realistically." It illuminates a capacious artistic modality that draws dually from conventional formal vocabularies as well as from personal engagements with the physical environment. The moment is prepared to the stone of the painting of the section of the organic and its metonymic poetry of a rock as a mountain, Cennini's passage describes a mode of "realistic" painting (to repeat Clark's language) that is far more complex than Clark's framework of "ideograms" vs. "natural objects

⁵³"Il modo del ritrarre una montagna del naturale: Se vuoi pigliare buona maniera di montagne, e che piano naturali, togli di pietre grandi che sieno scogliose e non polite; e ritra'ne del naturale, dando I lumi e scuro, secondo che la ragione t'acconsente." Cennino Cennini, *Il Libro dell'Arte*, 61.

⁵⁴ Interestingly, the *Decameron* (eighth day, third story) describes a similar scenario wherin Calendrino, Bruno, and the Florentine painter Buffalmaco go out to a riverbed of the Arno in search of a special stone that Calendrino believes will render him invisible. Giovanni Boccacio, *The Decameron*, translated by Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (London: Penguin, 1982).

⁵⁵ This idea engages with Ernst Gombrich's model of schema and correction and David Summers expansion of that framework in his book *Real Spaces*. Thinking about real and virtual worlds, Summers argues that all art objects are experienced by human bodies with specific physical and cultural conditions. He shows that a truly global art history (what he calls "World Art") is only possible if art historians consider these unifying features of art objects. Ernst

Taken together, Vasari's, Leonardo's, and Cennini's texts illuminate a range of artistic practices that took place outdoors, from sourcing pigments to studying mountains to inventing compositions out of stains on a wall. For the Renaissance artist, the physical environment was at once a sourcebook, a medium, and a workspace. I propose, then, that artistic practice should be understood as part of a broad spectrum of labor performed through environmental engagement. This understanding can add crucial dimension to art historical interpretations. For instance, spending extended time working outdoors, both within the city walls and beyond them, surely impacted the painters' social status and public persona, not to mention presenting yet another professional barrier for women who, as the previous chapter showed, were not permitted equal freedoms of outdoor mobility and visibility. Furthermore, it could help explain why fifteenth-century landscapes so frequently and attentively represent outdoor industries such as milling, fishing, and farming; or why pastoral imagery flourished in religious painting during this time. As Chapter Two demonstrated, spiritual metaphors can only go so far in explaining the proliferation of this imagery.

In drawing these connections, I do not mean to equate the labor of painters with that of manual laborers, but rather to think about the context and conditions of both forms of labor with respect to the physical environment.⁵⁶ Seen this way, painted landscapes present the opportunity to imagine many kinds of workers as part of an integrated community, rather than segregating

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Gombrich, Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance (London: Phaidon, 1966); David Summers, Real Spaces: world art history and the rise of Western Modernism (London: Phaidon, 2003).

⁵⁶ The present study focuses on the outdoor context of artistic work, but it does not seek to connect environmental imagery to socio-historical developments in the agrarian economy. Such arguments have already been made by Max Weber, Martin Warnke, and Jacob Wamburg. For a brief summary of this bibliography, see *Landscape Theory*, eds. James Elkins and Rachel Ziady DeLue (New York: Routledge, 2008), 96.

them into different categories of historical inquiry. This is important in countering discourses of art history, exemplified by Clark's *Landscape into Art*, which manufacture strict divisions between intellectual and physical labor. These dialectics persist across the discipline in overemphasized distinctions between artistry and craftsmanship and the work of masters versus their assistants. As we will continue to see, Renaissance sources reveal a different, more nuanced ontology of artistic labor and professional hierarchies. Focusing on how workshops adapted to new demands for landscape over gilded backgrounds, this next section will show that, whether gold or green, the space of background has always presented the opportunity for collaborative creation.

Distributions of Labor

In *Painting and Experience*, Baxandall characterized the rise of painted landscape as symptomatic of the broader shift from "gold to brush," a means for patrons to replace the material riches of gold with demonstrations of the master artist's investment of labor and pictorial skill. As evidence for this shift in taste, he cites the two contracts analyzed earlier as well as Book Two of *On Painting* where Leon Battista Alberti admonishes artists who rely on actual gold rather than pictorial illusion to represent all things glittery and golden.⁵⁷ While Baxandall's argument sheds crucial light on the economic and social dimensions of artistic experience, it also makes a number of tenuous assumptions about artistic labor. First, it assumes that period audiences would have seen painted landscapes as more labor-intensive and skillful than gilding. Gilding was, in fact, an incredibly complicated process that required significant

⁵⁷ Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting, 85.

expertise and artistry *as well as* pictorial skill. Most gilded surfaces featured elaborate punchwork and incisions, sometimes even figurative imagery. Second, his argument overestimates Alberti's influence on artistic production, especially beyond the Florentine context. For example, as noted in the dissertation's introduction, throughout Northern and Central Italy, gold and landscape backgrounds flourished simultaneously, appearing side by side in collections and sometimes even within the same work such as Carlo Crivelli's *Brera Crucifixion* (Figure 4.15). Finally, and most crucially, requirements for paintings to be executed in the painter's own hand almost never extended to the landscape. In fact, they specifically left it out.

