

Greek Island Paradises: *Creating a new 'text' at the Court of Ferrara*

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Introduction

The medieval Castello Estense in Ferrara can be a cold, damp and inhospitable place. It was home to the ruling d'Este family from 1240 to 1597.¹ Looking at this vast stone fortress, it is easy to imagine the Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso d'Este I, recovering from an illness here in the autumn of 1511 and wishing he could escape to sunnier climes. One way he could achieve this was to enter into an imaginary world where nymphs and satyrs danced in sylvan glades, rivers ran red with wine and beautiful women lay naked on the beach.

Flowered garments and thrysi and fawn-skins have been cast aside as out of place for the moment, and the Bacchantes are not clashing their cymbals now, nor are the Satyrs playing the flute, nay, even Pan checks his wild dance that he many not disturb the maiden's sleep. Having arrayed himself in fine purple and wreathed his head with roses, Dionysus comes to the side of Ariadne, "drunk with love" as the Teian poet says of those who are overmastered by love. (Ariadne, *Imagines* I.xv)²

These were the Bacchanalian tales from Greek mythology set forth in Philostratus' *Imagines*. His sister, Isabella d'Este, the Marchesa of Mantua, lent a unique vernacular translation to the Duke. Written by a Greek Sophist identified as Philostratus the Elder, active in the early third century AD, the *Imagines* describes a rich gallery of Greco-Roman paintings.³

The first part of this paper looks at the early manuscripts of the *Imagines* and their readers leading up to the sixteenth century when the book became an iconographical source for a famous series of paintings commissioned by the d'Este family in an attempt to re-create antiquity. The second part of this paper addresses the question of whether paradise, once lost, can be re-forged, and the d'Este case study helps to assess the role this book played in shaping Renaissance concepts of the Classical world.⁴

The Text

The *Imagines* of Philostratus the Elder including the later addition by his grandson, Philostratus the Younger, is the only book surviving from antiquity that deals

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solely with the appreciation of painting.⁵ Other ancient texts contain ekphrasis describing works of art, but unlike the *Imagines*, they are abstracts taken out of context and were not conceived as single texts dedicated to painting. These include Lucianus of Samosata's description of *The Calumny of Apelles* and Longus' description of a painting seen on Lesbos in the romance *Daphnis and Chloe*.⁶ Whilst the so-called *Tabula of Cebes* takes a painting as its vehicle for a dialogue, the aim of the work is not art appreciation but a philosophical excursion into the conditions of human life.⁷

The *Imagines* consists of translations of images into words. Philostratus is not interested in the sort of travel log art history practiced by Pliny the Elder.⁸ Instead, he aims to instill some kind of art awareness into his audience, showing them how to "interpret paintings and appreciate what is esteemed in them" (Proem). Philostratus educates his audience on art whilst simultaneously using the discussion as a platform from which to narrate a wide range of Greek myths. This discourse on Greek mythology is wrapped up in a virtuoso oral performance intended to be used as an exemplar by his pupils of rhetoric. Consequently, the *Imagines* of Philostratus the Elder and Younger have a threefold academic purpose encompassing art, language and cultural history. The Elder's compilation of formal descriptions, or *ekphrases*, which describe a gallery of sixty-five masterpieces of painting, can be read as a captivating literary device by which Roman philhellenes of the 3rd century could step back in time to a distant Greek past via Philostratus' "pure attic Greek" and the exclusively Greek subject matter.⁹ More specifically, the *Imagines* is written for the children of these affluent philhellenes and the text's pedagogic nature is central to our understanding of it. As a grammatical primer for the learning of rhetoric, the *Imagines* enjoyed its longest success. From the time it appeared in the third century AD till its transmission from the Byzantine East to the Renaissance West, the *Imagines* was used in the teaching of classical ekphrasis and rhetoric. It was not until the text re-appeared in sixteenth century Italy that anyone took much interest in its significance as a document of art historical value. Despite no evidence the gallery itself existed, Renaissance patrons and artists were perhaps justified in looking to the *Imagines* for authenticity as the paintings described by the Philostratoi have few inconsistencies with what we know today of Greco-Roman art.

Crossing Cultures: the Imagines before Titian's d'Este paintings

Whilst the period circa 1490-1520 is recognized as the re-birth of mythological painting that occurred predominantly in Italy, little is known about the methods by which artists ignorant of Greek and Latin were able to paint pictures based on Classical texts. With only a few exceptions the Renaissance artist did not receive a

Classical grammar school education.¹⁰ Obligated to become the interpreters of antiquity they were not the *readers* of antiquity, at least not until things were made easy for artists in the shape of vernacular translations and later illustrated translations such as the 1614 French edition of Philostratus.¹¹

Renaissance artists long schooled in Christian iconography were academically unprepared to meet the demand for a new and fashionable taste for mythological subjects in art. Court humanists were the guardians of the written word, privileged by education and position to converse with the ancients. Patrons like Isabella and Alfonso d'Este would consult humanist scholars such as Mario Equicola, Paride da Ceserara and Pietro Bembo, when deciding upon a programme of decoration. The scholars found suitable subjects from the ancient authors; Ovid, Lucianus, Catullus, Lucretius and Philostratus. Artists were then given instructions orally and by letter and sometimes, hand-written translations to work from.

Letter to Isabella d'Este from the agent Francesco Malatesta in relation to a commission to the artist Perugino:

he [Perugino] asks for you to send the measurements of the picture and similarly the figures to go on it, and to write out the story or subject of the painting as you want it to be. He will then send a reply about the price and the time that it will take him to do it.¹²

Isabella went so far as to provide artists with sketches of her own, dictating to Perugino where figures should stand in the picture and what size they should be.¹³

The manuscripts

The story of how the *Imagines* arrived in Italy is not known. It could be as early as the thirteenth century when Greek émigrés were recorded at centres of learning in Northern Italy.¹⁴ Much is written about the migration of Greeks to Italy after the fall of Byzantium in 1453 though many crossed over beforehand. Demetrio Chalcocondylas, Alessandro Zenos, Nicolas Leonicos, Marino Becichem, Romolo Amasacus and Nicolo Caliachius all taught at the University of Padua in the fourteenth century.¹⁵

