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Per Visibilia ad Invisibilia: Nature's Revelation in Cosmè Tura's Sacred Art

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Per Visibilia ad Invisibilia: Nature's Revelation in Cosmè Tura's Sacred Art

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Table of Contents

Abstract

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Thesis Title: *Per Visibilia ad Invisibilia*: Nature's Revelation in Cosmè Tura's Sacred Art

This thesis explores aspects of the nature in selected artworks of Cosmè Tura (c. 1430 – 1495) - a core artist of the School of Ferrara and court painter to the ruling Este family -, interpreting these aspects against the backdrop of cultural continuities from the Middle Ages. Rather than concentrating on human protagonists, I assess three different aspects of the natural world. I look firstly at painted decoration representing nature in his *Virgin and Child Enthroned*, and its role in the panel's message of covenantal fulfilment. This assessment is carried out against the background of theological continuities, especially patristic, found in texts studied and translated contemporaneously in Ferrara and in the monastery for which the panel was painted. I then explore flora and fauna in selected sacred paintings, according to the cultural continuity of the medieval bestiary tradition. Finally, I examine landscape - and especially rock formations - in scenes inspired by scripture and hagiography, considering the potential influences from Byzantine art. In this way, this thesis challenges conceptions about 'Renaissance' art propagated by Giorgio Vasari and which continue to be prevalent in scholarship. The approach to painting from this period, beginning in the *Quattrocento*, is usually focussed on notions of harmony and verisimilitude and on the idea of a 'rebirth' of pagan classical culture. The focus additionally tends to lie on the human protagonists of art works. Fifteenth-century Ferrarese art, which is considered not calm and harmonious but 'unusual' and even 'demonic' (Ruhmer 1958: 6), has therefore been somewhat neglected, compared with the schools of Florence or Rome, for instance. Thus, to shed new light on this artistic centre, I analyse Tura's sacred artworks, shifting the focus away from the concept of rebirth and instead examining these selected paintings of his *œvre* according to medieval continuities, cultural, philosophical, and religious.

Acknowledgements

List of Illustrations

Fig. 15: Tura, Cosmè (c.1470-75) *Saint John the Evangelist in Patmos,* Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, tempera on panel, 27 x 32 cm

Fig. 16: De Limbourg, Pol, Jean and Herman (1411 - 1416) *Saint John on Patmos,* from the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry,* Musée Condé, Chantilly, tempera on vellum, 29 x 21 cm

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1. Introduction

Looking at the painting of *Saint Jerome* by *Quattrocento* Ferrarese artist Cosmè, or Cosimo, Tura (c. 1430 – 1495) in London's National Gallery **(Fig. 5)**, what one first notices is perhaps the extremely penitential air of the protagonist himself, kneeling, partially clothed, and striking his bloodied breast with a rock. Once, however, the gaze begins to shift around the rest of the scene surrounding the saint, one spots for example the gnarled tree behind him, the owl perching on a branch, the looming, twisted formation of sandy rock. The next thing a shrewder viewer may ask him/herself - even without much prior knowledge of the hagiographical legend - is *why* those features may be there and *how* they could relate to the overall narrative and message of asceticism and penitence. Active in the fifteenth century, Cosmè Tura is generally categorised as an artist of the early Renaissance,[1] a term whose definition in this context can ultimately be attributed to Giorgio Vasari, who in 1550 was the first to use the word *rinascita* in regard to the renewed interest in, and indeed 'rebirth' of, aspects of classical antiquity. For Vasari, the most laudable artistic work was that which abandoned what he labelled the 'crude Greek style', but strived towards antique principles of aesthetic harmony. Delineating a chronological stylistic improvement from artist to artist that climaxes with Michelangelo at its apex, Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (originally e *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri*) begins with Cimabue and soon after reaches Giotto, who Vasari says:

> non solo in poco tempo pareggiò […] la maniera di Cimabue, ma
> ancora divenne tanto imitatore della natura, che ne' tempi suoi sbandí
> affatto quella greca maniera, e risuscitò la moderna e buona arte della
> pittura, et introdusse il ritrar di naturale le persone vive, che molte
> centinaia d'anni non s'era usato (1986: 147).

Dismissing thus the 'Greek manner' - that is the Byzantine painting style - as belonging to a regressive 'dark age', Vasari presents an art historical view that undulates between peaks of glorious

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[1] By, for instance, the *Encyclopædia Britannica* or the website of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Stephen J. Campbell's monograph on Tura is even entitled *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics and the Renaissance City 1450 - 1495.*

progression and troughs of stagnant darkness. He illustrates this conception of repeated artistic golden ages with almost identical trends in the preface to the second part of the *Vite,* where he asserts that 'nella pittura e scultura in altri tempi debbe essere accaduto questo tanto simile che, se e' si scambiassino insieme i nomi, sarebbono appunto i medesimi casi' (231). Perhaps, then, it is in part owing to Vasari that art historians have perpetuated these three main focusses when regarding Renaissance art: 1. its harmony and verisimilitude, 2. its crucial essence as a 'rebirth' of classical antiquity, and 3. the overwhelming importance of the human protagonists represented. In light of these criteria, it is not surprising that *Quattrocento* Ferrarese painting has often been neglected or perceived negatively, especially in comparison to Florentine art for instance. The aim of this thesis is to shift away from these main focusses which have so dominated scholarship, thereby taking an alternative approach to Renaissance painting. It will assess selected works of the *œvre* of eminent Ferrarese artist Cosmè Tura in this new light, illustrating how this approach proves fruitful especially when applied to Ferrara as an artistic centre. It will explore not merely cultural rebirth but also, and primarily, cultural and philosophical continuity, and it will analyse how these continuities are manifest in the non-human, *prima facie* 'peripheral' features of Tura's sacred painting. In this introductory chapter I will explain the reasons for which it is especially valuable to challenge these three prevalent approaches to early Renaissance art, particularly where that of Ferrara is concerned.

1.1 The 'unharmonious' nature of Ferrarese painting

This first focus, the preoccupation with harmony and verisimilitude, perhaps explains the neglect that the School of Ferrara has suffered through the ages. Heinrich Wölfflin even at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century perpetuated Vasari's conceptions of Renaissance art. When distinguishing it from the Baroque for example, he described it as 'the art of calm and beauty'. He elaborates that 'the beauty it offers us has a liberating influence, and we apprehend it as a general sense of wellbeing and a uniform enhancement of vitality. Its creations are perfect: they reveal nothing forced or inhibited, uneasy or agitated' (1964: 38). This prevailing attitude goes some way in aiding the aversion to the art of the Ferrarese School, and especially to Cosmè Tura. Eberhard Ruhmer identifies that Tura's religious art contains 'unusual' elements, hard to explain and scarcely found elsewhere. Of Tura's Madonnas he says that the artist deprives them of 'the touching, intimate element found in the naively confidential Virgins painted during the Early

Renaissance. […] These Madonnas are not intended for candid souls sure of their faith, but for anxious human beings' (1958: 6). He elaborates too on Tura's saints, describing them as

> complete expressions of inner problems, of an almost pietistic fervour and esotericism. They are monks full of superhuman humility, ascetics and fanatics, with hectically reddened, sunken cheeks, feverish eyes and trembling hands. Here too, in these morbid psychopathic phenomena, there is a 'demonic' element (*Ibid.*).

This impression of Tura's paintings is echoed somewhat in Bernard Berenson's descriptions, which equally do not convey an air of harmony or of calm. Although Berenson praises Tura, he describes his figures as 'of flint, as haughty and immobile as Pharaohs, or as convulsed with suppressed energy as the gnarled knots in the olive tree. Their faces are seldom lit up with tenderness, and their smiles are apt to turn into archaic grimaces' (1952: 160). Though Berenson finds a sort of harmony in Tura's painting, in that the 'rock-born men could not fitly inhabit a world less crystal-hard' (*Ibid.*), it is not the kind which adheres to the principles of classical antiquity, those which in an architectural context John Summerson summarises, drawing on Leon Battista Alberti, as 'a demonstrable harmony of parts' (1963:8) and which provided a foundation for general perceptions of the Renaissance. It now seems opportune to shift away from the preoccupation with those works whose figures conform the best to canons of taste, and towards a view incorporating these less typically harmonious and at times exaggerated and unrealistic elements.

1.2 The background of theological, and especially patristic, scholarship in *Quattrocento* Ferrara

Linked to this aesthetic approach to Renaissance art is the second prevailing focus, which originates with Vasari and is the *rinascita* of aspects of classical culture. Whilst this is a widely studied phenomenon, what perhaps receives less attention are the continuities from medieval tradition into the Renaissance. These include cultural, religious and philosophical continuities, and of these the cultural centre of fifteenth-century Ferrara is a particularly rich case study. Regarding religious and philosophical continuity, a particularly significant aspect which has often received little attention was the study of the Church Fathers and the crucial role of many originally patristic concepts that are central to Catholic Christianity and therefore to the analyses of Christian messages in the

paintings explored in this thesis. Hence, it is useful here to establish an overview of religious and scholarly trends in Ferrara during this century, including the significant place of patristic study. Andrew Jotischky (2002) asserts that albeit having a more 'precarious hold' in the fourteenth century, after the turn of 1400 the popularity of Greek patristic theology was revived (238).[2] In the present day, fifteenth-century humanism is largely associated with certain momentous figures, and far less so with other individuals, who to some extent avoid due scrutiny, as is inevitable when any given field or 'movement' is recalled to the chronologically distanced collective mind. An example is that of the great fame accorded to Leonardo Bruni, an illustrious and innovative historian. Nonetheless, fellow pupils of Manuel Chrysoloras (c.1355 - 1415), who even undertook a more direct continuation of their master's work, like the Camaldolese Prior General and theologian, Ambrogio Traversari (d. 1439), an ascetic humanist, are frequently overlooked. Charles L. Stinger in *Humanism and the Church Fathers* (1977) thoroughly summarises the issue:

> Given their sharply different intellectual concerns, it is not surprising, then, that Traversari and Bruni were never close, despite Bruni's permanent residence in Florence from 1415 onwards. Although Traversari and Bruni both emphasized rhetorical studies and believed in the superiority of antiquity, Traversari admired not the courage and political prudence of Athens and Rome, but rather the spiritual fervor of the Fathers and the more holy Christianity which animated the universal Church of the patristic age. This is not to deny Bruni's greatness, nor that he was undoubtedly the more original thinker, but merely to stress that early Quattrocento Florentine humanism cultivated Christian as well as civic humanism (54).