As discussed in Part One of this chapter, the fifteenth century saw a rise in contractual language that legally required that whole works or specific parts of them be executed in the master artist's own hand (*sua mano*).⁵⁸ A representative example can be seen in another Ghirlandaio contract for an altarpiece (now destroyed) made for the church of San Francesco in Prato. It reads: "[...] and these saints I, Domenico, must diligently draw by my hand and colour all the heads." Sua mano stipulations like Ghirlandaio's were usually limited to the human figures, specifically, faces, hands, and draperies. However, even when they specified the entire work, there seems to have been a flexible understanding of how that would actually play out in practice. For example, the contract for Filippino Lippi's Strozzi chapel frescoes undermines itself by stipulating that Filippino complete the commission: "all in his own hand, and especially the

⁵⁸ Knut F. Kroepelien, Sua mano and modo et forma *Requirements: Balancing Individual Creativity and Collective Traditions in Contracts for Altarpieces in the Italian Renaissance* (Dissertation: University of Oslo, 2008), 27-29.

⁵⁹ "e quali santi debbo io Domenicho diligientemente disegnare di mia mano ecchosi chlororire tutte le teste." Ibid, 49.

figures."⁶⁰ The "especially" here suggests an expectation that master artists leave background content (landscape and architecture) to their assistants even when authorship was of primary concern. The fact that *sua mano* requirements effectively exclude the landscape poses a problem for Baxandall's claim that patrons requested landscape backgrounds to increase the master artist's hand and illusionistic skill in the work. Indeed, in naming which parts of the composition the artist must execute "in his own hand," *sua mano* clauses also dictate, implicitly, which spaces can be executed by the hands of others (under the master's supervision, of course). It would follow that landscape fell under the purview of these *altre mani*.

Sua Mano / Altre Mani

Without mentioning landscape specifically, art historian Knut Kroepelein all but comes to this conclusion in his dissertation on *sua mano* clauses, noting that their primary function was to ensure that master artists occupied themselves "with the main parts of the painting (such as the Virgin and the saints), not the *predella* and the background" and that there is "little evidence that clients expected a painting that had only been made by one person." Paired with his findings that "the *sua mano* clause seems to have had limited general impact on the traditional division of labour in workshops," it would follow that the same category of workshop members tasked with gilding backgrounds – that is, assistants rather than masters – would have adapted their skills towards a new kind of background: landscapes. While this sounds unlikely at first, it is worth noting that gilding and painting require similar skills (brushwork, preparing ground, creating

⁶⁰ Hannelore Glasser, Artists' Contracts of the Early Renaissance, 75.

⁶¹ Knut Kroepelien, Sua mano and modo et forma *Requirements*, 63.

⁶² Ibid, 56.

pattern through punchwork or *incisioni*) and materials (rabbit skin glue, *gesso*, red bole, minkhair brushes, etc.). Indeed, one could reasonably argue that gilding is closer to painting than metalwork, especially because the arduous task of creating the thin sheets from gold coins was handled by a different set of specialists altogether called goldbeaters (*battilori*).

If we accept the hypothesis that in a thriving workshop, background – gilded or green – was typically delegated to assistants; and we pair this with the revelation that the assistant's job often called them outdoors to interact with nature, there emerges a new set of entanglements between artistic labor, artistic invention, and the physical environment. Thus, where Baxandall sees the fifteenth-century landscape background as a territory of negotiation between artist and patron, perhaps it is better understood as a site of collaboration between artist and assistant, and furthermore, between assistant and the physical environment.

The fact that assistants commonly painted backgrounds is often alluded to anecdotally, but there is much work to be done on understanding how this actually worked out in practice. While sixteenth-century sources sometimes name the assistant tasked with landscape backgrounds (Titian's assistant Lambert Sustris, for example), that kind of direct evidence is uncommon for the fifteenth century. Few contracts from this period survive especially beyond the Tuscan context, and there are even fewer *modelli* and artists' books. Necessarily then, arguments about workshop process during this time must be grounded in specific examples and, when generalized, remain speculative and flexible. The best evidence for the execution and design of landscapes comes from techniques of connoisseurship and the material/visual evidence of the paintings themselves. While connoisseurship has long associated multiple hands with a

⁶³ Federico Zeri, *Italian Paintings: A Catalogue of the Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Venetian School* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973), 53.

diluted sense of originality, it can also be deployed to seek evidence of dynamic collaborations between individuals.

Though every workshop was different, visual and technical evidence shows that background landscapes were typically painted first, and the figures added after. This can be seen with the naked eye across a number of fifteenth-century works, including Carlo Crivelli's Castel Trosino Crucifixion (Figure 4.16), whose paint layers show that the Crucifixion triad was painted after the rocky landscape. Interestingly, X-ray photography of the painting also shows two distinct approaches to transferring the figural and landscape compositions (Figure 17). A series of sharp broken marks outlining the figures' bodies, clothing, and facial details suggest that their design was transferred from a drawing, while the background imagery's uninterrupted incisioni and fluid, sketchy lines evidence a different mode of design transfer, or perhaps even direct application. The architectural lines, for instance, appear to have been drawn onto the panel using a straight-edge, and the trees, cliffs, and rocks are mostly rendered in loose brushwork. This evidence cannot confirm whether Crivelli designed and executed all of the imagery himself. It can, however, show that drafting figures and landscape demanded different skills, approaches, and preparatory materials. This allows us to make two logical assumptions. First, that within a workshop setting with compartmentalized duties, different hands could have been responsible for figural and environmental imagery.⁶⁴ Second, and relatedly, paintings with more figures would have required more direct involvement by the master artist while paintings with significant

⁶⁴ Writing about Giovanni Bellini's workshop practice, David Wallace Maze implies that such compartmentalized labor structures were the norm. He characterizes Bellini's practice of assigning one assistant per commission (rather than several with different specialties) as unordinary. *Giovanni Bellini: Landscapes of Faith in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Davide Gasparotto (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2017), 43. For more on the Bellini workshop, see Daniel Wallace Maze's dissertation "The Bellini Workshop: Emancipations, Enterprises, and *Cittadini Originari*" (Dissertation: UCLA, 2013).

landscapes demanded more labor from assistants. It is a compelling possibility that a painting's ratio of figure/landscape could relate to its potential for assistant's involvement and, as a result, artistic collaboration. Countering Baxandall's argument, this would suggest that landscapes presented master artists with the opportunity to offload labor, not increase it.