The earliest known manuscript of the *Imagines* is dated to the thirteenth century and is now in the Laurenziana library of Florence (MS *Laurentianus*, 69.30 Folios 242-269).¹⁶ Identified in the c.1499 San Marco catalogue as item 1117 the volume also contains Thucydides, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Philostratus' *Vitae sophistarum* and *Heroica*. Upon examination of the manuscript it was apparent two quite distinct hands copied the text down. Hand A writes in red ink on parchment to folio 159 of the codex at which point Hand B writing in black ink

continues until folio 269. Hand A concludes the manuscript with a commentary that continues over leaf to the final folio 271. This suggests that the two scribes were working in unison with the intention of creating a complete edition of the *Imagines*. The most extraordinary feature of the manuscript is the illustrations drawn in the margins of the first two folios. This is the only manuscript of the *Imagines* that has been decorated with illustrations. Although the illustrator had little understanding of anatomy or perspective, there is some competence in the execution, especially in animals such as the horse that accompanies *Aesop* (I.iii). Visualization of the first four descriptions in Philostratus is attempted and then stops abruptly. The parchment has been trimmed on all sides as evidenced by the drawings being cut at vital points, hence the head of Scamander is sliced through at the top of the page and only half of the seventh gate of Thebes remains on the right hand margin. The drawings are in brown or red ink so it is unlikely they were simultaneously executed by the scribe Hand A, who was using black ink for the text. The illustrations appear to be a case of casual doodling on the part of an inspired reader, possibly Hand B who also used red ink. The illustrator has reacted to the strong reflex to visualize the images provoked by the reading of the ekphrasis.¹⁷

The Laurenziana manuscript appears to have entered the Medici collection in the time of Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492) with the c.1499 San Marco catalogue providing a *terminus ante quem* for its acquisition.¹⁸ Listing one hundred seventy-six Greek manuscripts contained in the Medici library at San Marco, the catalogue groups Philostratus with Pausanias, Diogenes Laertius, Ptolemy and Appian.¹⁹ I have counted eleven pre-1500 manuscripts containing descriptions from the *Imagines* listed in the present day Laurenziana catalogue. There was a Greek manuscript of Philostratus the Younger in the library of Niccolò Niccoli who also owned Philostratus' *Apollonius of Tyana*, originally acquired by Cristoforo Buondelmonti on Andros in 1419.²⁰ Niccoli, a Florentine humanist, owned at least 146 Greek books most of which passed into the Medici collection.²¹ Whilst Renaissance artists had scant knowledge of Greek, neither were many collectors of Classical books proficient in Greek. Vespasiano da Bisticci in his *Vite di uomini illustri del secolo XV* reports that Niccoli attempted to study Greek with Manuel Chrysolaras after the Greek scholar arrived in Florence in 1397.²² Contemporaries Giannozzo Manetti and Guarino Veronese however, wrote that Niccoli never mastered Greek.²³ The great collector Cosimo de' Medici (1389–1464) founder of the library at San Marco, had no Latin or Greek, an embarrassment he determined to rectify in the education of his own sons.

One possible candidate for introducing the *Imagines* to Italy is the Byzantine grammarian Maximus Planudes (c.1260–1305). Planudes brought the *Fables of Aesop* to Italy before 1300.²⁴ Philostratus is linked to Aesop in the manuscript

tradition, making it plausible that Planudes also brought the *Imagines* with him when he left Constantinople. Planudes' transcription of Aesop is to be found with the *Imagines* in manuscript Laurenziana 55.8. The two works were later published in the same volume under the title *Aesopi Phrygis vita et fabellae* in Basle by Johannes Frobenium (1518). Furthermore, the *Imagines* would have been familiar to Planudes as a textbook used in the *progymnasmata* of Byzantine education. The only extant manuscript of Nikolaos' *Progymnasmata* (MS London, BL, Add. 11,889) is to be found collated in the same volume as *Imagines*, (*Proem* and Book I. i-x only).²⁵ If Philostratus was read in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it is probably due to the attention paid to his works by Planudes and his pupil Manuel Moschopoulos. A manuscript, Laurenziana 55.7 also in the Medici collection before 1499 and containing a fourteenth century copy of the *Imagines*, is described by Fryde as "the most valuable grammatical codex of the Medici library."²⁶ The first part of this codex completed in 1314 contains works by Planudes and Moschopoulos. Of a later date, the second part contains fifty-seven descriptions from the *Imagines* copied down by a Greek scribe identified simply as Nikolaos. Moschopoulos has heavily annotated the *Imagines* with grammatical and lexicographic commentary. Written and compiled if not entirely in the lifetime of Moschopoulos, then completed close after his death in 1330, the collection of *erotemata* seems to have had a cohesive intention. The inclusion in Laurenziana 55.7 of Philostratus' *Imagines* along with part of the *Heroica* and a commentary by Planudes, strongly suggests that both scholars recommended Philostratus as an author worthy of serious attention to their contemporaries in Italy. It is tempting to propose that the manuscript of the *Imagines* they were working from was the 13th century Laur. 69.30 which featured the hands of two scribes working in unison. It is entirely in keeping with Byzantine scholarship that neither Planudes nor Moschopoulos seems to have displayed any interest in the antiquarian value of Philostratus. Their commentary is not concerned about *what* Philostratus had to say, but the *way* he said it.

Fryde's study of the use of Greek texts in the Medici collection shows Philostratus was also of interest to humanists as a model of Attic language to study.²⁷ This way of looking at Philostratus continues until the end of the fifteenth century. In the *Imagines* the sophist states clearly that his purpose is to teach ways of viewing art, but Byzantine scholarship took no notice. The fact that quattrocento Italian humanists knew the *Imagines* but chose to ignore its value as a source for Greco-Roman art, emphasizes the literary nature of the humanist movement and shows the lack of interest they held in art in general. It is hard to estimate the extent to which the *Imagines* circulated in Italy before it was printed in the sixteenth century but I am aware of at least seventy-one early manuscripts currently held in European libraries.

New Texts, New Readers, New Worlds

Having briefly explained the appearance of the text in the West and its reception up to circa 1500, I will now look at how the first known vernacular translation created new readers amongst artists and patrons.

Although there was ample opportunity for humanists active at courts across Italy to transmit valuable knowledge concerning the material nature of Classical antiquity to artists, there seems to have been very little inclination to do so. The humanists' link to the distant past was intellectual and centred on the written word. Theirs was not an archaeological perspective that wanted to physically resurrect antiquity in the way that collectors such as Isabella d'Este desired. As a result, the opportunity for humanists and artists to work in tandem was seldom instigated.