Their master Manuel Chrysoloras may indeed have worked with and shared classical texts of Antiquity, but his contribution to theology as a discipline and his striving for the union of the eastern and western Churches was outstanding, and cannot have simply passed by his pupils. A renowned Greek teacher and translator, his enterprises included the translation of the Collects of the Roman Missal and Mass of St Gregory the Great from Latin into Greek, as well as the composition

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[2] A very interesting presentation of the value of Greek patristics in the Renaissance is found in Pelikan 1997.

of his own works, such as his most notable on the Procession of the Holy Spirit.[3] This latter treatise advocated the Latin doctrinal position, and thus represents a clear manifestation of his strongly unificatory goals. Consequently, it is not a surprise that, as Jotischky reaffirms, not all of the humanist pupils of Chrysoloras were of the same 'anticlerical stamp' as Bruni was (*Ibid.*)[4]. Rather, a profound appreciation for patristic study and for Byzantine asceticism can be identified; Traversari translated St John Climacus's iconic *Scala Paradisi* as well as works of St John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church Ephrem the Syrian, and Neo-Platonist Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. An even better-known humanist in Ferrara was Guarino da Verona (1370 - 1460), whom Stephen J. Campbell in his comprehensive work on Cosmè Tura names as 'one of the most esteemed Latin scholars and teachers of the century' (1997: 9). Guarino was a pupil of Chrysoloras and spent five years of his life in the latter's Constantinople home, whilst amassing an extensive array of manuscripts that included Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen, and illuminated Latin and Greek Psalters (Nelson 1995: 220). Spending his last thirty five years in Ferrara, he became an immensely influential educator to the Este family, and it was indeed around his teachings that much of the Ferrarese hub of *studia humanitatis* was elaborated. He worked avidly with classical Latin and Greek manuscripts, but also popularised his master's works and conducted, as Jotischky notes, his own translations of St Basil's homilies and the works of Cyril of Alexandria (*Ibid.*). Prince Leonello D'Este, as well as being educated for some years by Guarino, became great friends also with Traversari, and built for the *camaldolesi* at the Belfiore residence a monastery dedicated to *Santa Maria degli Angeli.* When Traversari died in 1440, the building became a centre of Dominican observance which became very dear to Prince Leonello as a spiritual centre. Given this mixture of profound influences on the prince's spirituality, it is perhaps not surprising that he became also greatly interested in the movements of reform that were spreading throughout Italy and especially in that area of Ferrara, aiming at the recovery of authentic religious experience. In a similar ambit, another protagonist was also Blessed Cardinal Niccolò Albergati, and another institution of import was the Olivetan monastery of San Giorgio, to which Leonello showed remarkable benevolence (Mariani Canova 1998: 18), and which will feature prominently in the following chapter.

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[3] The centuries-old question of the Holy Spirit's procession concerns the eternal origin of the third person of the trinity, whether just the Father, or both the Father and the Son.

[4] See pg. 54 of Rev. James MacCaffrey's (2000) *History of the Catholic Church from the Renaissance to the French Revolution* for a more complete list of Christian Renaissance Humanists and Greek patristic scholars in the area at the time.

Stephen Campbell acknowledges in a subchapter of his monographic work on Tura 'Giovanni Tavelli and Tura's *St Jerome*'[5] the role in fifteenth-century Ferrara of renowned *Gesuato*[6] and later bishop, Giovanni Tavelli (1386 - 1446), who attained wide renown for his extreme ascetic practices and for his extensively diffuse written works. These works included spiritual exhortations as well as hagiographies, drawing on Greek sources such as those aforementioned, and Campbell notes the influence upon Tavelli of Guarino and Traversari which is reflected in this fact. On the subject of the renowned Florentine humanists, Gombrich, in his study *From the Revival of Letters to the Reform of the Arts,* ascribes 'by common consent' to Niccolò Niccoli (1367-1437) the role of the most outstanding agent in the reporting of discoveries from abroad and transmission of information and codices (94). This is known from correspondences of Poggio Bracciolini and Bruni, as well as Traversari and Giovanni Aurispa (*Ibid.*).[7] Among all the manuscripts in Niccoli's extensive library, he owned at least four Greek texts of Scripture and a great number of Latin translations of Origen, Gregory Nazianzen and other Greek Fathers. Much of this corpus was left with Traversari during the time that Niccoli was in Rome (Stinger 141).

Aside from these more didactic impetuses, a great motivating factor for the West's acquisition of Byzantine manuscripts of this kind in the era immediately preceding that of Cosmè Tura was the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-45), an attempted, and fleetingly successful, reconciliation of the Latin and Greek churches. Amongst other doctrinal issues, the *Filioque* clause[8] was discussed at length, a long-standing cause of dispute between the churches that prompted Chrysoloras' aforementioned work on the procession of the Holy Spirit and a treatise by Traversari on the same subject. The humanist figures like Traversari, Guarino, and Niccolò Albergati were heavily involved in the council, where the Latin delegation appealed to patristic works by previously mentioned authors of manuscripts brought from Byzantium. It appealed for instance to Pseudo-Dionysius' treatment of the celestial hierarchy, and whose corpus Traversari himself translated into Latin. It was, to no great surprise, Niccoli who owned these Pseudo-Dionysius

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[5] Campbell 1997 pp. 80 - 90

[6] The *Gesuati* were a religious order founded in 1360 by St Giovanni Colombini, devoted especially to charity and penance.

[7] It may be noted here tangentially that this latter figure, Sicilian born though he later moved to Ferrara, spent time in Constantinople whence he retrieved, according to Stinger, hagiographies, Chrysostom's orations, letters of Gregory Nazianzen, a Psalter and Gospels. He expressed in a correspondence to Traversari that he had attempted to gain a good number of sacred volumes, but that this incurred anger and charges of pillaging, whilst 'with regard to the heathen books it seemed to them no great crime' (37).

[8] The *Filioque* clause of the Nicene Creed describes the double procession of the Holy Spirit, that he proceeds from both the Father and Son.

manuscripts to which Traversari had access and it is worth noting in fact that the latter translated them into Latin after the 'entreaties of many which forced him' (Stinger 159). Robert R. Nelson observes that even if much of the reason for this deep examination of the Greek Fathers by Italian Renaissance humanists was to provide counter-arguments to the Byzantine delegation of the council, it nevertheless occurred, bringing about a 'convergence of Eastern and Western interests' and exposure to countless manuscripts (*Ibid.*). Perhaps even more pertinent to the sphere of the visual arts, Pisanello, who like Cosmè Tura was involved with the Este family[9], was present in Ferrara during the council and famously created a medal depicting the penultimate Byzantine Emperor of Constantinople, John VIII Palaeologus, in commemoration of his historic visit, in addition to various sketches of the emperor and his retinue (Jardine, Brotton 2000: 26). Whilst assessing Cosmè Tura's theologically inspired works, it is extremely important to bear in mind this overview of the background of humanistic theological scholarship in the milieu surrounding the artist. Giordana Mariani Canova comments of *Quattrocento* Ferrarese miniatures: 'Protagonisti della commitenza furono da un lato i principi estensi, impegnati a rendere belli i libri della cultura e della devozione personale, e dall'altro le comunità della Chiesa e degli ordini religiosi intese a dare onore e figura alla parola di Dio nei libri della liturgia' (17). If this was the case with miniature painting in fifteenth-century Ferrara, then one can easily imagine that it could also be the case when it came to larger contemporaneous sacred works, such as those by Cosmè Tura; alongside his Estense patrons, Church figures and religious orders such as those discussed above might have played pivotal roles.

1.3 Iconological non-human features of painting

The third focus I would like to shift is a question of subject matter. I will move away from the dependance on human protagonists and their verisimilitude as a principal means of judging or characterising Renaissance painting and towards the elements which may be classified as secondary or 'peripheral'. To this end, I will explore other integral features of the works, viz. ornament, flora and fauna, and landscape. Ernst Gombrich's discussion of the aims and limits of iconology and its relationship to iconography seems very pertinent as a defence for the importance of these ostensibly secondary features, especially as it still stands as a pertinent, 'classical' study. In his work *Symbolic Images,* Gombrich considers the discipline of iconography as 'the identification of texts illustrated in a given religious or secular picture' (1972:6). Iconography in this way acts as a foundation for the

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[9] Campbell, for example, discusses the formalised friendship between the artist and Leonello D'Este (12).

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iconological issues that arise therefrom. A text is far less particularised than a picture, that is whilst a text can be imagined or illustrated in countless different ways, it is impossible to reconstruct from a picture precisely the text it illustrates because 'not all its features can be laid down in the text'. What can be determined first of all, however, is the iconographical subject matter, and, Gombrich notes, this is especially applicable to Renaissance painting. E. D. Hirsch's principle of the 'primacy of genres' - which asserts that the subject of a painting can only be identified once its genre has been determined - he believes 'applies to the art of the Renaissance with even greater stringency than it does to the nineteenth century' (5). The example he uses is the image of a beautiful woman holding a child; this motif may indicate textual provenance in a novel in whose plot a child is born, for instance, or a textbook on child-rearing. In Renaissance visual art, genres like the altarpiece and varying repertoires, such as those legendary or mythological, aid us in identifying iconographical subject matter, and in this case it is on this very basis that the image of the woman and child can be presumed to represent the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Christ child. From this point of iconographical identification, the iconological questions may be tackled, or in other words an interpretation of the artwork's specific features and symbols in the artist's cultural context can be launched. For Panofsky, whilst '*iconography* is concerned with the identification of the characteristic motifs employed in particular art traditions […], *iconology* is taken up with assessing underlying cultural premises from out of which the artist's work was drawn, and which he may quite unconsciously express in what he produces' (Layton 1991:35). Thus it may be said that the human protagonists in many scenes in Renaissance art play a role in establishing the painting's iconography, while other features which are in a sense additional and do not necessarily have an overtly iconographical function pertain to the iconological question of cultural premises. Regarding particularly the art of *Quattrocento* Ferrara, Joseph Manca (2001) critiques several prevailing misconceptions, including that the iconological features of the paintings are unnecessarily 'complex' and 'arcane' (58). Indeed, according to Panofsky and Gombrich's view, they should not be isolated from their socio-historical situation, their 'cultural premises'. As Manca warns, a preoccupation with an inherent iconological arcaneness may lead us to 'wrongly assess individual works [and] misjudge the nature of the society from which [Tura's painting] sprang' (61).

Having drawn on Gombrich and Panofsky's discourses on *iconography* versus *iconology* to highlight the importance of exploring non-human iconological features of painting and their relationship with 'cultural premises', I shall also discuss a motive for which Renaissance art historical scholarship often continues to focus on human protagonists. Simona Cohen (2008) in her

work on animals in Renaissance art underlines the pervasiveness of the assumptions and generalisations I have already noted above regarding the conceptually clear separation of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Hence, she says,

> we should expect to discover in art expressions of an increasingly secular as opposed to religious cultural orientation, homocentric as opposed to theocentric conceptions, and innovation of empirical science replacing authoritarian encyclopedic knowledge. In fact, tendencies towards secularity, homocentrism and empiricism have traditionally been underlined in Renaissance art-historical literature (xxxiv)

She observes that despite Wallace K. Ferguson's criticism of those art historians 'who take the various interpretations of the renaissance more or less for granted and have been unconsciously rather than consciously influenced by them', these very assumptions still prevail (*Ibid.*). Drawing to attention the retrospectively secularising nature of much historical scholarship, Cohen juxtaposes homocentrism and theocentrism. I will also build upon this by adding the juxtaposition of homocentrism and a kind of nature-centrism.[10] Not only has this homocentric approach to art been detrimental to the study of theological medieval continuities, but also to the analysis of representations of the natural world.