The degree to which assistants were involved in the design and execution of landscapes cannot be broadly and definitively proven beyond connoisseurial evidence, but a strong case can be made of the plausibility of these conditions by taking account of means, motive, and opportunity. The means boil down to two facts: that master artists were increasingly busy with figural imagery and that the outdoor nature of much artistic training and labor meant that assistants were just as equipped as master artists to paint locally resonant landscapes. This kind of evocative, familiar imagery that transcends religious symbolism and textual references is precisely what stands out in fifteenth-century painted landscapes, especially those that emerged from the Adriatic workshops.

Beyond the pleasure of studying and representing one's surroundings, the motivation for assistants to take on the responsibility of painted landscapes probably came down to experience and professional advancement. While master artists, paid directly by patrons, could negotiate competitive rates and secure themselves a middle-class social standing somewhere above agricultural laborers and below wealthy merchants, their assistants relied on some combination of the master's distribution of wages, tips from the patron, and, possibly in some cases, financial support from the painters' guild.⁶⁵ Indeed, some assistants might have had more in common

⁶⁵ Regarding tips for assistants: a 1504 payment for Cima da Conegliano's *Incredulity of St. Thomas* altarpiece included 8 *soldi* for the porters who carried the altarpiece to the site and 2 *lire* for Cima's assistants ("per pagar lo beveraso alli garzoni del magistro"). Cited in Jill Dunkerton's *Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 134.

socially and economically with other outdoor workers than they did with their own bosses. After years of apprenticeship, the assistant would gain more responsibilities with the hopes that their individual talents and flair might attract an independent commission, thereby allowing them to leave the workshop and open their own. Painted landscapes – which during this period featured increasingly complex and diverse kinds of imagery *including* human figures – would have been an ideal forum in which to showcase the range of one's skill in design and technique, as well as one's level of preparedness to go out on their own.

Finally, the opportunity for assistants to cut their teeth on landscape imagery emerged in the shift in patrons' taste (as expressed in contracts) for less gold and more figures in the artist's own hand. This opened up a kind of creative vacuum, making pictorial background available for new kinds of non-figural (and non-determined) content precisely at the time that master artists were told to focus their attention elsewhere: on the figures. In sum, the secondary nature of landscape imagery made it available as an arena of creativity and competition among the workshop's secondary hands. Perhaps Baxandall was right in stating that painted landscape functioned as a vehicle for demonstrating the artist's authorial hand, but there is good reason to believe that the hand in question did not belong to the master but his assistant.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with a crisis of evidence: fifteenth-century writings about paintings indicate minimal interest in landscape while the paintings themselves demonstrate significant development in that area. The rest of the chapter sought to resolve this tension, ultimately arguing that a specific constellation of social, environmental, and artistic factors under-gird

one challenged the traditional argument that the shift from gold to green was motivated by patrons who wished to increase the master's personal output of labor and pictorial skill.

Marshalling literary, visual, and archival evidence against this claim, it showed that patrons' requirements rarely extended to the composition and execution of landscapes and, in leaving it out, effectively enabled and incentivized master artists to delegate that work to their assistants. Part Two then explored the implications of artists developing elaborate landscape iconographies that (according to the available evidence) their patrons did not appear to ask for. It interrogated the ways that artists engaged with landscape on a professional level, showing that the physical environment was a resource, a worksite, and an inspiration. Finally, it explored the possibility of assistants playing a significant role in the design and execution of landscapes, and laid out reasons why this is likely, even if unprovable. Ultimately, it proposed that the landscape background presented artists with a new arena to experiment with representing their own surroundings, and ambitious assistants with a pathway to creative and economic freedom.

EPILOGUE:

Critical Passages

This dissertation has advocated for a conception of Renaissance painted landscapes as dynamic sites of potential in which multiple creative voices and hands can come together to tether the world of the picture to the world of its makers and viewers. In closing, I want to reflect on how this relates to modern concerns about the conservation of Renaissance paintings and the landscapes to which they refer.

Fifteenth-century painted landscapes deeply inform modern understandings of what the world used to look like in an idyllic pre-industrial era. Examples of this phenomenon can be seen in Emilio Sereni's definitive *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape* which illustrates the chapters on feudal farming entirely with Renaissance paintings and frescoes; and in Rosetta Borchi's Giardino delle Rose Perdute, part of a series of eco-oriented projects that seek to reconstruct the historical landscapes of Piero della Francesca and Raphael. Yet, while Renaissance paintings are valuable resources for determining how historical communities have related to their surroundings, they are not transparent windows onto the world. Paintings are

¹ Medina Lasansky addresses related concerns in her work on heritage-driven urban renewal. Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004). See also Lasansky, *Hidden Histories: The Alternative Guide to Florence* + *Tuscany* (Florence: Didapress, 2018).

² Emilio Sereni, *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); The Giardino delle Rose Perdute project is not well-documented or accessible online besides a few tourism articles. I learned about the project from the creator's collaborator, Olivia Nesci, a geomorphologist who works on identifying the landscapes in Renaissance paintings. Their co-authored book is *Il Paesaggio Invisibile: la scoperta dei veri paesaggi di Piero della Francesca* (Ancona: il lavoro editoriale, 2013).

physical constructions with their own histories, politics, and motivations. As we have seen, their makers were invested in more than simply observing and documenting what they saw around them. They were also replicating models, experimenting with form, and inventing new kinds of places. Sometimes they were processing their surroundings, and sometimes they were just showing off. This is not to say Renaissance painted landscapes falsely represent the historical environment, but to suggest that any empirical truth they may express is also already filtered through the lens of embodied experience and imagination. In many ways, the visual record of this process of mediation is more valuable than empirical truth.