When Philostratus was finally discovered by Renaissance art it came about due to the pivotal role of the patron. As artists could not converse equally with humanists on the subject of Antiquity, the patron had to act as intermediary. Utilizing the intellect of the humanist together with the artistic skill and imagination of the artist, the patron achieved his or her preferred outcome. A review of the d'Este family patronage at Mantua and Ferrara demonstrates just how much control the patron exercised over the production of a painting. In the case of the *Imagines* it was only through an exceptional chain of events that Titian received an Italian translation of the text to work from, two centuries before a *filostrato volgareizzato* was ever published.²⁸

In 1505 Isabella, Marchesa of Mantua, invited the Greek scholar Demetrios Moschos to make the first known vernacular translation of the *Imagines* (fig.1) now at Cambridge (MS Cambridge, University Library, Ad. 6007). Isabella's fascination for Philostratus corresponds to her insatiable thirst for the marvels of antiquity. Rumoured to have been well versed in Latin and Greek from an early age, Isabella has long had the reputation of being a precocious student of Classical literature.²⁹ The question remains, that if fluent in Greek why would Isabella commission a *filostrato volgareizzato*? One possible answer is that the translation was for the express purpose of being able to pass on the text to artists in a comprehensible form.³⁰

Classical texts like the *Imagines* provided the ideas for paintings, but the artist was not the one who selected the subject. Even artists as revered as Perugino and Titian had sometimes, to simply obey the patron's instructions. In Titian's case, descriptions from Isabella d'Este's privately commissioned vernacular translation of the *Imagines* were copied out and sent to Titian in Venice. This is one of the few documented cases where we have an artist being furnished with a Classical text that he is required to translate into an image.³¹ Art history attributes the first

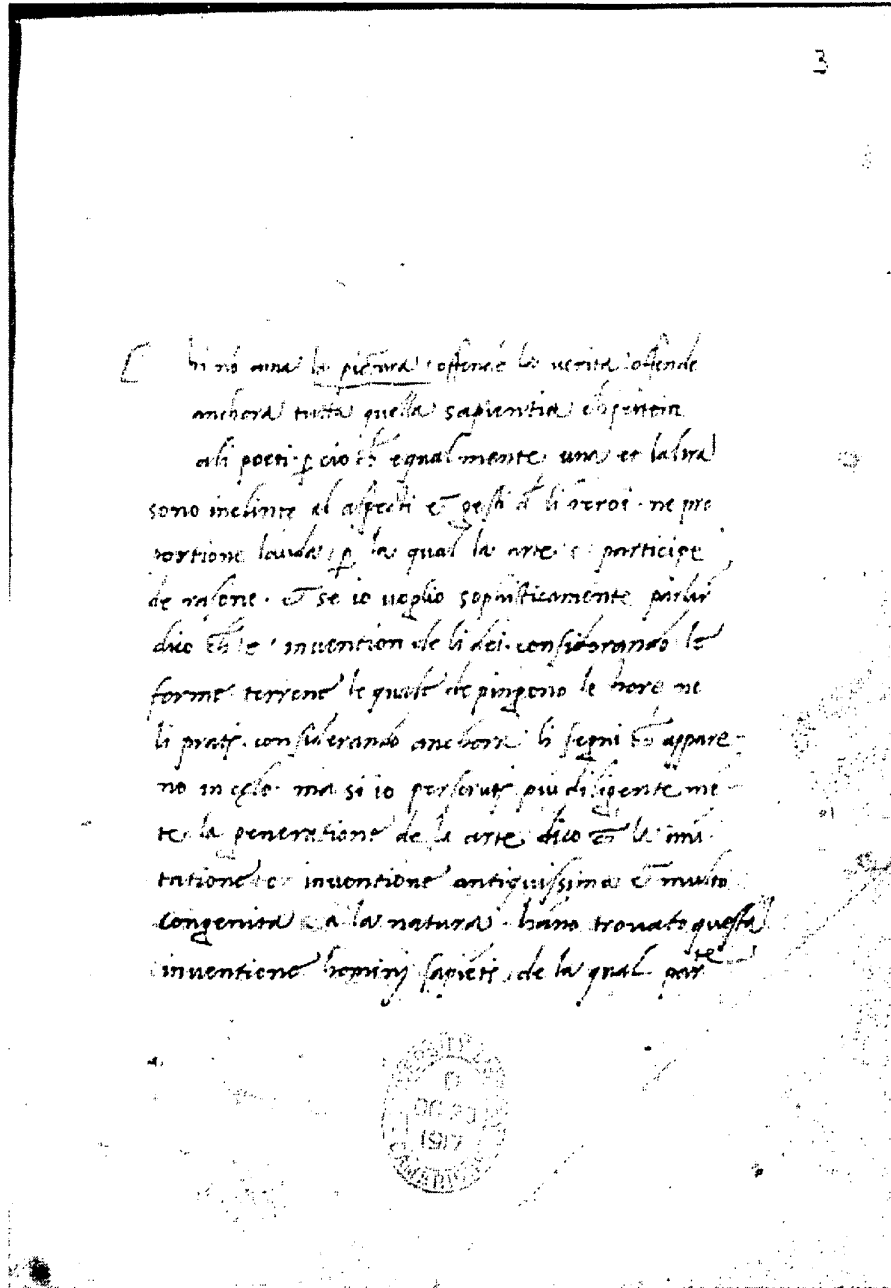


Fig.1 Chi no ama la pictura, offende la verita offende anchora tutta quella sapientia
 ...Opening line of *Imagines*, translation by Demetrius Moschos, c.1505, MS Cambridge,
 University Library, Ad. 6007. 3

example of classical ekphrasis converted into a Renaissance painting to the Florentine artist Sandro Botticelli with his *The Calumny of Apelles* c. 1497. David Cast, in his book devoted to the painting, argues convincingly that details in Botticelli's version derive not from the text of Lucianus' *Calumny* but from Leon Battista Alberti's loose translation of Lucianus in a 1437 treatise *Della Pittura* and also from a manuscript translation of Lucianus' *Calumny* essay produced in 1472 by the Florentine scholar Bartolommeo della Fonte.³² It is highly unlikely that Botticelli drew inspiration directly from the text of Lucianus, which was published in Florence in a Latin edition as late as 1496. Whilst this event may have renewed interest in Lucianus among Florentine patrons and humanists, it does not change the likelihood that Botticelli would not have had access to the text except via Alberti and della Fonte. A contemporary of Botticelli, quoted by Vasari, commented that the artist was "poorly educated, unlettered and almost unable to read."³³

The text as Muse

Between 1500 and 1524 at least five paintings based on descriptions from Philostratus were commissioned from Italy's leading artists by Isabella in Mantua and her brother Alfonso in Ferrara:

1. c. 1503, Perugino, *Battle of Love and Chastity* (Philostratus, I.6 *Erotes* and I.9 *A Marsh*).³⁴
2. c. 1504, Mantegna/Costa, *Story of Comus* (Philostratus, I.2 *Comus*).³⁵
3. 1514-1517, Raphael, *Hunt of Meleager*, (Philostratus the Younger, (15) *Meleager*).³⁶
4. 1517, Fra Bartolomeo/Titian, *Worship of Venus* (Philostratus, I.6 *Erotes*)
5. 1524, Titian, *The Andrians* (Philostratus, I.25 *Andrians*).³⁷

The last three were among a group of five paintings commissioned c. 1513-1529 by Alfonso for his private gallery known as the *camerino d'alabastro* in the Castello Estense, Ferrara.³⁸ The paintings by Titian tend to dominate any study of Philostratus in Renaissance iconography.³⁹ Conversely, it is not with Alfonso that credit lies for bringing Philostratus to the attention of artists at the beginning of the sixteenth century, but rather with his sister. It was Isabella who introduced the text to Alfonso and it was her own celebrated *studiolo* in Mantua, a room designed to hold contemporary masterpieces and precious antiquities, which Alfonso most probably took as his model for the *camerino d'alabastro*.

In 1502 Isabella d'Este wrote to her agent Francesco Malatesta:

we desire to have in our 'camerino' pictures with a narrative story by the excellent painters now in Italy.⁴⁰

This is somewhat close to Philostratus' profile of his Roman collector in a villa outside Naples whom the Sophist tells us:

had collected paintings with real judgement, for they exhibited the skill of very many painters (I: Proem).

Isabella specifies that her *camerino* pictures must be 'narrative' paintings, the same genre as all but one of the sixty-five paintings she read about in the *Imagines*.⁴¹ Philostratus also tells us that the collecting of paintings was a pastime favoured by aristocrats of the Classical age, a suitable occupation for the elite:

Now the story of men who have won mastery in the science of painting, and of the states and kings that have been passionately devoted to it, has been told by other writers, notably by Aristodemus of Caria, ... (I: Proem)

Reading the *Imagines* Isabella encountered the idea of a splendid private gallery owned by a wealthy Roman connoisseur. It was perhaps with this paradigm in mind that Isabella conceived the creation of the *studiolo* that took eighteen years to perfect.⁴² Her uncles, Leonello d'Este (1407-1450) and Borso d'Este (1413-1471), constructed the *studiolo di Bellefiore* at Ferrara based on antique themes under the guidance of the humanist Guarino Veronese. Isabella's reading of the *Imagines* may have inspired her not only to emulate the family example, but also to arrange the programme more closely to the ideas put forward in Philostratus' *Proem*. The rooms of Isabella d'Este were originally located in the tower of the Castello di San Giorgio in Mantua and then later transferred to the Corte Vecchia. This suite of rooms was composed to create a private paradise, the ideal humanistic ambience within which to meditate upon her fabulous collection of books, paintings, antiquities and rare objects. All of the paintings created for Isabella's *studiolo* are described in the Stivini inventory of 1542, together with other objects in her vast collection.⁴³

Isabella had decided to acquire one work of art from each of the greatest living artists working in the main regional centres of Italy that would represent *cosa antiqua e de bello significato*.⁴⁴ Such interests were indicative of an overall hope to revisit and re-forged the Classical world; a *rinascimento dell'Antichità* as Fritz Saxl called the Italian Renaissance in his defining 1922 article.⁴⁵

For Isabella's *studiolo* Mantegna painted the *Parnassus* (1496-1497) and the *Minerva Chasing the Vices from the Garden of Virtue* (ca. 1498-1502).⁴⁶ The Marchesa was unsuccessful in obtaining a painting from Giovanni Bellini, the most famous Venetian master of the day, whom she first approached in 1496. From Pietro Perugino in Perugia she commissioned the *Battle between Love and Chastity* before approaching the Ferrarese artist Lorenzo Costa to paint the *Crowning of A Lady*

(1504-05). A third painting was commissioned from Mantegna, *The Story of Comus* circa 1505, a subject derived from Philostratus' description (I.ii) of a painting depicting the festivities of the God of Revelry.⁴⁷ Mantegna died in 1506 and Lorenzo Costa took over as court painter in Mantua, completing the *Comus* painting.

Isabella's pride in her own learning and antiquarian expertise meant that she was not capable of asking Mantegna or Perugino to simply re-create Philostratus in paint on canvas; to simply let the words of the Sophist dictate the iconography. The Marchesa rather liked to tamper with primary sources and create her own version of antiquity. Her *studiolo* paintings derived from Classical sources include extra figures and actions that introduce a faintly Christian moralizing theme of 'virtue triumphant' into the pagan iconography. This takes away from the ambience of eroticism that Philostratus constructs by his descriptions of ancient rituals that take place in outdoor settings with a cast of divine beings intervening with mortals on earth. The *Comus* painting has much in common with representations of an earthly paradise as seen in medieval illuminated manuscripts where paradise is often symbolized as a formal garden populated with elegant figures.

The artist that Isabella pursued relentlessly in her quest for masterpieces for the *studiolo* was Giovanni Bellini of Venice.⁴⁸ The brilliant poet Pietro Bembo was asked by Isabella to devise a theme for Bellini to paint. By a twist of fate, the resulting *Feast of the Gods* ended up in Alfonso's *camerino* and not his sister's *studiolo*. Added to Isabella's original group of five paintings were two later allegorical works by Correggio.⁴⁹

Ferrara: from Script to Paint

In 1511 when Isabella sent Moschos' translation of the *Imagines* to Ferrara, Alfonso had begun formulating plans to create his own personal picture gallery. Her Latin tutor, Mario Equicola delivered the book and whilst there, he wrote to Isabella:

The Duke is pleased that I have stayed here eight days; the reason is the 'pictura' of a room in which six fables, or stories, are to go: I have found them and given them [to him] in writing.⁵⁰

Unlike his sister who strove to demonstrate erudition by devising her own pedantically contrived compositions that borrowed elements from Classical authors, Alfonso aimed at creating surrogate paintings for Philostratus' lost Greek masterpieces.