This thesis will unite these three shifts in approach: it shifts towards the 'disharmony' of Ferrarese art rather than the potentially more harmonious Florentine; it looks through the prism of medieval cultural continuity rather than solely the rebirth of the classical; and it takes as its focus the iconological depictions of the natural world within the whole iconography, rather than the central human figures. These focusses are easily reconciled when one puts into the context of continued Christian tradition the function of the iconology of nature. The philosophy of Neo-Platonist Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite - whose works, as I discussed in section 1.2, were prominent in fifteenth-century Ferrara - provides an interesting and useful entryway into understanding theological concepts of nature. The writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, or Denys as he came to be known in the vernacular, first began to be diffused at the beginning of the sixth century and have 'exercised a

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[10] I am hesitant to employ the somewhat anachronistic term 'ecocentrism'.

profound influence on Christian theology from that day to this' (Louth 1989: 2). He was hugely influential throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, partially owing to his self-representation as Pauline contemporary Dionysius the Areopagite and consequential quasi-apostolic authority, including in the Ferrarese spheres as aforementioned. The Greek for 'image' used in the New Testament, εἰκών (*eikon*), etymological parent of 'iconography' and 'iconology', denotes a mirror-like representation or a likeness, whilst in the Septuagint this term usually stands in for צֶלֶם (*tselem*) which has akin meaning. Paul writes precisely in 2 Cor 4:4 and Col 1:15 that Christ is the ultimate *eikon,* that of the Godhead. With Christ as king of the created Christocentric universe, it is helpful to understand the 'icons' of the natural world in light of both the Book of Wisdom and also of Pseudo-Dionysius's philosophy of 'dissimilar similarities', which was itself a continuity from its origins in the hermeneutics of the Athenian school (Lankila 2001: 21). The author of the Book of Wisdom - who is identified as Solomon by tradition - tells the kings of the Creator's bestowal of the wisdom of his splendour upon receptive human beings, splendour which may be found ubiquitously and thus in the natural world around them: elements, solstices, the positions of the stars, as well as 'the nature of animals and the tempers of wild beasts, the powers of spirits[11] and the reasonings of men, the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots' (Wisdom 7:20). Through this wisdom mankind learns what is manifest and what is κρυπτὰ (hidden) (7:21), that is the 'visible' as well as what is 'invisible'[12], both of which are created by God. One means of envisioning the relationship between the natural world and the invisible is indeed via Pseudo-Dionysius's 'dissimilar similarities', a lens through which this scriptural description seems readily interpretable. In order to explain the concept of 'dissimilar similarities', earthly incongruous images that convey divine realities, I quote from Chapter II of the *Celestial Hierarchy*:

> We cannot, as mad people do, profanely visualize these heavenly and godlike intelligences as actually having numerous feet and faces. They are not shaped to resemble the brutishness of oxen or to display the wildness of lions. They do not have the curved beak of the eagle or the wings and feathers of birds […] or any of those shapes handed on to us amid all the variety of the revealing symbols of scripture. The Word of God makes use of poetic imagery when discussing these formless

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[11] Or *winds.*

[12] See the first article of the Nicene Creed.

intelligences but, as I have already said, it does so not for the sake of

art, but as a concession to the nature of our own mind (147).

Although this passage refers to animal symbols which represent specifically the angelic bodies, the notion is also applied to any symbol of the natural world which conveys something of the 'hidden' divine. Divine revelation, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, works 'by proceeding naturally through sacred images in which like represents like, while also using formations which are dissimilar and even entirely inadequate and ridiculous' (149). There is something 'similar' to the divine thing being revealed wherefore it is chosen, but at the same time there is something essentially 'dissimilar' in that the thing being revealed is not of the earthly world and mankind can only experience a foretaste of it.

When one considers that these scriptural images are only recognisable to mankind when they are read by virtue of the fact that they exist in the sensible world, the message expressed in Chapter 7 of the Book of Wisdom can be understood in the same fashion. The Church taught and teaches that wisdom received sacramentally[13] in the earthly *ecclesia*, reveals the nature of its celestial counterpart[14], but the point here is that wisdom's teachings also expose divine mysteries using the natural world via flora, fauna and minerals, natural symbols which once experienced in human perception can be interpreted in scripture. Although manmade art would not be considered to independently reveal divine realities, when the natural images are inserted artistically into specific religious iconographies as they would not necessarily be experienced in the sensible world, the artwork starts to approximate the divinely revelatory function of both by means of combining them, as an *eikon*. The iconological representations of nature can be interpreted according to the other contextual features, figures and messages of the artwork to convey the theological meanings of different issues, be they temptation, penitence, an episode in the Christ-Event etc. Therefore the artistic depiction of our mankind-wide conscious reality of incongruous natural images - leading to God *per visibilia ad invisibilia* - may be looked upon as an act whereby the artist assumes a somewhat analogous function to the Creator, becoming a creator him/herself in a kind of *mise en abîme*. Using this Neo-Platonic tradition is a fruitful foundation for beginning to interpret iconological symbols in works of Cosmè Tura against their textual basis, both scriptural and hagiographical, given its prevalence and pervasiveness. For Italian Neo-Platonist humanists like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463 - 1494) and the hugely influential Marsilio Ficino (1433 -

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[13] *Sacramentum* is the Latin translation of μυστήριον [mustérion], 'that which is hidden'.

[14] For example, the Eucharist as a symbol and foretaste of the heavenly marriage banquet.

1499), Pseudo-Dionysius was 'the quintessential Platonist, preferable even to the ancients, because he combined Platonic philosophy with the truth of the Christian faith'. For Ficino, as for other philosophers, Plato, Paul, and Dionysius were the key figures in this religious synthesis (Leclercq 1987: 36). Breaking down 'iconology' etymologically, we have εἰκών (*eikon*) and λόγος (*logos*), 'image' and 'word', which in Christian art both orbit around he who is at the same time the *eikon* of the Godhead and the Λόγος that became σὰρξ (flesh), Christ.

Kristen Lippincott (2001) explains in a review of Stephen Campbell's monograph that his approach to Tura's life and works accepts the fragmentary and 'tragic' state of the remains of Ferrarese art of this period, a state meaning that 'traditionally structured monographic studies of Tura may be doomed because they place priority on a set of issues which can never be fully resolved' (555). She reiterates that because of the scarceness of the remains of Ferrarese art, any study 'aiming to reconstruct a complete biography, a plausible chronology of works, a list of definitive attributions, or a series of reconstructions of dismantled polyptychs will be incomplete. To date, monographic studies of Tura's works have not only failed to present a clear picture of his career; they have failed to move us any closer to an understanding of why he painted the way he did' (*Ibid.*). Indeed, finding a solution by exploring aspects of Tura's work against cultural attitudes and trends seems an opportune approach to take.

It is my wish not to reject the 'mysterious' essence of the paintings' features highlighted by previous studies, but to illuminate these elements according to a different conception of 'mystery'. The Greek μυστήριον (*mustérion*) denoted in its classical sense anything whatsoever 'hidden', and in its original Judeo-Christian sense, the term indicates a 'hidden' divine reality.[15] In a Christian context, that which is hidden is the divine reality that is made known to man through revelation, in Christ, the *eikon* of the Godhead, and in the incongruous images of the natural world. To this end, I shall discuss three aspects of nature in selected paintings of Cosmè Tura's corpus, focussing on cultural and philosophical continuities through the Middle Ages, as opposed to merely a 'rebirth'. My next chapter explores the rich decorative features of Tura's *Virgin and Child Enthroned* (mid-1470s) from the *Roverella* altarpiece, ornamental and architectural Old Testament imagery often representing nature. The chapter offers an analysis of it, within its New Testament iconography, according to the continuity in Christian philosophy of covenantal fulfilment, the New Testament fulfilling the Old. Therefore, having established what I have in this introductory chapter regarding the theological and patristic background in Ferrara, I begin my analysis by further

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[15] 'He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables.'(Mk 4:11)

contextualising the painting itself by locating it within the particular religious and patristic environment for which it was painted. The painting's most salient feature are the Hebrew Tablets of Law, and interpretations have been proposed that they harbour an anti-Semitic message. In order, however, to offer my alternative reading of the Tablets and the rest of the Old Testament imagery, the chapter proceeds with an assessment of contemporary Christian-Jewish relations and attitudes to the Old Testament and Hebrew language in culture and art. On the basis of this assessment as well as the painting's theological background, I then explore some of the particular imagery, which is often derived from the natural world, aided by the texts whence the images are derived and the scholarship of the Church Fathers.

The following chapter explores another non-human aspect of the natural world, flora and fauna, rethinking the approach to Renaissance nature by assessing it according to continuations in cultural tradition, as opposed to simply rebirth. I offer a presentation of the bestiary tradition as one based on earlier sources like the *Physiologus* and the Church Fathers, and also as a tradition that has continued beyond the strict Middle Ages and well into the early modern period, using the Italian Renaissance *imprese* as a case in point. I proceed to analyse three different sacred paintings of Tura's and how the flora and fauna can be interpreted according to the overall works' message, derived from scriptural and hagiographical sources, and how layers of meaning accumulate underpinned by these continuations in bestiary tradition and religious and philosophical thought. This includes what may be considered somewhat less 'obvious' flora and fauna, whose potential meanings are not immediately evident.[16] I look first of all at the 'penitential' nature of the fauna in Tura's *Saint Jerome,* the lion, an owl with a frog in its talons, a wall-creeper bird, which all seem to reflect a certain aspect of the saint's life or of his ascetic fervour. In his *Pietà,* now in the Museo Correr in Venice, orange tree and the monkey within it can, as symbols of the natural world, be read to help convey the divine truths behind the rest of the painting's iconography and textual sources. Finally, the *Annunciation*, which was painted on the doors of the original cathedral's organ, features some curious fauna aside from the dove, that is to say a squirrel and an unidentified bird. I explore potential interpretations of these creatures as situated in a scene of the Angel Gabriel and Virgin Annunciate, particular how the unknown bird and the squirrel pertain to them respectively, as they correspond to each half of the doors. I propose that in their functions as understood in medieval tradition, they may possibly behave as 'foils' to an extent, highlighting something crucial of the two protagonists.

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[16] By 'obvious' I mean flora and fauna which may subscribe to an extent to a semiotic code, such as saints' attributes used to identify them (Saint Jerome's lion, Saint John the Baptist with a lamb, Saint Dominic with a lily).

The final chapter continues to challenge both the focus on human protagonists in art and the preconception, in scholarship and generally, that Renaissance painting is harmonious and verisimilar by exploring Tura's landscapes. Therefore, I consider some classical and typically 'Renaissance' notions of verisimilitude and harmony, and illustrate the ways in which Tura's landscapes, and particularly his rock formations, may adhere to some aspects and not to others. Having much in common with a certain phenomenon in Byzantine rock depiction, which filtered into Italian painting, I assess how in Tura's work there may be some parallels with trends in Byzantine iconography, both in terms of landscape features themselves, natural structures of the earth's materials and as landscapes in their entirety as historical and sacred places from scripture or hagiography. Thus, landscape features are discussed according to how they operate as backdrops themselves in the paintings, but also against their own backdrop of religious and philosophical continuities from the Middle Ages. I thus revisit Tura's *Saint Jerome,* which has a fascinating landscape divided into two sections, the left of which seems to suggest the soul's attempt to ascent closer to God, which the saint desires during his penance in the desert. I then shift my attention once more to Tura's Museo Correr *Pietà*, but having discussed the monkey and orange tree in the preceding chapter, I explore the prominent Mount Calvary in the background and its function in the concepts of ascent, and even how it can also be interpreted as other mountains, Old Testament and New. I also look at its role from the point of view of a landscape feature crucial to a kind of chronological overlapping of scenes, something which is found in Byzantine art, including mosaics in Ravenna, and in contemporary Ferrarese paintings and manuscript illuminations.