Value is yet another reason why the realism of Renaissance painted landscapes must be regarded through a critical lens. Landscape painting as a genre has been systematically undervalued; and Renaissance painted landscapes are even more ignored and less understood. As discussed in the dissertation's introduction, they hover in the discursive limbo of medieval naturalism and Baroque pastoralism. This has taken a toll on the objects themselves. Renaissance landscapes are often found damaged or painted over, as seen in the Ridolfo Ghirlandaio *Portrait of a Gentleman* (Figure E.1) discussed in Chapter Two. I initially presented that painting as a means of introducing how the influence of Netherlandish art has been a primary historiographic framework through which Italian Renaissance painted landscapes have been understood. Now, in light of the previous chapter's discussion of painted landscape as a site of collaborative labor, Ghirlandaio's portrait warrants a second look.

In it, the sitter beholds us severely from beneath a furrowed brow. His expertly modeled flesh and skin glows bronzy and alive, the realism enhanced by details like the soft sheen of his fingernails and his coarse gray stubble. Behind him, a lush and lively landscape beckons. Black-and-white photographs of the painting during treatment present a wholly different environment

than the one seen in the painting today (Figure E.2).³ While the sitter's piercing stare and expressive hands remain, the window of landscape is little more than smeared abraded pigment. Blurred and unevenly textured by centuries of wear, the forms in the window convey a Munchlike fever dream of landscape, a crash site where the paintings own material conditions have run up against the force of time.

The Art Institute's 1989 condition report details "extreme damage" to the landscape not only from wear, but from poor nineteenth-century restorations that, according to the head paintings conservator Frank Zuccari, were "virtually complete fabrication done in a style which was wholly inconsistent with the remaining fragments of original." Removing this restoration left little more than a single tuft of "original foliage" and "a ghost indicating the general outline of a tree." When the conservation team took on this project, they had to make a decision: show the painting as is, or in-paint the landscape to restore the entire painting to its original state as much as possible. In the end, they decided that a "largely conjectural reconstruction" of "these critical passages" would be needed for the painting to meet the museum's display standards. They built a new composition around what was left – one tuft of foliage and the ghost of a tree – and supplemented with imagery drawn from Netherlandish paintings, as they believed Italian artists from this period would have done. Finally, they distressed the surface so that "an

³The painting entered the Art Institute's collection damaged in 1955. Conservation File for Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of a Gentleman*, Art Institute of Chicago, Accession Number: 1933.1009.

⁴ Frank Zuccari, "Treatment Report: Portrait of a Gentleman of Florence, August 1989." Conservation File for Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of a Gentleman*, Art Institute of Chicago, Accession Number: 1933.1009.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ This is explored in-depth in Chapter Two.

informed viewer" could identify the modern intervention. The result is a convincing Renaissance painting with a background landscape that enhances the portrait's appeal, but in no way distracts from it. This was indeed the goal.

I end with this painting for two reasons. First, because it presents a thought-provoking example of how art history shapes, sometimes literally, its own subjects; and second, because it appears to pose an inexorable art historical problem – the landscape is not original, not painted in the artist's own hand – but it actually does the opposite. Bear with me. In characterizing a landscape background as a set of "critical passages" vital to the painting's broader composition, and in continuing the collaborative processes that defined the Renaissance workshop, Ghirlandaio's restored painting boasts its own kind of historical accuracy. Its truth-value is not based in documenting a historic landscape or indexing a master artist's "hand," but in cultivating a continuity of process and form. Presenting a site in which multiple hands come together, synthesize observed details with imagery from other visual models, and contextualize a painted figure in time and space, Ghirlandaio's heavily damaged and restored painting approximates Renaissance understandings of landscape, labor, and visual art.

Beyond questions of historical accuracy and conservation practice, the fact that a twentieth-century American museum could not fathom displaying this painting – a portrait – without restoring the background landscape (a generic rustic scene) speaks, I believe, to a deep and transcendent felt connection between humans and their surroundings. We desire to see ourselves situated, placed, surrounded, and we feel discomfort when that is taken away. In the Renaissance as today, landscape imagery resonates not because it is pleasing or beautiful in a

⁸ For more on the stakes of technical art history as applied to Renaissance paintings, see Caroline Fowler's, "Technical Art History as Method," in *The Art Bulletin* 101:4 (2019), 8-17.

Romantic sense, but because it performs an essential function of confirming and grounding our physical existence. In making and seeing and unmaking images of our world, we become active agents in our own processes of being. This is not only comforting, but crucial and generative, shaping our network of connections to other beings, human and non. There is a mutual feedback loop between the physical environment and its visual representations; yet it only exists in relation to the human actors – creators, stewards, interlocuters, and viewers – that intervene within it.

This dissertation presents one such intervention with the hopes of inspiring many more.

APPENDIX: FIGURES

Note: Due to copyright issues, some images are not reproduced here.

0.1 Sabrina Lumicisi. Aerial view of the American Academy in Rome. Fresco. 2013. American Academy in Rome.



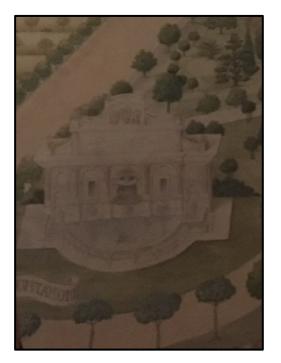
0.2 Sabrina Lumicisi. Details of the aerial view of the American Academy in Rome. Fresco. 2013. American Academy in Rome.