As early as ca. 1350 Petrarch had expressed the hope that future generations would be able to "walk back into the pure radiance of the past" and the *Imagines*

along with other Classical texts describing works of art, became a vehicle through which this could be attempted.⁵¹ Titian's *The Worship of Venus* and *The Andrians* he painted for Alfonso, remain our most accurate transliteration from text to image arising from the *Imagines*. Alfonso was so concerned about ensuring Titian would execute his painting of *The Worship of Venus* precisely as he envisaged, that not only did he send Fra Bartolommeo's original sketch and a copy of the Moschos translation, but also the canvas and stretcher upon which Titian was to paint.⁵²

Titian's paintings might never have been realized had Isabella not had the initiative to commission a vernacular translation of Philostratus that could be read by artists. It would have been far easier to select mythological subjects from Ovid. The *Metamorphoses* had been circulating in printed editions since 1480. The first illustrated edition of *Metamorphoses* adorned with woodcuts was issued by Colard Mansion in Bruges in 1484 followed by an illustrated *Ovidio Volgarizzato* in Venice, 1497.⁵³ Isabella's agent Lorenzo da Pavia, records in a letter of July 26, 1501 that she had ordered a first edition Ovid from Aldus Manutius in Venice.⁵⁴

It seems the purpose of the Moschos translation was to make the ancient Greek myths hidden within Philostratus' descriptions accessible to Titian and other Italian artists. This unique translation was to become a technical guidebook, a 'how to paint Classical pictures' for a small circle of elite artists that Isabella and Alfonso were in contact with. These artists: Fra Bartolommeo, Raphael, Mantegna, Bellini, Costa, Garofalo and Dosso Dossi, could not rely on models of Greco-Roman masterpieces, as none existed. All panel paintings from Classical times had perished and the fresco cycles of Pompeii and Herculaneum had yet to be excavated.⁵⁵ Literary descriptions were the only evidence remaining of this 'paradise lost' and Philostratus was the most complete and in depth account of Greco-roman painting to have survived.

Islands and Paintings

Alfonso d'Este differed from Isabella in his ambitions for re-capturing the lost glories of ancient Greece and Rome. A letter to Isabella from Mario Equicola reported that Alfonso "cared only for commissioning pictures and seeing antiquities."⁵⁶ He was also a passionate bibliophile with an impressive library of rare manuscripts. Unlike his sister, Alfonso was not interested in controlling the iconography or introducing Christian morals into his Classical paintings, his instructions to the artists appear to be 'follow the text.' The aim of Philostratus was to create vivid pictures in the mind of the reader, to educate the reader whilst making the images seem real. In the Renaissance, the process did not end there. So successful was the power of the ekphrasis to conjure up these images, that the reader then wished to materialize them. A reader such as Alfonso d'Este had the

means and the influence to take the words and mold them into works of art. This required the creation of a golden refuge within the Estense castle consisting of a suite of three rooms adorned with rich narrative paintings set on the Greek islands of Andros and Naxos and in the woodlands of Thebes. Alfonso's *camerino* was clad in fine alabaster marble reliefs by Antonio Lombardo.⁵⁷ The use of this precious material is evocative of Philostratus' description of a magnificent villa built on five terraces overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea with a gallery:

resplendent with all the marbles favoured by luxury, but it was particularly splendid by reason of the panel-paintings set in the walls. (Proem).

Inset in the ceiling of the *camerino* were pictures by Dosso Dossi of Bacchic and erotic themes and a frieze of scenes from Virgil's *Aeneid* ran along the walls. It was this refuge that became Alfonso's private paradise, a place where everything that surrounded him was otherworldly, beautiful, valuable and everlasting. When the pressures of doing battle with the Pope and maintaining the balance of power became too great, this Renaissance prince could retreat to his cabinet of wonders.

The first painting for the *camerino* to rely upon Philostratus' text was Titian's *Worship of Venus*. Philostratus conjures up a pastoral paradise set in an apple orchard populated with playful cupids:

Here run straight rows of trees with space left free between them to walk in, and tender grass borders the paths, fit to be a couch for one to lie upon. On the ends of the branches apples golden and red and yellow invite the whole swarm of Cupids to harvest them...Do you catch aught of the fragrance hovering over the garden, or are your senses dull? (*Imagines*, I.vi)

Philostratus constantly cajoles his audience into believing they have entered the picture, frequently referring to the reader's sense of smell and touch.

The longest description in the book is simply entitled *Islands* (II. xvii). It is a virtual cruise throughout the Aeolian Islands colonized by the Greeks in 575 BC. Here Philostratus describes fertile landscapes overflowing with honey, grapevines and bubbling springs of sweet water; of forests covered in cypress, and fir, pine, oak and cedar, where wild beasts abound. Nature's bounty is a pre-requisite for the notion of an earthly paradise in Ancient Greek literature. The hilly province of Arcadia in the central Peloponnese, birthplace of Hermes and home to Pan, is often cited as the ideal landscape.⁵⁸ A man like Philostratus, born on the island of Lemnos, would have had an inherent appreciation of the life-giving value of natural resources.

He speaks of the tiny island of Vasiluzzo, which he calls "golden" and marvels at its famous mineral springs, which flow hot, and cold into the sea. Always with

Philostratus, the gods dwell wherever nature is at its most beautiful. Philostratus tells us that on the island of Panarea the honey fed by mountain flowers is so divine that the Nereids go there to frolic along the seashore and pick the flowers whilst Poseidon sits upon one of the island's peaks.

Elements of this long tour around the Aeolian Islands are echoed in Philostratus' description of the Greek island of Andros (I. xxv). Philostratus begins:

The stream of wine which is on the island of Andros, and the Andrians who have become drunken from the river, are the subject of this painting. For by the act of Dionysus the earth of the Andrians is so charged with wine that it bursts forth and sends up for them a river; if you have water in mind, the quantity is not great, but if wine, it is a great river — yes, divine!

A good many of the details narrated by Philostratus are recreated by Titian in *The Andrians* (see Plate 11) including the river god who lies on a couch of grapes, and the "tritons at the river's mouth who are dipping up the wine" (I. xxv). Among the revelers are two maidens who appear to be portrait figures dressed in contemporary fashion. The maidens are engaged in making music. Each girl holds a recorder and before them is a sheet of music set to words carefully spelled out for us: *Qui boyt et ne reboyt/Il ne sait que boyre soit* (he who drinks and does not drink again, does not know what drinking is). These lyrics correspond to Philostratus' admonition to drink copiously from the river of wine in order to be truly successful in life. "The theme of their song," he writes, "is that this river makes men rich, and powerful in the assembly, and helpful to their friends, and beautiful and, instead of short, four cubits tall; for when a man has drunk his fill of it he can assemble all these qualities and in his thought make them his own." At the high point of his ekphrasis, Philostratus proposes that we in fact can "hear" the song of the Andrians, just as in the *Erotes* he pretends that he can "smell" the fragrance of the apples.