2. Covenantal Fulfilment in the Architecture and Ornament of Cosmè Tura's *Virgin and Child Enthroned*

O [Ark of the New] Covenant, clothed with purity instead of gold! You are the Ark in which is found the golden vessel containing the true manna, that is, the flesh in which divinity resides.

(St Athanasius, *Homily of the Papyrus of Turin*)[17]

2.1 An introduction to the painting and its Olivetan background

One of the most striking elements of all Cosmè Tura's works are perhaps the Hebrew Tablets of Law which constitute part of the architecture of the throne in his *Virgin and Child Enthroned* (mid-1470s) **(Fig. 1)**. This symbol stands out to the viewer since Hebrew inscription is not an especially common feature of early Renaissance art, although I shall come to another couple of examples further on. It is also striking for a second reason, in that the Decalogue is perhaps the most emblematic item one could choose of the continuity between the Old Testament and the New. The panel's architectural and ornamental decoration includes sculpted and embedded Old Testament symbols of animals, fruit, vegetables, musical instruments, shells and even images not found in the sensible world but purely in scripture, like the cherub. They may *prima facie* seem purely decorative but can in fact be interpreted according to the whole semiotic iconography of the celestial throne and the painting's overall conspicuous message of covenantal fulfilment. As I discussed in my introductory chapter, whilst Tura is an artist of what we may call the early Renaissance, I will not assess his sacred works with the mindset of 'rebirth', but rather I will look down the medieval timeline at the cultural and religious continuities. Therefore, my interpretation of the painting's ornamental representation of nature will be underpinned by continuations in religious philosophy that were perpetuated contemporaneously in the city of Ferrara. As outlined in detail in section 1.2, the writings of the Latin and Greek Fathers were prominent in *Quattrocento* Ferrara, not only because of the Council of Ferrara-Florence but also because of the scholarship of eminent humanists. Manuel Chrysoloras, for example, and his pupil the Camaldolese humanist

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Ambrogio Traversari, studied and translated works by such Fathers as Chrysostom, Gregory Nazianzen, and Pseudo-Dionysius. This latter theologian had a marked influence on Neo-Platonist humanists Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, the second of whom read philosophy at Ferrara's university. Guarino da Verona - pivotal in the Ferrarese humanist milieu and educator to Cosmè Tura's patrons, the Este family - too undertook patristic study and translation, for instance of St Basil and Cyril of Alexandria. Hence, much of my assessment of the message of Old Testament fulfilment will hinge upon the writings of such authors. This is particularly pertinent to the patristic background of the painting itself and the institution for which it was commissioned.

Tura's *Virgin and Child Enthroned* is the central panel of the now fragmented and partially lost *Roverella* altarpiece, and is currently located in London's National Gallery. The altarpiece was, however, painted for the church of San Giorgio, Ferrara's original cathedral, in the monastery of San Giorgio.[18] It was a monastery of the Olivetan branch of the Benedictine Order.[19] Perhaps the principle figure in its commissioning was Lorenzo Roverella, Bishop of Ferrara from 1460 to 1474, who is represented in the original altarpiece alongside his brothers, who also had a part to play in the commissioning: Bartolomeo, Cardinal of San Clemente and Bishop of Ravenna, and Niccolò, the abbot at the monastery Monte Oliveto Maggiore, the Mother House of the Olivetan congregation in Tuscany. Bishop Lorenzo had an intense rapport with the Olivetans, and on the 6th July 1474 even came to die at Monte Oliveto Maggiore. He left patristic manuscripts to the San Giorgio monastery, such as a codex of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* now in Ferrara's Biblioteca Ariostea (Cl. II 167), evidencing the diffusion of works of the Church Fathers and their presence at the monastery. Other *Quattrocento* Ferrarese works bearing the symbol of the Olivetan monks are for example codices of Chrysostom's writings (1457 - 1458) (Biblioteca Ariostea, Cl. II 333, Cl. II 334). The Olivetan emblem is a three peaked Mount Calvary with a red cross atop the central peak and green olive branches protruding from the lateral ones, and is in the case of the Chrysostom manuscripts in a *bas de page* medal (1r). At the very end of Cl. II 334 are the words 'LAUS DEO FINIS GLORIA CHRISTO IESU', followed by the signature, in Greek, of Girolamo Bendedei, whose Greek signature is also found in the other. Bendedei was the predecessor of Niccolò Roverella as prior of the monastery, and was a scholar of the Greek Fathers who annotated various manuscripts of Traversari's translations of Chrysostom's sermons and commentaries. He is a highly possible candidate as theological advisor for Tura's altarpiece (Campbell 118). Finally, as regards

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[18] See p. 12 of this work's introductory chapter.

[19] The name 'Olivetan' comes from the congregation's original hermitage, named Monte Oliveto (now Monte Oliveto Maggiore, in Tuscany 10km south of Asciano) after that in Jerusalem from which Jesus ascended into heaven.

the Roverella family's contact with the Greek Fathers, Bartolomeo Roverella in fact studied under Guarino in the 1430s in both Verona and Ferrara (104). This context to the painting, the involved figures' high regard for the Fathers and especially for Chrysostom, it seems must have had notable influence on both its production and reception. The Old Testament imagery may hence be viewed through this prism of patristic theology present in Ferrara and wider Italy, as the rich web of covenantal fulfilment begins to unravel, beginning with the Hebrew Decalogue. Concerning the painting's relationship to the manuscripts themselves, a link has been made which suggests that there may have been an anti-Jewish sentiment in Ferrara and in turn in Tura's painting owing to presence among them of Chrysostom's sermons against the Jews.[20] However, it is anachronistic to judge the work as strictly anti-Semitic; it has been widely accepted, for instance by Robert L. Wilken, that the sermons must be viewed in a late antique rather than medieval setting. Chrysostom was delivering the sermons to Judaizers, compelling them to return to the Church. This was owing to the fact that the Christian elite found it hard to accept the monastic ideal and turn away from the hellenistic urban life to which they were accustomed, and for this reason the Jewish customs were appealing to certain portions of society (Maas 1985: 291). For Chrysostom it was impossible to share worship between the two religions and confuse them, and so he made full use of late antique rhetorical traditions in his preaching in order to lead people to a theological understanding of Christian liturgy. Girolamo Bendedei's vast patristic study would have provided him with a profound theological understanding which would doubtfully have given him a superficial regard for Chrysostom's homilies.

2.2 Contemporary Judaism in *Quattrocento* northern Italy

In order to better understand Tura's decision to include the Hebrew language in his painting, given that it was a fairly uncommon phenomenon, it is useful to commence with an exploration of contemporary Christian-Jewish relations. Amongst the more recent studies of the painting's Hebrew Tablets has been that by Stephen Campbell, who suggests that the Old Testament symbolism of the altarpiece's central panel may have a polemical side, an anti-Semitic one. In his comprehensive monograph, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495,* Campbell observes that the head of the sleeping Christ-child partially covers the second commandment of the Tablets of Mosaic Law (117). He discusses Roberto Longhi's commentary on the Hebrew Tablets in the *Officina Ferrarese* (1934: 38), which overlooks what is written on them and views their

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[20] eg. Campbell (1997) p.118

inclusion as an instance anticipating the fashionable 'orientalising fantasies of the *seicento*' (102). Longhi's dismissal of the textual meaning behind the stylistic touch Campbell deems part of a recurrent obstacle in the interpretation of fifteenth-century art, and he indicates that 'no confident distinction can be made between [...] the meaning of the work and elements which might be said primarily to advertise the artist's skill' (*Ibid.*). Indeed, the Hebrew Decalogue so crucial to Tura's work need not be overlooked as a display of artistic skill but regarded in the context of the entire iconography of the Virgin and Child Enthroned, though perhaps as foundational and prophetic, rather than anti-Semitic.

Whilst there could have been some anti-Semitic elements in society, nevertheless it seems that the bearing of social antipathy towards Judaism, or the specific resident Jews, was limited. Campbell states in a 2015 article[21] that Pope Sixtus IV (1414 - 1484) 'was particularly preoccupied with the need to ground the roots of Christianity in Judaism', signs of which are evident in frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, including for instance the *Testament and Death of Moses* (1482) by Luca Signorelli and Bartolomeo della Gatta, giving prominence to the continuity between the Old Testament and the New. Evidence of these papal trends in theological scholarship are the dimensions of the chapel itself, adhering to those given by God in First Kings for the Temple of Solomon. Indeed, this resonates with the deeply theological nature of Sixtus's activities, which extended to many an advancement in Mariology and to his pivotal role in the controversy surrounding the blood Christ shed on the cross.[22]

Specifically in the city of Ferrara, its Jewish population was famously protected by the Este court and it enjoyed the city's renown as something of a sanctuary nurturing religious freedom and tolerance. Cecil Roth describes the prosperity of Jewries in fifteenth century northern Italy, adding only that 'a few setbacks are chronicled, but they are isolated and exceptional. If, during civic disturbances, the Jews may sometimes have suffered more than their neighbors, this did not betoken a persecutory spirit among the people' (1946: 137). To be regarded as an exceptional setback is the incident frequently cited in scholarship on anti-Semitism in the northern Italian cities of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance:[23] In 1493 in the city of Mantua, the Jewish moneylender Daniele Da Norsa received permission to remove an image of the Virgin Mary from the façade of the house he had purchased, but once this was effected, some public outrage was triggered (Rubin 2010: 341).

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[21] The article in question was written for *Antiques and Fine Art Magazine.*

[22] The controversy concerned whether it remained linked to his divinity during the three days in the tomb, a debate for which he composed the 1467 treatise *De sanguine Christi* (Stinger 1998: 147).

[23] See, for example, *The Art of Mantua: Power and Patronage in the Renaissance* by Barbara Furlotti, Guido Rebecchin

He was absolved by Francesco Gonzaga after having received a fine to commission a work painted by Mantegna, the 1496 *Madonna della Vittoria*, to be housed in the new chapel built in place of his razed house. This incident does not speak favourably for Christian-Jewish relations, but it may be considered above all as a reaction to perceived blasphemy and a reasserting gesture of courtly power, rather than an indication of a kind of animosity towards Judaism. Another instance of intolerance occurring around the very same time and only a little farther south, in the city of Florence, was that of the renowned fiery Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola who was preaching against usury, exhorting charity to the poor, and called for the introduction of a state lending institution, the Monte di Pietà (Najemy 2006: 396). The Christian standpoint in the late Middle Ages was opposed to usury, since time was perceived as belonging to God; according to Aquinas, 'to accept usury for money is intrinsically unjust. For to sell something that does not exist[24] constitutes an obvious inequity, which is contrary to justice' (2002: 204). Indeed, one main Christian and medieval criterion for excluding certain professions was related to the Seven Deadly Sins, and groups whose *mestiere* was perceived to involve these sins were 'excluded in the name of lechery' (Le Goff 1990: 48). While merchants were instruments of avarice, 'the usurer, the worst type of merchant, was the object of several overlapping condemnations: handling money (which was especially scandalous), avarice, and sloth' (*Ibid.*).[25] The sinful nature of lending money at interest was deeply ingrained, and for these reasons it was in fact forbidden by Canon Law. During the thirteenth century, usury remained one of the few trades condemned *secundum se,* 'in itself', *de natura,* 'by its very nature', and those who practised it were refused a Christian burial (Le Goff 50). For these motives, it became an occupation often assumed by Jews. Franciscan monk Marco di Matteo Strozzi, was too preaching against usury in Florence, but he spoke, as Najemy observes, with a distinctly anti-Jewish voice, calling for the Jews' removal from the city, 'their old synagogue, their rites and their usury' (Najemy 396). This demand for their expulsion, however, was never enforced. On the contrary, it was rescinded even at the urge of Savonarola himself, and his

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[24] Aquinas explains this non-existence with the analogy of wine or wheat; to sell the 'use' of wine or wheat is selling the same thing twice, as is loaning wine or wheat and asking for a dual repayment, one for the value of the object itself and the other for its use (*Ibid*).