0.3 Fontana dell'Acqua Paola ("Il Fontanone") in Rome with corresponding detail from the American Academy fresco. Photos my own.



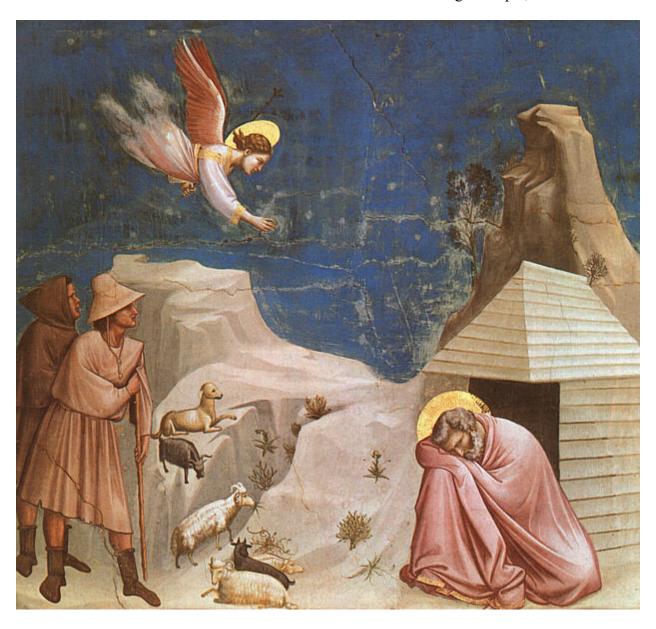


0.4 Top: Photo of Sabrina Lumicisi examining the mock-up of her composition. Bottom: Photo of Sabrina's assistants – me, Walter, and Matteo – preparing the design for transfer. 2011. Photos my own.





0.5 Giotto di Bondone. Joachim's Dream. Fresco. c.1303-05. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.



0.6 Pisanello. The Vision of St. Eustace. Tempera on panel. c.1438-42. National Gallery, London.



0.7 Jacob van Ruisdael. *Landscape with a Village in the Distance*. Oil on panel. 1646. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



0.8 John Constable. Wivenhoe Park, Essex. Oil on canvas. 1816. National Gallery, D.C.



0.9 Scheggia (Giovanni di Ser Giovanni). Portrait of a Lady. Tempera and gold on panel, transferred to canvas. c.1460. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



0.10 Fra Filippo Lippi. Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement. Tempera on panel. c.1440. The Metropolitan Museum, New York City.



0.11 Piero della Francesca. Portrait of the Duchess of Urbino. Oil on panel. c. 1474. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



0.12 Moretto da Brescia. Portrait of a Man. Oil on canvas. c.1520-25. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



0.13 Gentile da Fabriano. Madonna and Child. Tempera and gold on panel. c.1420. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



0.14 Carlo Crivelli. Madonna and Child. Tempera and gold on panel. c. 1480. Pinacoteca Civica di Ancona. Photo my own.



0.15 Raphael. The Alba Madonna. Oil on panel. c.1510. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



0.16 Carlo Crivelli. Crucifixion. Tempera and oil on panel. 1488-90. Brera Pinacoteca, Milan.



1.1 Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti. Allegory of Good and Bad Government. Fresco. 1338-39. Sala dei Nove, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.



1.2 Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti. Detail of the countryside in the Allegory of Good Government. Fresco. 1338-39. Sala dei Nove, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.





1.3 Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti. Detail of *Securitas* in the Allegory of Good Government. Fresco. 1338-39. Sala dei Nove, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.



1.4 Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti. Detail of the countryside in the Allegory of Bad Government. Fresco. 1338-39. Sala dei Nove, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.





1.5 Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti. Detail of *Timor* in the Allegory of Bad Government. Fresco. 1338-39. Sala dei Nove, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.

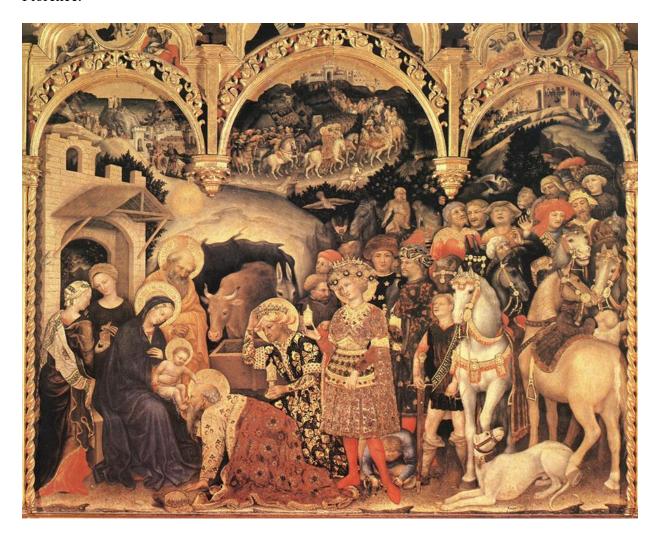


1.6 Carlo Crivelli. Madonna and Child. Tempera and gold on panel. c. 1480. Pinacoteca Civica di Ancona.





1.7 Gentile da Fabriano. Adoration of the Magi. Tempera on panel. 1423. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



1.8 Sano di Pietro. San Bernardino da Siena. Fresco. c.1450. Sala del Mappamundo, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.