Titian completed a third painting for the *camerino*; the *Bacchus and Ariadne* that is the most celebrated of the entire programme. It only relies on Philostratus for the detail of the leopards that pull Dionysus' chariot but it does link to the other Bacchanals in the worship of the god of wine. The *Bacchus and Ariadne* also takes place on a Greek island, Naxos, situated near Andros in the Cyclades group. Philostratus describes a painting in the *Imagines* relating the tale of Ariadne on Naxos, which he calls by the island's ancient Greek name of Dia. Philostratus has chosen the episode that occurs prior to the scene painted by Titian. For the Sophist, it is the moment Dionysus discovers the beautiful naked figure of Ariadne asleep on the beach and abandoned by Theseus that is crucial to the narrative. This voyeuristic snapshot in the drama seems to be the scene from the *Ariadne*

story most evident in Roman wall paintings and mosaics. It is also known from a Roman statue now in the Vatican collection. The *Sleeping Ariadne* continued to find favour with artists after the Renaissance and was painted by Luca Giordano c. 1685 and Sebastiano Ricci c. 1713, enjoying a popular revival with nineteenth century artists. Titian reproduces the reclining Ariadne of Naxos figure in *The Andrians*, seemingly happy to mix literary sources and geographical locations.

Conclusion

In his *Bacchanals* for Ferrara, Titian is responding not only to the power of the ekphrasis when forging paintings from the text of Philostratus, but he is also declaring a parallel between himself and the ancient masters, Apelles and Zeuxis.⁵⁹ In this sense, both Alfonso's and Titian's ambitions for the *camerino* reflect a Renaissance trend to regard their own highly developed culture and society as the direct heir to the classical past. If contemporary authors could hail Titian as the "new Apelles" then by association, his patron Alfonso became the new Alexander the Great. The civilization of Classical Greece and Rome was not a lost world that the Italian Renaissance stood apart from, but one which they could resuscitate and partake in.⁶⁰ So latent was the desire to connect to a nobler Classical past that patrons like the d'Este had medals struck with their portraits in imitation of Roman emperors. Alfonso even had a painting commissioned where he and his wife, Lucrezia Borgia, appear thinly disguised as Mars and Venus making love in an idyllic setting.⁶¹

The influence of Philostratus upon art was not confined to Ferrara and Mantua. Alfonso also asked Raphael in Rome and Michelangelo in Florence to contribute paintings to his *camerino* and it seems likely, they too were sent hand-written translations of certain descriptions in the book. Although neither artist fulfilled Alfonso's request, sketches they made from Philostratus' descriptions of the *Fall of Phaeton*, *Marsyas*, *The Calydonian Boar Hunt*, *Galatea and Polyphemus* and *The Worship of Venus*, survived and inspired the next generation of artists in Italy's most important cities.

My main purpose in looking at the Philostratean paintings for the d'Este was to examine the end result of a process which began with the transmission of the text from the East to the West in the early Renaissance period as discussed at the beginning of this paper. A painting that attempts to re-invent a lost Hellenistic masterpiece superimposes a host of associations onto those who were involved in its creation. The patron becomes Philostratus' Roman connoisseur, the artist aspires to become a new Apelles and the humanist advisor takes on the role of the Sophist himself. For the Renaissance viewer, the painting becomes a conduit to the Classical era which at least two centuries of humanistic culture had convinced

them was mankind's defining moment. There was no doubt in the Renaissance mind that Philostratus' Neapolitan Gallery was real and that the paintings he described, had existed. This period of artistic production after 1500 is a departure point in the reception of Greco-Roman culture in Renaissance Italy. Preceding generations epitomized by the figure of Lorenzo Medici il Magnifico, believed that preservation of the written word was the priority.

With Isabella and Alfonso we see a stronger need to materially resurrect and own the past. It is true the bibliophile Lorenzo Medici collected antiquities and the d'Este siblings also hunted down manuscripts, but the d'Este pursuit of artists all over Italy to decorate their private apartments with mythological paintings speaks of a new direction in Renaissance patronage that reached its zenith in the collecting activities of Lorenzo de Medici's son, Pope Leo X in Rome.

In effect, Philostratus was the catalyst in forging three domains of paradise. First was the virtual paradise, the vision of a lush Greek island that existed in the mind of the reader. This *phantasia* was then translated into paint on canvas and became the elusive paradise, something you could see, but not enter. The image created a new 'text' from which Philostratus could be read. Finally there was the physical paradise; the *studiolo* or *camerino* or *grotto* itself, an actual environment offering sanctuary and luxury.

The design of Isabella and Alfonso's private paradises, their *studioli* and *camerini* created to mimic the antique style, was highly influential. In the sixteenth century, there was hardly a nobleman's villa, castle or palace in Italy and France which did not have a private gallery *all'antica* for the display of the most precious masterpieces and antiquities that evoked the golden age of a long forgotten world.

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Endnotes

¹ A history of the Castello Estense is given by Thomas Tuohy, *Herculean Ferrara: Ercole d'Este, 1471-1505, and the invention of a ducal capital* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

² Philostratus, *Imagines*. Trans. Arthur Fairbanks. (Loeb Classical Library: Harvard University Press, 1931). All quotes from *Imagines* mentioned in this paper are from the 1952 edition of Fairbanks' translation.

³ The Byzantine *Souda*-lexicon places the author of the *Imagines* as one of three Philostratoi from Lemnos writing at the time of Septimius Severus (193-211 AD) and puts his death in the reign of Philip the Arab (244-9 AD). Due largely to conflicting entries in the *Souda* the issue is unresolved as to whether our Philostratus the Elder is also the author of other works in the *Corpus Philostratum*: *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*; *Lives of the Sophists*; a discourse on Nero; *Heroikos*, a dialogue on the heroes of the Trojan War; *Gymnastikos*, a treatise on athletics and a collection of erotic epistles.

⁴ This paper was originally presented at the SHARP regional conference *Paradise: New Worlds of Books and Readers*, Stout Research Centre, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand, (27-29 January 2005). It has evolved from postgraduate research on the *nachleben* of the *Imagines* of both Philostratus the Elder and Younger.

⁵ A group of seventeen descriptions of paintings are attributed to Philostratus the Younger who identifies himself as the Elder's grandson, in the introduction. The descriptions are written in imitation of the Elder's original work. From the time of the first printed edition in 1503 (Aldus Manutius, Venice) the two collections have been published in the same volume. This was not always the case in the manuscript tradition.