[25] Dante placed usurers in the third ring of the seventh circle, amongst those who committed violence against God, Art and Nature: 'Da queste due, se tu ti rechi a mente/ lo Genesì dal principio, convene/ prender sua vita e avanzar la gente;/ e perché l'usuriere altra via tene,/ per sé natura e per la sua seguace/ dispregia, poi ch'in altro pon la spene.' (*Divina Commedia, Inferno*, Canto XI. 106-111) Dante condemns the usurer, for he/she takes a different path other than that of God or of his natural law of industry and honest work. As Guy P. Raffa (2000) notes, Virgil at this point has just appealed to Aristotle's *Physics* to establish the idea that *ars imitatur naturam*, 'art follows nature' (2.2.194) and then here reminds Dante of God's words in Genesis 3:17: *in laboribus comedes ex ea [terra] cunctis diebus vitae tuae* ('in toil you shall eat of it [earth] all the days of your life') (847). Dante recounts how he walks alone around that seventh circle 'dove sedea la gente mesta', one of the subtle instances of *contrapasso* whereby the usurers' seated position reflects the laziness of their business.

followers reproached him for having ever having made the demand (397). Thus, it can be noted that in *Quattrocento* Florence there was a history of opposition to usury, but it was for the religious reasons given by Aquinas, the very reasons for which it was banned by the Church. The resultant practice of the occupation by Jews was because of the Christian institutional opposition to the practice and not vice versa. In the case that does display a misguided association of Judaism itself with usury, that of Matteo di Strozzi, Najemy has indicated that the demand for the Jews' expulsion was barely heeded and was never enforced.

À propos visual culture, a traditional means of juxtaposing Judaism and Christianity was by the personifications of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga,* the latter blindfolded holding a broken spear and with the Ten Commandments hanging solemnly from her other hand.[26] In Tura's central panel, the Commandments are found in an entirely different context, and the tablets bearing them form part of the physical throne in a central position that reinforces their concreteness and congenital relationship to the enthroned mother and son. On the subject of this iconographic trope *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*, Dana E. Katz (2008) offers an interesting view on a specifically Ferrarese pictorial use of it, though from a later generation than Cosmè Tura. The work in question is Garofalo's (c. 1476 - 1559) fresco of the *Crucifix with Ecclesia and Synagoga* painted originally for the Augustinian refectory of Sant'Andrea and now in Ferrara's Pinacoteca Nazionale. Katz, affirming the tolerance and favourability of Garofalo's patron Alfonso I d'Este and predecessors towards the contemporary Jews, submits that the fresco 'indeed adheres to Ferrarese policies on tolerance' (71). Some of the arguments Katz uses may not be relevant to this chapter, but she does explain some theological and doctrinal motives for which the painting 'defended Ferrara's Jews through the allegorization of religious difference. Garofalo […] constructs a complex allegory through tropes of personification that abstract reality to create a conceptualized Christian ideal'[27], employing also complementary textual exegesis to ensure that the image is thus understood (87). Whilst Garofalo was active in Ferrara later than Tura, a nuanced approach may be taken towards both painters' works which bears in mind the tolerant attitudes of Ferrara's ruling family.

2.3 Hebrew in Italian Renaissance art and culture

To recall once more the continuities in scholarship from the Middle Ages via humanistic patristic study, it gave way also to Hebrew scriptural study and translation. Ambrogio Traversari is yet again

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[26] See, for example, the statues at the portal of Strasbourg Cathedral or Rheims.

[27] For a thorough account of Katz's analysis of the fresco, see her chapter 'Slaying Synagoga in Estense Ferrara', Katz (2008) pp. 69-98

of pertinence, as his pupil Giannozzo Manetti, an often overlooked Florentine humanist and ardently Christian scholar, was the first to learn Hebrew from Jewish teachers, proceeding to translate Psalms and other scripture into Latin, driven by theological as well as philological interest. Later in the century, 'la fenice deli ingegni' (Craven 1981: 7), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was, as I mentioned in section 2.1, making his way around northern Italian cities, and the Hebrew that he acquired he applied to profound study of the Old Testament and Rabbinical commentaries. Pico and his fellow Renaissance Neo-Platonist, Marsilio Ficino tried to reconcile the Kabbalah with Christian doctrine, the former including numerous cabalistic propositions in his 1486 *opus,* the famous oration *De hominis dignitate* (Kristeller 1996: 222). Many studies regarding the evolution of Jewish studies by Christian humanists such as Pico have been conducted from the point of view of secular and/or historical humanists, but once the dynamic between humanism and contemporary Judaism is analysed, a close rapport can be observed between the two groups. The exegetical works translated by Pico from Hebrew were recommended in the main by his Jewish collaborators, and 'così la metologia didattica, il *curriculum* di studi ebraici seguito dall'umanista fu in larga misura quella indicatogli da personalità della cultura contemporanea, quali Elia del Medigo, Flavio Mitridate, Yohanan Alemanno e forse Avraham Farissol' (Lelli 1997: 303). These figures were not simply passive mediators for humanistic interest in Jewish studies, but were great *maestri* offering their didactic tradition and working closely with Christian humanists in a religious and cultural exchange. Jewish intellectuals even in the preceding century had been exploring scripture via a synthesis of Aristotelian-Jewish exegesis and Christian Scholasticism. Fabrizio Lelli illustrates that many of these intellectuals were translating Christian philosophical texts in order to apply them to their own scriptural commentaries, such as Yehudah ben Mošeh Romano and especially his *Commento all'opera della creazione* (*Be'ur 'al ma'aśeh berešit*), which has notable influences from Egidio Romano and Thomas Aquinas (306).[28] Notwithstanding, then, some of the controversy that was aroused by those belonging to the Christian Kabbalah movement in the *Quattrocento,* its popularity does seem to attest at the very least to a northern Italian attention to Jewish tradition and its parentage of Christianity, if not a fascination and appetite for greater exploration. Likewise, the mutual appropriation of texts and exegetical and philosophical traditions indicates respect and healthy interest. Taking Pico della Mirandola as an exemplary instrument and leader in this trend in Christian-Jewish studies and bearing in mind the periods he spent in Ferrara and closely

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[28] A more in-depth study of the rapport between Christian humanists, especially Pico della Mirandola, and Jewish intellectuals can be found in Lelli's chapter 'La cultura ebraica italiana del XV secolo' in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* from the *Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494-1994)*, p. 303-325

neighbouring intellectual centres, it may be safely suggested that an interesting intellectual culture that valued Hebrew tradition was being fostered.

Israel Abrahams (1913: 46) in 'The Decalogue in Art' discusses the work of Lodovico Mazzolino (1480-1530), an artist who was, according to different sources, influenced by Lorenzo Costa, Ercole De' Roberti, Cosmè Tura, or perhaps a mixture of Ferrarese artists.[29] In his work perhaps lie more clues to comprehending Tura's Hebrew tablets. Mazzolino's *Christ disputing with the Doctors* (c. 1520-5) **(Fig. 4)** in the London National Gallery is a portrayal of the finding of the child Jesus in the temple from Luke 2:41-52. He painted in this work a relief above Christ and the Rabbis which depicts Moses giving the Commandments to the Israelites and, above that, a Hebrew inscription: 'הבית אשר בנה שלמה להי' ['The house which Solomon built for the Lord'], taken from 1 Kings 6:2. It seems not far-fetched to consider that Mazzolino may have been inspired by Tura's implementation of Hebrew inscription in his own work, and, in this case, was enkindled by its use in conveying traditional theological purposes in reference to the continuity of the Old Testament into the New. Since the scene of the *Dispute* takes place during the Passover pilgrimage, it reinforces loyal observance of Jewish law by Mary and Joseph, for males were obligated to make the *Pesah* pilgrimage thrice a year. Additionally, if one considers the artist in his social context, as Dalia Haitovsky (1998: 134) has done, one notes that Mazzolino was working with the aid of different Jewish teachers for help with the Hebrew inscriptions not only in this work, but in eleven others where Hebrew inscriptions feature. Instead of copying from the text directly, Mazzolino abbreviates the name of God to one sole letter, which, Haitovsky highlights, must have been through the help of either a Jew or someone who acknowledged the Jewish custom forbidding the full spelling of God's name. Haitovsky also discusses Lorenzo Costa's (1460 - 1535) Hebrew inscriptions and especially his *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*, formerly in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum but destroyed in 1945.[30] The episode is itself an archetypal fulfilment of Mosaic Law and a sanctification of all women through the Virgin Mary's purification upon presenting the Son of God in accordance with the law. Costa's 'sophisticated' use of Hebrew is found on a tablet held by the prophetess Anna, who in Luke 2:22-38 bears witness to Simeon's prophecy but is never attributed precise words. The words Costa gives her on the tablet, Haitovsky explains, are taken from the Old and New Testaments, and 'by changing the phrases slightly, [point] to the child Jesus

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[29] Dalia Haitovsky (1998) p. 134 of 'The Hebrew Inscriptions in Mazzolino's Painting', mentions that Vasari, for example, claimed that Mazzolino was trained by Costa, whilst Berenson named his master as Ercole de' Roberti, and others Cosmè Tura.

[30] Haitovsky (1994) offers a more extensive study on the Hebrew inscription in this work

as the coming Christ' (133). An immediate association of the Presentation is the fact that it is the Fourth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, and indeed in the painting the Hebrew text that merges the Testaments assumes a mysterious quality, **μυστήριον** (*mustérion*), a hidden divine reality.[31] Considering that Lorenzo Costa, as well as possibly having been involved in the training of the young Mazzolino, was a contemporary of Cosmè Tura, his use of Hebrew inscription to illustrate the fulfilment of the Old Covenant proves useful in understanding Tura's inclusion of the Hebrew Decalogue. Israel Abrahams also acknowledges the general accuracy of Tura's use of Hebrew, pointing out that the order and choice of initial words correspond precisely to the usual arrangement in synagogues of the modern age, and this he views in fact as a signal of the influence that Jewish teachers had in the city of Ferrara at the time that Tura and Costa were painting (46). Tura may well have even attended a synagogue in order to imitate contemprary inscription.