1.9 Giovanni Bellini. St. Francis in the Desert. Oil on panel. c.1480. The Frick Collection, New York City.



1.10 Carlo Crivelli. Crucifixion. Tempera and oil on panel. 1488-90. Brera Pinacoteca, Milan.

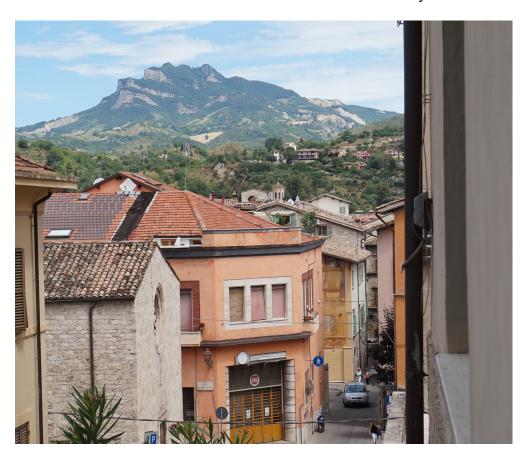




1.11 View of the Ascoli Piceno skyline. Photo my own.



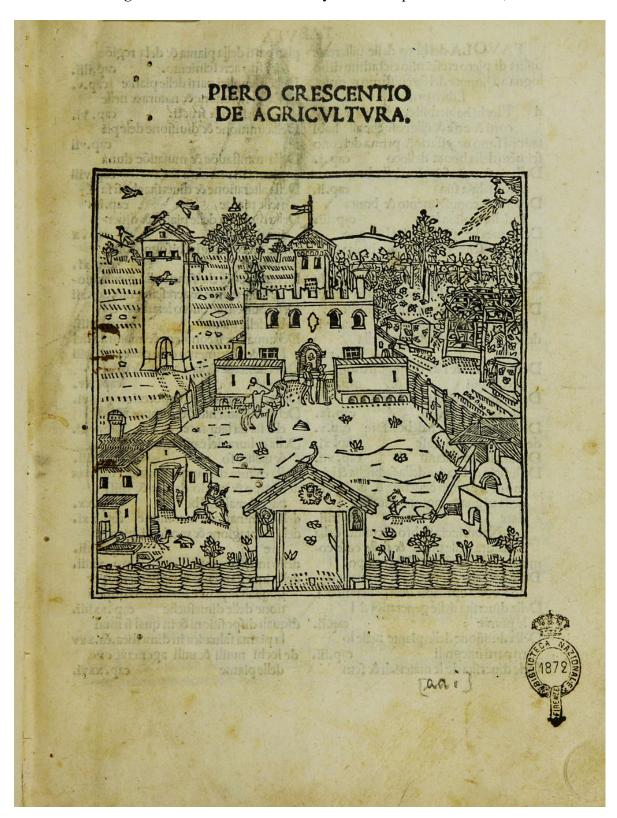
1.12 View of Monte Ascensione from Ascoli Piceno. Photos my own.



1.13 Fra Carnevale. Crucifixion. Tempera and oil on panel. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.



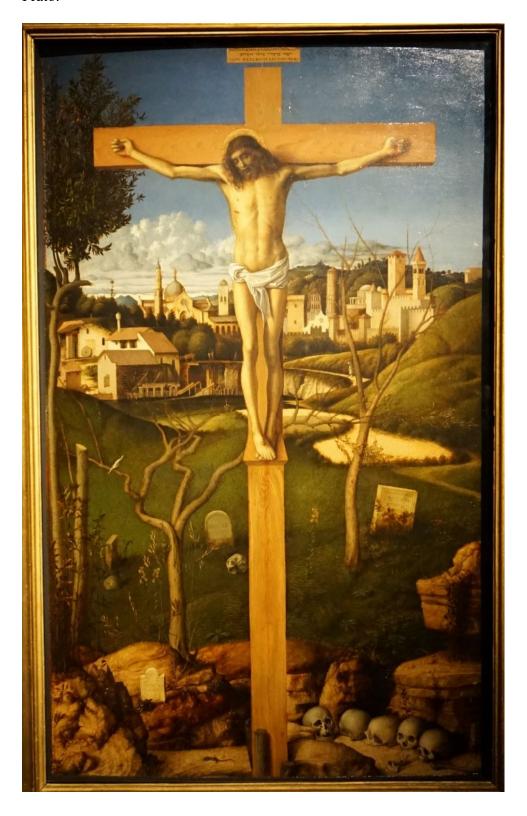
1.14 Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze Pal. E.6.2.31. Frontispiece for Piero Crescenzi's *De Agricultura*. Woodcut. Printed by Matteo Capasca in Venice, 1495.



1.15 Giovanni Francesco da Rimini. Madonna and Child. Tempera and oil on panel (?). c.1450. Private Collection, the Marche.



2.1 Giovanni Bellini. *Niccolini Crucifixion*. Oil on panel. c.1480-85. Galleria degli Alberti, Prato.





2.1b Detail of San Ciriaco



2.1c Detail of rural complex



2.1d Detail of wheat field



2.1e Detail of cemetery



2.1f Detail of tombstone, plants, and lizard



2.1g Detail of grapevine and dove



2.2 Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, Portrait of a Gentleman. Oil, probably with some tempera, on panel; transferred to canvas. c.1505. Art Institute of Chicago.



2.3 Frank Zuccari, paintings conservator at the Art Institute of Chicago. Reference sketches of buildings from the backgrounds of paintings by Joos van Cleve and Hans Memling. Located in conservation file.