⁶ On Lucianus of Samosata's *Calumny of Apelles*; David Cast, *The Calumny of Apelles: a study in the humanist tradition*. (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1981) and on Longus' *Daphnis and Chloë*, Joseph Kestner "Ekphrasis as Frame in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloë*," *Classical World*, 67 (1973): 166-71. Invaluable is Virginie Eck's *L'ekphrasis au travers des textes de Cébès de Thèbes, Lucien de Samosate et Philostrate de Lemnos: traductions et interprétations aux XVI^e, XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, DESS Ingénierie documentaire, Rapport de recherché bibliographique, enssib (École nationale supérieure des sciences de l'information et des bibliothèques, Villeurbanne, 2003.)

⁷ On the *Tabula of Cebes*; Jas Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 21-48.

⁸ I refer specifically to Pliny's *Historia naturalis*.

⁹ In his 'Proem,' Philostratus the Younger, comments on his grandfather's elegant use of the Attic Greek language (mhtropatori lian AttikwV thV glwrthV). Philostratus, *Imagines*, Loeb (1952), 282.

¹⁰ Exceptions were the sculptor and engraver Giulio Campagnola, (1482-c.1514) adopted son of a nobleman who was educated in Latin, Greek and Hebrew and the Florentine sculptor Antonio di Pietro Averlino (c.1400-69) known as Filarete (Greek for 'lover of virtue').

¹¹ *Les images ou Tableaux de platte peinture des deux Philostrates sophistes grecs*, trans. Blaise de Vigenère, (Paris: Abel Angelier, 1614).

¹² letter 24th October, 1502 as translated in David S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance*. (London: Macmillan, 1970). 135.

¹³ Isabella's letter to Perugino 15th January 1503 and details of the commission are reproduced in Fiorenzo Canuti, *Il Perugino*, (Siena: Editrice d'arte "La Diana," 1931) II. 212-213. English translation of the letter and other correspondence surrounding this commission in Kenneth R. Bartlett. *The Civilization of the Italian Renaissance: A Sourcebook*. (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1992) 220-223.

¹⁴ The main authority on Philostratus is Graham Anderson who writes on the author from the point of view of a Classicist interested in the reception of the *Imagines* in Antiquity. He does not discuss

the medieval and renaissance *fortuna* of the *Imagines*. Graham Anderson, *Philostratus, Biography and Belles-Lettres in the third century A.D.* (London: Dover, 1986).

¹⁵ Francesco Maria Colle, *Storia scientifico-letteraria dello Studio di Padova*, (Padua: Minerva, 1824).

¹⁶ For a general survey of this period see Leighton Durham Reynolds, and Nigel Guy Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, (3rd ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.)

¹⁷ see Raichel Le Goff, "Continuity in Change: Revisualizations Of Philostratus's *Imagines*," in *Humanitas*, Journal of the National Humanities Institute, (Washington D.C.). vol. X, 2, (1997), 61 ff.

¹⁸ see Edmund Boleslaw Fryde, *Greek Manuscripts in the Private Library of the Medici 1469-1510*. (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1996), 65.

¹⁹ Berthold Louis Ullman & Philip A. Stadter, *The public library of Renaissance Florence. Niccolò Niccoli, Cosimo de' Medici and the library of San Marco*, (Padova: Antenore, 1972.) 110 & 74. (their reference: Ambrogio Traversari, *Epistolae* VI, 10 (*Ambrosii Traversarii Latinae epistolae a... Petro Canneto... in libros XXV tributae. Accedit eiusdem Ambrosii vita... deducta a Laurentio Mechus* VI, 10 (May 15, 1418) published Florence 1759, photographic reprint Bologna 1968.)

²⁰ Ullman & Stadter (1972), 262, listed in the San Marco catalogue as 1191, *Philostratus de Apollonio Tyaneo, oribieroglyphica*, (for Hori hieroglyphics), now Laurenziana 69, 27. s. XIV, 282 x 210 mm., (on paper).

²¹ Ullman & Stadter (1972), 60.

²² Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite di uomini illustri del secolo XV*, (ed. Paolo d'Ancona & Erhard Aeschlimann, Milan, 1951) 434.

²³ Ullman & Stadter (1972) 84.

²⁴ Fryde, (1996) 60.

²⁵ MS London BL, Add. 11,889 also contains the *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonios. cf. British Museum, *Catalogue of Additions: Manuscripts 1841-1845*, 16.

²⁶ Fryde, (1996) 374.

²⁷ Fryde, (1996) 374.

²⁸ The first Italian translation published was by Vincenzo Lancetti, *Le opera dei due Filostrati*, Milano, 1828-1831. (2 vols.). Translations in French and German were published as early as the 16th century.

²⁹ The latest publications on Isabella maintain that she had received a classical education in her birthplace of Ferrara: *Isabella d'Este La primadonna del Rinascimento*. ed. Daniela Bini, (Mantova: Artiglio, 2001). This collection of articles by a range of authors is full of conflicting views and inconsistencies and is only to be recommended for the illustrations. More reliable is Egon Verheyen, *The Paintings in the 'Studiolo' of Isabella d'Este at Mantua*. (New York: NUP, 1971). and "La prima donna del mondo," *Isabella d'Este Fürstin und Mäzenatin der Renaissance*, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, exhibition catalogue (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1994.)

³⁰ Isabella was an avid collector of books from the Manutian press even ordering special editions on fine parchment in advance, so it is likely she owned a copy of the 1503 printed Greek edition. Mention of the Moschos translation is to be found in: John Shearman, "Alfonso d'Este's *Camerino*" in *Il se rendit en Italie études offertes a André Chastel*. (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1987.) 209-230. The early reference is A. Luzio, & R. Renier, "La cultura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga," in *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, XXXIII, (1899): 22.

³¹ correspondence Titian to Alfonso 19th February 1518 reproduced in Giuseppe Campori, "Tiziano e gli Estensi," *Nuova Antologia*, XXVII (1874): 585. The Este family correspondence is now housed at the Archivio Storico of Modena.

³² David Cast, *The Calumny of Apelles: A Study in the Humanist Tradition*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.)

³³ Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*. Edizione Giuntina (1568) edition 1994, (ed. Paolo Barocchi, Pisa: Scuola normale superiore, 1994.) vol.3: 519. "Epicurei e che l'anima

morisse col corpo, volle vedere l'acusatore dinanzi al giudice; onde, Sandro comparso, disse: «Egli è vero che io ho questa opinione dell'anima di costui, che è una bestia; oltre ciò non pare a voi che sia eretico, poi che senza avere lettere o apena saper leggere comenta Dante e mentova il suo nome invano?»».