2.4 The Hebrew Decalogue and other Old Testament images

2.4.1 The Decalogue and cherubim with trumpets

Let us now consider in detail the specific Hebrew Tablets in Tura's Roverella *Virgin and Child*, **(Fig. 2)** and the Christ-child's interaction with the Commandments, according to theological continuities alive in the contemporary culture. The child's head may be appearing to cover the second Commandment: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image'. It could be proposed that the Commandment is a reference to Jewish iconoclasm, providing a means to distinguish Christianity from Judaism, but there is an entirely different way to understand the Decalogue and Tura's depiction of it. Initially, a distinction needs to be drawn between post-sixth-century Rabbinic Judaism - forms of which grew from a contradistinction with Christianity - and the traditional Judaism practised by those for whom the Commandments were given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and with which traditional Christianity is contiguous in its faith content. The second Commandment was, in its context, a law to stand opposed to such behaviour as the Israelites themselves exhibited in Moses's absence during his journey up the mount, when they resorted to the worship of a golden calf (Ex 32:4). This scriptural episode showing what became of the Israelites when left to their own religious devices echoes the practices of many peoples at the time, such as the Philistines' graven image worship of Dagon, practices to which this second law stands averse. It is not a law condemning visual representation and images of divine realities *per se*, whether or not this may have been the motive for its introduction into discourse by the iconoclastic heretics of the eighth

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[31] See p. 19.

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and ninth centuries. For Christianity, then, the Mosaic Law holds the very same implications against idolatry, an attitude that Paul expresses towards the Corinthians' prior worship of 'mute idols' (1 Cor 12:2), hence evoking attributes that were given to silver and gold idols in Psalm 115:5, that 'they have mouths but they cannot speak'. Conversely, there is only one God who is the **Λόγος** (Word) and who breathed the heavens into being by his **λογοσ** (word), according to Psalm 33:6 in the Septuagint.

As stated in John 1:14, that **Λόγος** became **σὰρξ** (flesh) in Christ, whose juvenile form in Tura's painting unites spatially with the Decalogue, one may say, rather than obscuring or obliterating it. Gravity seems not to be acting on the child's head, as it is suspended in rest with the only ostensible support for it provided by the stone tablets themselves, the foundation necessarily laid for his coming. Continuities from medieval patristic thought affirm this reading of a message of covenantal fulfilment. Chrysostom, a Greek Father whose commentaries were read and translated in Ferrara and in the San Giorgio monastery, commented on the Epistle to the Hebrews likening the New Covenant's fulfilling of the Old to the *eikon* (image) as a completion of the *skia* (shadow). Cyril of Alexandria's - another saint studied by Ferrarese humanists - exegetical conception of *skiagraphia*[32] is a similar trope that claims the Old Law's akin-ness to an 'underdrawing' (Campbell 117). An apt way to conceptualise this trope, rather than by obliteration or destruction, for instance, is in Augustine's famous declaration,*"In vetere testamento novum latet, et in novo vetus patet"*. The outline of the Old Dispensation was awaiting the vibrancy of the New, hidden in the space, but simultaneously that outline is rendered not obsolete but crucially attainable by the inserted colour. This way of interpreting the Fathers' words and Tura's pictorial connection of the child Jesus's head with the stone tablets of Mosaic Law conforms also to Jesus's words in Matthew 5:17: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.' Stephen Campbell (107) in fact explains that Ferrarese cleric Girolamo Baruffaldi in an eighteenth century work on Ferrarese artists associates a damaged inscription on the organ played by the angels rousing the Christ child in Tura's painting with a couplet in the *Tumultuaria Carmina* of Ferrarese poet Lodovico Bigo Pittorio: 'Surge puer. Roverella fores gens pulsat./ Aperturum redde aditum. Pulsa lex ait, intus eris.' ('Arise boy, the Roverella family are knocking outside. Let entry be given unto them. The Law says "knock, you shall be admitted."') In this explicit reference to Matthew 7:7-8 [33], the poet raises the question of law, presumably recalling Jesus's final statement

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[32] Literally, 'shadow painting'.

[33] 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.'

in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, when he summarises in verse 12: 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets', that is the Law that Christ claims to come to fulfil. Thus, in showing openness to divine law and the Christ child as its new and absolute proponent, entrance is promised to the Roverella brothers. As Chrysostom says in his Homily XXIII on Matthew, 'by *seeking*, then, He declared this; by *knocking*, that we approach with earnestness and a glowing mind' (1843: 350).

Continuing to bear in mind the cultural premises of patristic scholarship amongst the humanists of Ferrara and of the monastery for which the altarpiece in question was painted, let us move on to explore some of the other rich Old Testament iconological features of the painting, forming the decorative ornamentation of the throne above and around the niche. I have already briefly alluded to the Temple of Solomon insofar as its proportions were used in the construction of the Sistine Chapel, but allusions to this architectural *eikon* of the cosmos are found embedded in Tura's central panel. The two adorning golden cherubim on either side of the arch over the Virgin's throne are redolent of two sets of sculpted cherubim which each play a respective part in Salvation History and in the message of covenantal fulfilment. Firstly, they allude to the pair of gold cherubim which God commanded to reside on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant, in which the tablets of the Commandments were to be kept. Between these cherubim God met with his chosen people (Exodus 25:22) during the period in the wilderness within the tabernacle or מִשְׁכָּן (*mishkan*), signifying also 'tent' or 'dwelling place'. The second pair are those sculpted in olive wood and overlaid with gold described in 1 Kings 6 and 2 Chronicles 3, far larger than those on the Ark, found within the Holy of Holies in the Inner Sanctuary of Solomon's Temple. Tura's decision to employ these Old Testament figures is one of the clearest instances of a 'dissimilar similarity', since they are, as in Scripture so in visual art, mere representations of unembodied pure angelic minds (*mentes*). They can, in view of their symbolic history as incongruous images described by God, be seen to readily clarify the very same ultimate fulfilling of the old law that we have established is suggested in the Christ child's interaction with the tablets. Campbell in fact points out the plausibility of regarding the throne itself as a representation of the Tabernacle, 'long established in Christian exegesis as a type of the Virgin Mary herself'. As the Ark, watched over by the cherubim, contained the manna prefiguring the Eucharist, so Mary's body contained Christ, whose one sacrifice is present in it.[34] One of the most salient continuities is the function of the cherubim in the overshadowing of sacrifice. Leviticus 16 describes the sacrifice that Aaron is to make as the first

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[34] See the quotation above from Athanasius which introduces this chapter.

High Priest of the Israelites, sprinkling the blood of a bull and a goat on the Mercy Seat in atonement for his own sins and for those of the people. Likewise during the dedication of the First Temple - the inner sanctuary of which became the permanent tabernacle for God to dwell with his people - King Solomon, exercising a priestly prerogative, sacrificed twenty two thousand oxen and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats as a peace offering, together with the sacrifices of all the people. Of course, these episodes prefigure the ultimate loving sacrifice made by God in Christ's Passion. Romans 3:25 states that 'God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood--to be received by faith.' In fact, the word 'atonement' or 'propitiation' is translated from the Greek ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*)*,* which is also the term used in the Septuagint for the Mercy Seat. Thus Tura's cherubim adumbrate Christ's incarnation whereby occurred the propitiation for the sins of all. In their architecturally sculpted, golden form, these cherubim concretise a continuity in Salvation History that progresses from temporary tent, to an architecturally and mundanely permanent sanctuary, before climaxing in the risen Christ enthroned at the right hand of the Father amid angelic hosts, the closest of them being - as C.S. Lewis (1964: 71) notes drawing on Pseudo-Dionysius - the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones, who 'face Him ἀμέσως, *nullius interiectu*, with nothing between, encircling Him with their ceaseless dance.'

The blood sacrifice on the Mercy Seat betwixt the wrought cherubim is evoked in Tura's panel via the messenger function of his own painted pair. The priestly sacrifice effected by Aaron which foreshadowed the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross became the sacrifice that was, after Pentecost, to be carried out by the priesthood in the Eucharist. It is in this eucharistic fashion that some of the the bizarre annunciatory imagery may be deciphered, viz. the ornamental vegetation heralded by the cherubim as it emerges from their trumpets. A prototype for the peculiar notion of fruit coming from brass instruments could be found in the central panel of Mantegna's c.1457-60 *San Zeno* polyptych **(Fig. 3)***,* which seems to draw upon the Byzantine iconography of the Victorious Madonna, the *Theotokos Nikopoios*, represented head-on with a regal and triumphant air, sitting enthroned with the Christ child. The frieze behind the Virgin depicts four grey cherubim in stone relief that, whilst bearing no ostensible Solomonic features, do carry conically trumpet-like containers from which pour leaves and cascades of pomes. The uniformity of colour and mineral suggested by the painted stonework allows Mantegna a neat visual transition from carrier to vegetation, blending the two just as he merges the forms of trumpet and sack. It particularly calls to mind the *cornucopia,* the classical symbol of the horn of plenty representing abundance and prosperity. The symbol has its origins in Greek mythology, in the goat horn that Zeus presented to Amalthea, the virgin who nursed him as an infant, promising that it would fill with an abundance of

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whatever the one to possess it may desire. In Mantegna's work the symbol is Christianised, drawing parallels with the infant Christ's nursing by the Virgin Mary and, in his maturation, the abundance of blessings promised to those who follow him. In view of 2 Corinthians 9:8, the *cornucopia* assumes a didactic function: 'And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work' (NIV). The same verb is used for the abounding of God's grace as well as that of the Christian's works consequently, **περισσεύω** (*perisseuó*), which is to abound or even to be in surplus or overflow. Likewise, the Gospel of Matthew uses the same verb when Jesus explains to his disciples the very purpose of his parables. He tells them that whoever listens to, and has understanding of, his teachings, will receive an even greater abundance (13:12). Thus, these horns take on a duplexity of meaning, on the one hand the abundance of grace and understanding offered by God in Christ, and on the other the abundance of good which can be done by the receptive Christian. Whilst here the form of the horns in the frieze evokes the trumpet, in Tura's panel the ornamental cherubim have what appear to be literal trumpets embedded in the architecture atop the semicircular exedra-like throne. Additionally, whilst Mantegna uses a subtler decorative ambivalence, horn and fruit ostensibly of the same material, Tura amplifies the iconography to the extent that his cherubim sound homogeneously metal instruments from which hang greenery that exaggerates the synthesis of ornament and reality, a matter from which the iconological considerations depart.