2.4 Hans Memling. Man with a Rosary. Oil on panel. c.1484-90. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.



2.5 Joos van Cleve, workshop of. Holy Family. Oil on panel. c.1510. Museum of Mount Holyoke College.



2.6 Jan Van Eyck, after. Crucifixion. Oil on panel. Ca'd'Oro, Venice.



2.7 Photo of a *Plantago lagopus* (Mediterranean plantain) in Ancona. Photo my own.

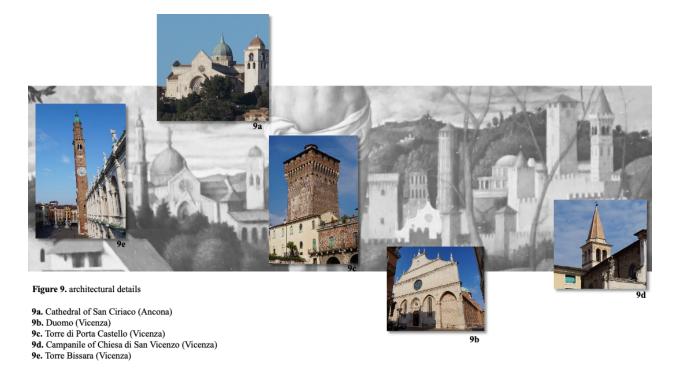




2.8 Giovanni Bellini. Dead Christ Supported by Angels. Tempera on panel. c.1453-55. Museo Correr, Venice.



2.9 Architectural details from the *Niccolini Crucifixion* superimposed with photographs of their real-world referents. Photos my own.



2.10 The Campo degli Ebrei (Jewish Cemetery) in Ancona, established in the fifteenth century. Photo my own.



2.11 Aerial view of Ancona's north-east coast including the Jewish Cemetery and the Cathedral of San Ciriaco. Image captured in Google Earth VR.



3.1 Piero della Francesca. Double Portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino. Oil on panel. c.1474. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

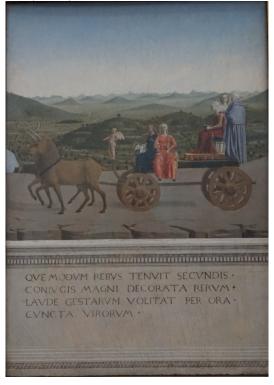


3.1 (recto)





3.1 (verso)





3.2 View of the Marche from Urbino looking south-east. Photo my own.



3.3 Hans Memling. Double Portrait of an Elderly Couple. Oil on panel. c.1470. Right: Musée du Louvre, Paris. Left: Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.



3.4 Fra Filippo Lippi. Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement. Tempera on panel. c.1440. The Metropolitan Museum, New York City.



3.5 Ercole de Roberti. Double Portrait of Giovanni II Bentivoglio and Ginevra Sforza Bentivoglio. Tempera on panel. c.1475. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.





3.6 Views *en route* from Sansepolcro to Urbino. Top: a land formation in Apecchio, near the Appenine Mountains. Bottom: hills in the Metauro valley between Urbino and Urbania.





3.7 Piero della Francesca. Detail of the landscape in the Portrait of the Duchess of Urbino. Oil on panel. c. 1474. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



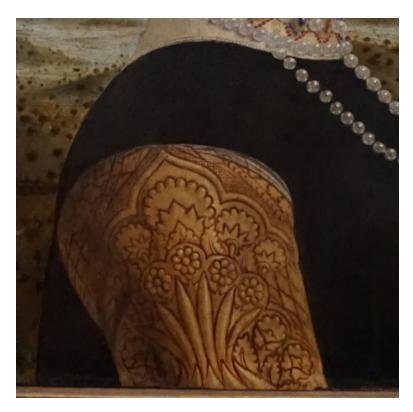
3.8 Piero della Francesca. Detail of the landscape in the Portrait of the Duke of Urbino. Oil on panel. c. 1474. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



3.9 Piero della Francesca. Detail of the pearls and the *cittadella* in the Portrait of the Duchess of Urbino. Oil on panel. c. 1474. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



3.10 Piero della Francesca. Detail of the Duchess's sleeve in the Portrait of the Duchess of Urbino. Oil on panel. c. 1474. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



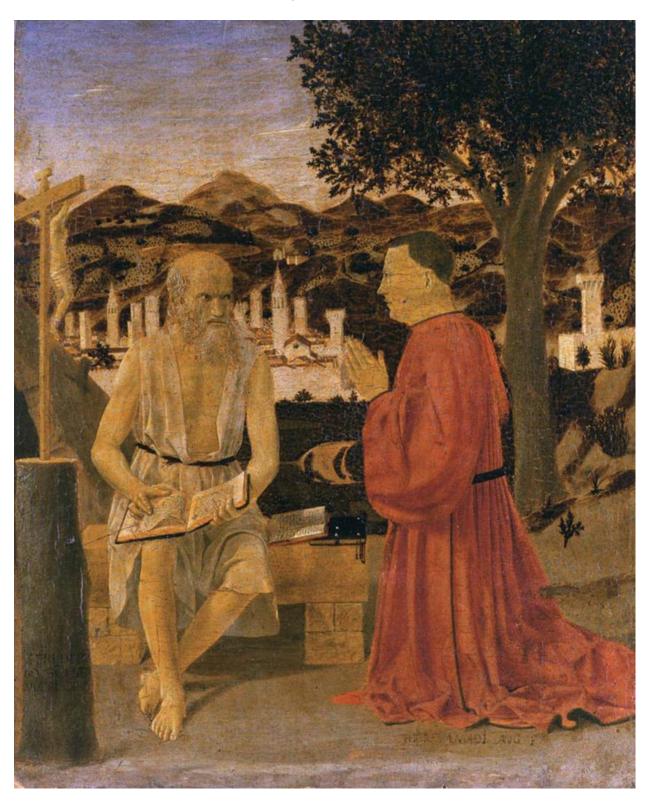
3.11 View of the Valmarrechia (near Pieve del Colle). Photo my own.



3.12 View of the Barca Ducale in Urbania. Photo my own.



3.13 Piero della Francesca. St. Jerome with a Donor (The Amadi Altarpiece). Tempera and oil on wood. 1440-1450. Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice.