³⁴ *The Combat Between Love and Chastity*, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

³⁵ *Comus*, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

³⁶ Originally, Raphael was asked to paint a *Triumph of Bacchus* and sent a preparatory sketch to Alfonso in 1517. The sketch was passed on to a local artist in Ferrara, Pellegrino da San Daniele, who proceeded to use it for a painting. When Raphael learned of this, he changed the subject of his own painting for Alfonso to a *Hunt of Meleager*. Raphael died in 1520 before carrying out the commission. Shearman (1987), 213.

³⁷ *The Worship of Venus* and *The Andrians* are today in the Prado Museum, Madrid.

³⁸ *Camerino d'alabastro*, or the 'alabaster room' is so called because of the precious marble relief panels that sheathed its walls. The room acted as the Duke's study and treasure room. The collection was dispersed in 1598 and nothing remains of the original room in Ferrara today. Charles Hope, "The 'Camerino d'Alabastro' of Alfonso d'Este I," *Burlington Magazine* CXIII, 820 (1971), 641-650.

³⁹ The *Titian* exhibition at the National Gallery London, 19 February – 18 May, 2003 provided a fresh look at the *camerino d'alabastro* bringing together for the first time since the dispersal of the paintings most of the original canvases from the *camerino* including three subjects of the frieze by Dosso Dossi. David Jaffé, "Alfonso d'Este's Camerino" in *Titian*. (London: National Gallery, 2003). 100 ff.

⁴⁰ letter 15th September, 1502 as translated in David S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance*. (London: Macmillan, 1970), 73.

⁴¹ *Xenia*, II.26 describes a still-life painting. It is not clear, at what date Isabella was introduced to the *Imagines*. She may have owned a Greek manuscript before the 1503 printed edition came out.

⁴² For a discussion on Renaissance *studioli* see Chambers, (1970).

⁴³ Daniela Ferrari, « L'Inventario delle gioie » in *Isabella d'Este La primadonna del Rinascimento*, (Mantua : 2001), 21 ff.

⁴⁴ Ferrari, 21 ff. 'of antique theme and beautiful meaning': letter sent from Isabella to Giovanni Bellini, 1501 «Se Zoanne Bellini fa tanto malvoluntieri quella historia ... siamo contente remetterne al giudicio suo, purché 'l dipinga qualche istoria o de sua inventione ne finga una che representi cosa antiqua et de bello significato».

⁴⁵ Fritz Saxl, *Rinascimento dell'antichità*, Studien zu den Arbeiten A. Warburgs in *Repertorium der Kunst wissenschaft*, 43. 1922. 220-72.

⁴⁶ Both paintings by Mantegna are now in the Louvre Museum, Paris.

⁴⁷ In a letter dated 15th September 1504 Mantegna wrote to Isabella assuring her that he was at work on the *Comus* painting, see Ronald Lightbown, *Mantegna: With a Complete Catalogue of the Paintings, Drawings and Prints*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). 208. also Keith Christiansen, "The Studiolo of Isabella d'Este and Late Themes," in *Andrea Mantegna: Padua and Mantua*, (New York: George Braziller, 1994). 422-23.

⁴⁸ Correspondence surrounding this commission to Bellini is summarized by Jennifer M. Fletcher, Isabella d'Este and Giovanni Bellini's 'Presepio' in *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 113, no. 825, December 1971, 703-713.

⁴⁹ The Coreggio paintings *Allegory of Virtue* and *Allegory of Vice* (Louvre) are listed as item no. 204 in the Gonzaga inventory 'il codice D.XII.6 dell'archivio Gonzaga' compiled by the notary Odoardo Stivini on the 22nd December 1535 and preserved in the Archivio di Stato di Mantova, reproduced in D. Ferrari, (2001): 25-39. The paintings remained in the *studiolo* until 1627 when the entire Gonzaga collection was sold to Charles I, King of England.

⁵⁰ Letter dated 9 October 1511, cf. P. Holberton, 'The Choice of Texts for the Camerino Pictures,' in *Bacchanals by Titian and Rubens*, Nationalmuseum Stockholm, 1987, 57 ff. n.32. Letter first pub-

lished in A. Luzio & R. Renier, *La cultura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga*, *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, xxxiii, 1899, 1-62.

⁵¹ Petrarch, *Le Familiari*, in Theodor E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Concept of the Dark Ages," *Speculum*, XVII, (1942), 226 ff.

⁵² letter from Jacopo Tebaldi, agent to the Duke of Ferrara, reproduced in John Walker, *Bellini and Titian at Ferrara: A study of Styles and Taste* (London, Phaidon Press, 1956) 32, n. 44.

⁵³ Jacques Monfrin, "La connaissance de l'antiquité et le problème de l'humanisme en langue vulgaire dans la France du XVe siècle" in *The late middle ages and the dawn of humanism outside Italy; proceedings of the international conference*, (Louvain, May 11-13, 1970). Edited by G. Verbeke and J. IJsewijn. (Leuven : University Press, 1972), 131-170.

⁵⁴ Letter reproduced in George R. Marek, *The Bed and the Throne, The Life of Isabella d'Este*, (New York, Harper & Row, 1976) 129.

⁵⁵ Raphael was better placed to study archaeological finds than most of the other artists mentioned as he was charged by the Pope with the duty of cataloguing Rome's antiquities. He was able to see wall decoration in the *Domus Aurea* or Golden House of Nero, for example.

⁵⁶ in Holberton, (1987): n.32.

⁵⁷ Twenty-eight relief panels attributed to Antonio Lombardo survive in the collection of the Hermitage, Leningrad (see *Gemini of Venice*, R.A. Catalogue, London 1983, cat. no. S7 and National Gallery *Titian*, (2003) cat. No. 13, p. 104). One of them records the date 1508 and three name the patron, Alfonso d'Este.

⁵⁸ Classical sources for Arcadia: Theocritus, *Idylls*. Virgil, *Eclogues*. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 8.1-2, 4.

⁵⁹ Titian was not the first Renaissance artist to be hailed as a new Apelles. Andrea Mantegna, who painted pictures for Isabella's *studiolo* was called "a second Apelles" by Lorenzo da Pavia (letter to Isabella d'Este, Venice, October 16, 1506).

⁶⁰ Italy was not the only country to claim inheritance of the Ancient Greek civilization; the first illustrated edition of the *Imagines* (Paris, 1614) blatantly proclaims Paris as the new Athens on the frontispiece.

⁶¹ *Allegory of Love*, Garofalo, c. 1530. National Gallery, London.