The allusion to the *cornucopia* is less conspicuous in Tura's image and it becomes more of an annunciatory horn than one of abundance. The trumpets in this panel offer a clue to the viewer as to the nature of the Christ child's sleep. It may be wise to consider the musical instruments in the context of their literal operation, that is in that of the surrounding musicians who try to rouse the child in order for him to permit entry to the awaiting Roverella brothers. As Campbell indicates in his analysis of the painting, 'in the altarpiece the inner space dominated by the Virgin's throne is the domain of 'la celeste patria', the Heavenly Jerusalem'. He recalls a commentary by the aforementioned Ferrarese poet Pittorio on Psalm 132 and especially his comment on the eighth verse, in which he offers a typological exegesis on the Ark in Solomon's Temple. The Lord is exhorted to indeed ascend to that heavenly realm,

> And not only you but also your church, which you have sanctified
> with your blood. You have established it as the Ark — no longer of
> manna, but of the Eucharist; and within it are the Tablets, that is the

Evangelical Law, and the rod of Aaron, the sign of priestly authority.
(115)

This imagery of covenantal fulfilment provided by Pittorio reaffirms the presence of such theological trends in *Quattrocento* Ferrara. In Tura's painting, too, there are allusions to the Ark as has been previously discussed, Tablets, and the Eucharistic iconology of the grapes which we will arrive at in due course. Coupled with the knocking figures, then, what these trumpets of the 'celeste patria' are announcing is the *eschaton*. Chrysostom, in the same homily on Matthew's Gospel, justifies Christ's instruction to knock thus: 'And if thou dost not receive straightway, do not thus despair. For to this end He said, *knock,* to signify that even if He should not straightway open the door, we are to continue there' (350). Bearing in mind the interaction of the *Virgin and Child* panel with the flanking ones, it could perhaps be inferred that the trumpets metaphorically announce Christ's Second Advent. The Roverella family members, and thus also any critical beholder of the painting, are waiting for the young Christ - already incarnate, already come for the first time - to awaken. Looking to the traditional iconographic function of the trumpet, the event of which we and the Roverella brothers are in anticipation, the 'awakening', seems to be none other than the *Parousia*. In the New Testament, the trumpet is an incongruous image all on its own, its sound described in verses such as Matthew 24:31 as the one to be played by angels to herald the return of the Son of Man and announce the new kingdom, just as the bronze cherubim sound them in this painting. Trumpet iconography was frequently used in its eschatological capacity in early Renaissance Netherlandish art, which was greatly influential on Cosmè Tura and the Ferrarese - albeit often longer, handheld instruments in these paintings - and so our artist ought to have been familiar with this.[35] Nonetheless, regarding more of the context of this particular painting of Tura's ought to shed light on iconological questions of his having inserted them into the scene. Such a context also recalls the instrument's function in the Old Testament and hence the fulfilment with the New Covenant of its symbolic purpose; as early as Exodus 19:13, the blast of the trumpet - which was in those times a וֹבֵל (*yobel*), a ram's horn - signalled the summoning of God's people. In Numbers 10:3, the instruments used are חֲצוֹצְרֹת (*chatsotsaroth*), ancient trumpets. God gives Moses instructions for the people of Israel: 'When both [trumpets] are sounded, the whole community is to assemble before you at the entrance to the tent of meeting.' The Hebrew used here for 'assembly' is

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[35] For instances of the trumpet in Northern Renaissance art of this context, see, for example, Van Eyck's (c. 1440) *Crucifixion and Last Judgement diptych,* Van der Weyden's (c. 1445-50) *Last Judgement Polyptych* or Jan Provoost's (c. 1525) *The Last Judgement.*

עֵדָה (*edah*), translated along with the better-known term קָהָל (*qahal*), as εκκλησια (*ekklesia*) or συναγωγη (*synagoge*) in the Septuagint. Swiss Refromer Ulrich Zwingli (1484 - 1531) notes the interchanging of translations within these Greek and Hebrew terms and offers a few exemplar instances in which these varied intertranslations occur, adding furthermore the diverse Latin terms such as *congregatio, universus populus Israel* and, commonly, *ecclesia.* He concludes his study observing that all these Old Testament instances 'have as their object our seeing that by the word "ecclesia" the whole company, congregation, assemblage, army, multitude, of the people of Israel is meant. Hence it is clear that "ecclesia" is used not only for the pious, holy, and faithful, but also for the impious, wicked, and unfaithful…' (1929: 366) Thus, with its origins in the Old Testament, the trumpet has a deep rooted history as an instrument to summon the 'ecclesia', this latter term being, as Zwingli notes, 'derived from the Greek for "calling together", as everyone well knows' (*Ibid.*). Likewise, the authors of 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52 fulfil the Old Testament God-given laws concerning the trumpet and inform us that this same instrument will announce the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead and final judgement of all, the righteous becoming the whole 'ecclesia'. In this sense, the trumpet's sounding yet again represents the sound to announce the final confluence, the consummation, of two worlds; the interior of Tura's heavenly throne room and those outside are to coincide in the same fashion as heaven and earth are to coincide in the New Jerusalem, at the sound of trumpeting music. It may be said that an additional dimension is given to the sleeping Christ child, then, his sleep mirroring not only his own death from which he was resurrected, but the sleep of death from which the multitudes will be resurrected to take their new bodies in the next world and its abundance. Taking our eyes away from the embellishments of the central iconography, the throne, embedded in the peripheral ornamental iconology is something in fact closer to Mantegna's frieze. On either side of the Hebrew Decalogue and beneath the pink entablature are capitals decorated with small sculpted cherubim carrying great horns from which emerge pomes very similar to those in Mantegna's painting. Nevertheless, whilst these are painted as though homogenised material forming a capital, like the *cornucopiae* of the frieze, the large trumpets of the throne obscure the boundaries between not only painting and sculpture, but painting, sculpture and real still life. Another instance of an ornamental horn heralding fruit can be found in an illumination by *Quattrocento* Ferrarese miniaturist Taddeo Crivelli (1425 - 1479). The Gradual *dalla domenica di Pentecoste alla nona domenica dopo Pentecoste* in the Museo San Petronio in Bologna (Corale VI, 98) has an initial *C* formed of *cornucopias*, beginning 'Cibavit eos…', the introit of the feast of Corpus Domini (c. 53 v). The text is taken from Psalm 81:16: 'Cibavit eos ex adipe frumenti, alleluia. Et de petra melle saturavit eos, alleluia,' alluding to the plentiful wheat and

honey from the rock promised to those obedient to God in the Old Covenant. Inside is a scene of Eucharistic adoration, the wheat and honey now the body and blood of the Eucharist in the New Covenant, the new image of plenty.

2.4.2 Vegetation heralded by trumpets

As regards the vegetation which is heralded by the trumpets, the same three natural forms can be counted protruding from each bell, that is the grape bunches, the vines, and - perhaps the most iconologically peculiar - the gourds. Beginning with the grape bunches, an iconographic tradition can be identified in earlier *Quattrocento* depictions of the Virgin and Child, in which grapes symbolise Eucharistic wine, for example in Fra Angelico's *Madonna and Child of the Grapes* (c. 1425) or Masaccio's *Madonna and Child with Angels* (1426), the latter featuring musician angels from which Tura's are not dissimilar. They are taken here, however, into yet a further domain from simply the present eucharistic sacrament; they are a kind of symbolic synecdoche for the *eschaton* being heralded, and this can be conceived according to the words of Alexandrian Church Father Origen in his *De Principiis*, where he juxtaposes those who adopt a superficial view of the world to come, hoping for bodily pleasure and disregarding the nature of the spiritual body, and on the other hand those

> who receive the representations of Scripture according to the understanding of the apostles, entertain the hope that the saints will eat indeed, but that it will be the bread of life, which may nourish the soul with the food of truth and wisdom, and enlighten the mind, and cause it to drink from the cup of divine wisdom, according to the declaration of holy Scripture: "Wisdom has prepared her table, she has killed her beasts, she has mingled her wine in her cup, and she cries with a loud voice, Come to me, eat the bread which I have prepared for you, and drink the wine which I have mingled." (II, 2:3)

The grapes, then, fulfil the verses combined in Origen's quotation from Proverbs (9:2, 4-5) when the *eschaton* is heralded, the iconology symbolising the wine of divine wisdom which the Fathers saw originating in Old Testament prophecy, now in the form of the Eucharist and destined in the next kingdom. Indeed, Revelation itself refers to the 'wedding supper of the Lamb' (19:9), and concerning the anticipation of its announcement, theologian Allister McGrath credits Theodore of

Mopsuestia, friend of Chrysostom and Maximus, for having written 'that the Eucharist allows us to glimpse the realities of heaven and anticipate our future presence there. We peer through the portals of the New Jerusalem…' (2011: 413). Indeed, Dermot A. Lane explains that patristic theology, after recognising the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, understood it as a prefiguration and anticipation of what was to come (1996: 471). Aquinas attributed to the Eucharist, alongside the epithet *rememorativum*, the quality *signum prognosticum*, in that it anticipates salvation in the heavenly supper 'in sign-fashion' (Vorgrimler 1992: 163). Equally, the Eucharistic hymn 'Ave Verum Corpus' dating from around a century later, the fourteenth, and set to music by numerous composers including English Renaissance composer William Byrd, features the lyric 'esto nobis praegustatum'.[36] We may interpret the grape bunches in Tura's painting in the context of foretaste of the trumpet-heralded kingdom, a context which we can identify to have been perpetuated throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. These are too 'in sign-fashion', that is in an iconological fashion, a 'dissimilar similarity' derived from Scripture and from the sensible liturgical life of the Church.

Another fulfilment of Old Testament prophetic imagery can be found in the grapes, in that they also seem to allude to the mystic wine-press of Isaiah 63:3: 'I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment' (KJV). The Hebrew term translated in the King James version as 'blood' is נִצְחָם [*niṣ·ḥām*] from the noun נֵצַח [*netsach*], a term used only twice in the context of grape juice, both times in Isaiah (63:3,6). As the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew lexicon informs us, it has the figurative meaning of blood or gore. There can too be found the identical noun that denotes strength, endurance or perpetuity. Latin Father Tertullian in his *Adversus Marcionem* offers an exegetical commentary on the symbolism of wine for blood using the illustration of Isaiah's question from 63:2 that leads to God's above mentioned response, and he expounds thus:

> The prophetic Spirit contemplates the Lord as if He were already on
> His way to His passion, clad in His fleshly nature; and as He was to
> suffer therein, He represents the bleeding condition of His flesh under
> the metaphor of garments dyed in red, as if reddened in the treading
> and crushing process of the wine-press, from which the labourers

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[36] 'May it be for us a foretaste', implying [of the heavenly banquet]

descend reddened with the wine-juice, like men stained in blood (Book 4).

Tertullian draws a parallel with Genesis 49:11, considering it a foretelling of Isaiah's prophecy; Christ was to come according to the flesh out of Judah's tribe, and it was the latter who in this very verse 'washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes'. Cyprian of Carthage, whose works it would appear were circulating around Ferrara in the mid fifteenth century[37], embellishes the interpretation of the treading and pressure of the wine-press in its Christological fulfilment 'because just as the drinking of wine cannot be attained to unless the bunch of grapes be first trodden and pressed, so neither could we drink the blood of Christ unless Christ had first been trampled upon and pressed, and had first drunk the cup of which He should also give believers to drink' (Epistle 62:7).