3.14 Piero della Francesca. The Legend of the True Cross. Fresco. 1466. San Francesco, Arezzo.



3.15 Hans Memling. Allegory of Chastity. Oil on panel. 1475. Hermitage, St. Petersburg.



3.16 Giotto di Bondone. Allegory of Chastity. Fresco. c.1320. Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi.



3.17 Madonna and Child in a tabernacle frame. Rome. Photo Courtesy of Rachel Patt.



4.1 Domenico Ghirlandaio. The Visitation. Fresco. 1486-90. Tornabuoni Chapel, Florence



4.2-4.5 Cityscape of Ghirlandaio's Visitation (4.1) with architectural references



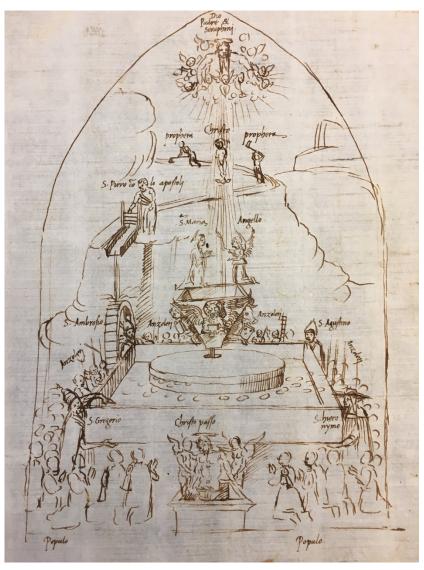
4.6 Left: detail of Dovizia figure from Ghirlandaio's Visitation (4.1) Right: View of the Mercato Vecchio, Florence. Calenzano, Bertini Collection. Photo courtesy of the Kunsthistorishces Institut, Florence.





4.7 Los Angeles, Getty Research Library 900255, f. 1. Bartolomeo Sanvito. Agreement between Bernardo de Lazara and Pietro Calzetta for the decoration of the Corpus Christi chapel in the Basilica of Sant'Antonio in Padua, 1466 Oct. 17.

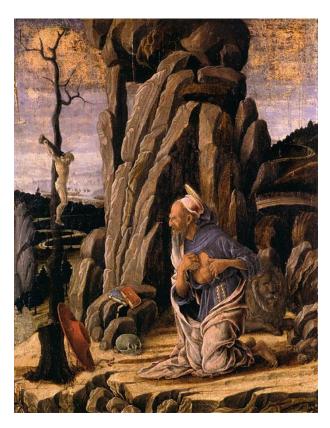




4.8 Andrea Mantegna. Adoration of the Shepherds. Tempera on panel; transferred to canvas. c.1450-51. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



4.9 Marco Zoppo. Penitent St. Jerome. Tempera on panel. 1465-66. Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna.



4.10 Alvise Vivarini. Crucifixion. Tempera and oil on wood. 1470-75. Museo Civico di Pesaro.



4.11 Carlo Crivelli. The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele Feretti. Tempera and oil on panel. 1480s. National Gallery, London.





4.12 Pietro Perugino. The Battle of Love and Chastity. Tempera on canvas. 1503. Louvre, Paris.



4.13 Andrea Mantegna. Parnassus. Tempera on canvas. 1497. Louvre, Paris.



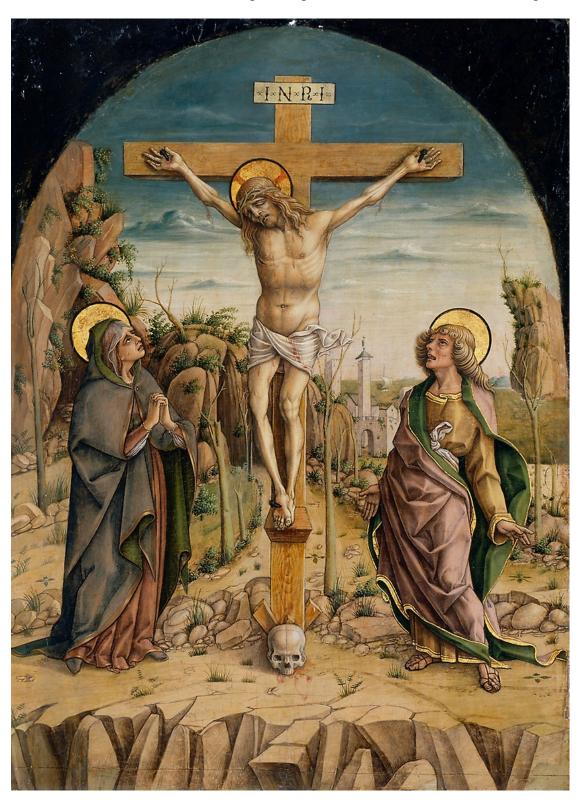




4.14 Andrea Mantegna. Suite of Cardinal Francesco. Oil on plaster. 1465-74. Camera degli Sposi, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua.



- 4.15 Carlo Crivelli. Crucifixion. Tempera and oil on panel. 1488-90. Brera Pinacoteca, Milan. [see Figure 1.10]
- 4.16 Carlo Crivelli. Crucifixion. Tempera on panel. c.1487. Art Institute of Chicago.



4.17 Reconstructed X-ray photograph of Carlo Crivelli's Crucifixion at the Art Institute of Chicago. Source images in conservation file.



- E.1 Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, Portrait of a Gentleman. Oil, probably with some tempera, on panel; transferred to canvas. c.1505. Art Institute of Chicago. [see Figure 2.2]
- E.2 Mid-treatment photograph of Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's Portrait of a Gentleman at the Art Institute of Chicago. Original in conservation file. Image courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago



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