We now arrive at the most curious vegetation that Tura has painted to protrude directly from the trumpet bells alongside the grapes, the cucumber-like gourds. In Scripture, the gourd is mentioned solely in the book of Jonah (4:6-7 and 9-10), and it could be reasonably deduced that, congruent with all the other rich and overt Old Testament ornamental allegory in the painting, this could well be the textual source. The original Hebrew term translated as 'gourd' is קִיקָיוֹן (*qiqayon*), whose derivation is unknown. The concurrent usage of the Hebrew is to signify the castor-oil plant, but much controversy arose in the Middle Ages regarding the plant to which it could have possibly referred in the Old Testament.[38] Tura is perhaps not making a conspicuous allusion to philological dispute in such an obvious fashion as Dürer later did in his 1514 engraving, *St Jerome in his Study,* but the gourds do bear the connotation of linguistic controversy. As regards the book of Jonah as an iconographical theme, Giovanni B. Bazzana (2010) discusses the representation of Jonah and its significance in early Christian art, stating that 'scholars have since long observed that Jonah's cycle is arguably the earliest and most widespread subject of early Christian art' (317). To illustrate this, he offers the spectacular extant example of a fourth century mosaic of Jonah resting under the gourd plant from the floor of the basilica of Aquileia, in modern day Udine, northeastern Italy. From the plant grow long gourds, resembling cucumbers, while Jonah reclines beneath in the shade. Bazzana

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[37] See Timothy Bolton's *Humanist Manuscripts in Renaissance Europe* for AVoA Ltd.

[38] Of greatest note are the long correspondences that occurred between St Augustine and St Jerome on the matter, the former expressing dismay over Jerome's new Latin translation of the word as an 'ivy' plant (*haedera*) rather than adhering to the authority of the Septuagint's translation, κολοκυνθη ('gourd'), traditionally rendered by *cucurbita* in Latin. (Bolin 1997: 25). The association of the gourd with Jonah was hence thanks to Augustine, who insisted, as Jerome himself also admitted, that if there could be no direct translation, then it was best to retain the traditional *cucurbita.*

draws a distinction between ancient readings of the book of Jonah, which focussed principally on repentance, and early Christian iconographies based on the text which scarcely feature a scene of Jonah preaching to the Ninivites (318). These earlier Christian depictions and their origins in New Testament text can perhaps offer one potential insight into Tura's inclusion of the gourd in the central panel of his polyptych. Bazzana says that many scholars have suggested that paintings and sculptures 'picked up the lead from the synoptic Gospels, in which Jesus promises a "sign of Jonah" to his contemporaries (in particular, Mt 12:40)', that is rendering Jonah as a type of Christ who spent three days in the large fish as Christ did in the tomb (319). Hence, for its associations with Jonah, the gourd has come to emblematise the resurrection, and so this motif chimes with the awakening of the Christ child in Tura's depiction as the dead Christ from death.

However, the matter of Jonah's resting beneath the gourds in the Aquileia mosaic seems not, Bazzana points out, to have an obvious relevance to this particular Christological interpretation. He notes that Jonah scenes were very common within the funerary scope, on sarcophagi and catacomb paintings, and that the model for the iconography of Jonah himself reclining seems to come from sculptures of Endymion. It would appear that Endymion's mythological context was selected because of the immortality that he was granted through an eternal sleep of divine luxury, and the parallels that can accordingly be drawn with eschatology. Endymion's blessed sleep may be mirrored in the shade of the gourd plant, a divine shelter from suffering. Bazzana, regarding the mosaic and other early sarcophagus sculptures, is directed towards hypotheses of millenarianism (321). Such doctrine may well have had some bearing on these very early representations albeit not on later ones, but what this analysis does attest to is that, aside from merely its affiliation with Jonah and the whale episode, the gourd may be regarded as an *eikon* in its own right. Indeed, to return to the 'sign of Jonah', a message of fulfilment can be obtained. In Jonah 4, the gourd stands for the Ninivites, to whom Jonah at God's command eventually heralds the coming of their judgement and the overthrowing of Nineveh. When the whole city puts on sackcloth and repents it provokes God's compassion and he withdraws the calamity, and so Jonah becomes angry for fear that he will be regarded a false prophet and desires to die rather than live with such an accusation. Jonah is given comfort and contentment by the gourd plant that God proceeds to send, so that when it withers and dies overnight the prophet is angry once more. The pity Jonah has for the fleeting gourd God likens - though, crucially, he does not do so commensurably - to his pity for the repentant Nineveh: "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from

their left — and also many animals?" (Jonah 4:10-11) Likewise, in the New Testament Matthew 12:41 compares the city of Nineveh to the generations of the new covenant using exactly the same rhetoric; the verse foretells that the Ninivites will rise up at the final judgement and condemn the contemporary generation, for, it can be said, the preaching of Jonah is to the preaching of Jesus as the gourd is to the great city of Nineveh. Yet, Nineveh repented at the word of its coming judgement, whilst even after Christ's revelation there are still those who do nothing. For Tura's peculiar inclusion of the gourd, therefore, it may be proposed that, though it may on the one hand evoke the traditional typological associations of Jonah's three days in the whale and the resurrection of Jesus after three days in the tomb, on the other hand it precipitates iconological questions as to its relationship with the surrounding imagery. When heralded by the anunnciatory trumpets, the gourd as a metaphorical Nineveh asks the critical beholder if he/she is too choosing to repent as time plays out in advance of the New Jerusalem.

Moving outwards, the vines seem to sprout from the gourds as the New Testament does from the Old with the true vine. Firstly, though, the vines call to mind the numerous Old Testament metaphors that foreshadow the new vine in their descriptions of Israel as a vineyard tended by the Lord[39], fulfilled in John 15 when Christ declares himself to be the true vine and his father the vinedresser. It is valuable to look again at patristic commentary; Augustine's tractate 80 on the Gospel of John elucidates the chapter, and especially its very first verse. He says that this passage, which identifies the disciples as the vine's branches, 'declares in so many words that the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, is the head of the Church, and that we are His members. For as the vine and its branches are of one nature, therefore, His own nature as God being different from ours, He became man, that in Him human nature might be the vine and we who also are men might become branches thereof' (1874: 298). According to Augustine's commentary, the vine may become an iconological sign of Christ's dual nature, which is intrinsic to the reconciliation of all things in God, things in heaven as well as on earth effected in Christ's first coming and by the blood of his cross.[40] Announced by the trumpets in Tura's panel, the vine representing the Christocentricity of the cosmos implies also the final accomplishment of God's purpose in the new kingdom.

2.4.3 Ezekiel's vision and the shell

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[39] See, for example, Psalm 80:8-16, Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-6, Jeremiah 2:21

[40] Colossians 1:20

One poignant Old Testament allusion is that of Ezekiel's vision of God from the first chapter of the eponymous book. The four golden Evangelist figures above the throne appear to refer to Ezekiel's vision. It is described as an immense flashing cloud surrounded by brilliant light with a fire of glowing metal at its centre. Within this centre are four living creatures;

> In appearance their form was human, but each of them had four faces
> and four wings […]. Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had
> the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a
> lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an
> eagle. Such were their faces. They each had two wings spreading out
> upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and
> each had two other wings covering its body. (1:5-6, 10-12)

Indeed, in Tura's painting, just as the cherubim are painted so as to resemble metal, so are the four winged figures, 'dissimilar similarities' atop the throne, revealed to Ezekiel in the vision. Angela Russell Christman (2005) discusses in her work on the Fathers's interpretation of Ezekiel's vision St John Chrysostom's rhetorical question for his congregation, "what did Ezekiel see?", and proceeding homiletic response. In his synopsis, John, like the Septuagint text, uses the term ὁμοίωμα (*homoiōma*), 'likeness', several times and with emphasis (85), referring in particular to verse 28: '*This was the vision of the likeness (ὁμοιώματος) of the glory of the Lord* (Ez 1.28). Do you not perceive God's accommodation to human limitations both here and in other passages?' (86) Indeed, the chapter in which Christman includes Chrysostom's sermon is entitled *Incomprehensibility of God.* Chrysostom's observation is reiterated by this Greek term *homoiōma*, which is synonymous to an extent with *eikon*, used interchangeably by Plato for earthly resemblances of heavenly things. The distinction between them, the latter denoting more closely 'image' (*imago*), and the former 'similitude' (*similtudo*), became more pertinent in the Arian heresy[41] (Trench 1880)[42], but for our purposes it certainly fits that the ultimate *eikon* of the incomprehensible Godhead would be surrounded by 'similitudes', similarities which are also dissimilar insofar as they must be adapted to human limitation.

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[41] Arianism was a prevalent heresy, originating from Arius (c. AD 250–336), which asserts that the Son was created by the Father and is not co-eternal nor consubstantial with the Father.

[42] For a complete study of the differences between ὁμοίωμα and εἰκών and their implications in the context of combatting Arianism, see § xv. Trench (1880).

Based on their function in the Pseudo-Dionysian conception as incongruous images of the celestial, leading *per visibilia ad invisibilia*, they can be understood too in terms of their relationship with the New Testament. John the Revelator's vision of the Son of Man, which will be discussed in chapter 4., draws upon Ezekiel's, the four creatures around the throne being like a lion, ox, man, and eagle respectively (Revelation 4:7). Christman highlights a major strand in the exegetical tradition of interpreting Ezekiel 1 against the New Testament, encompassing 'three distinct motifs: 1) the four creatures of Ezekiel 1 and the four gospels, 2) the Ezekiel-Christ typology, and 3) the chariot's *wheel within a wheel* as a sign of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.' She stresses above all that the patristic tradition was to identify how the vision demonstrated the unity of the two Testaments (13). On her first point, Christman elaborates that Irenaeus (died c. 202 AD) was the first to associate the two, ascribing an aspect of Christ's ministry to each of the creatures; for Irenaeus, the lion represents his royal and imperious role, the calf his sacrificial and priestly one, the man his advent among humans, with the eagle symbolising the gift of the Spirit hovering over the Church. Not only does the quadriform nature of the beings reveal something of the divine economy, but, still according to this schema, each also directly corresponds to one of the gospels. Associating the four faces to the four gospels was initially conceived of by Irenaeus though the *topos* was later to be adopted by numerous writers and artists in different patterns. According to Irenaeus, the lion corresponds to John, since its prologue deals with the *Logos*'s 'glorious generation from the Father'; the calf to Luke, beginning with Zechariah's priestly sacrifice; Matthew's gospel is indicated by the man, for it opens with Christ's genealogy and emphasises his humility; and finally the eagle stands for Mark, his version of the Good News and the first chapter's manifestation of prophetic spirit (16). Jerome's later exposition came to dominate, which correlated different symbols to the Gospels and Evangelists, keeping Irenaeus's respective associations of Matthew and Luke, but inverting Mark and John.[43] This continued patristic tradition, therefore, rendered Ezekiel's vision an overt symbol of New Testament fulfilment of the Old in these symbolic correlations. It would appear to follow, then, that this very iconological fourfold living creature in Tura's painting, regarded on the cultural premises of patristic scholarship and viewed alongside the other rich Old Testament iconography of the throne, does precisely that. Presuming, according to the intricate nature of Tura's construction of the throne, that the creatures were put not in arbitrary positions, but that there may indeed be an iconological intention, one notices that the lion and ox have swapped places from those the corresponding faces assume in

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[43] This scheme became popular in medieval iconography. An example is the bronze statue of the winged lion representing St Mark, brought in the Middle Ages to the Piazza San Marco in Venice.

Ezekiel's vision. Tura is of course not depicting that precise vision but rather evoking it; nonetheless, it begs the question why the right side may feature the lion and the left the ox, contrary to the description in Ezekiel. In order to see the lion on the right hand side of Tura's throne as Ezekiel saw its position, an onlooker would have to be behind it. Since the Madonna and Christ child are on the opposing side, the only side depicted by Tura and also the side seen by the critical beholder, perhaps there is an insinuation that, whilst Ezekiel as an Old Testament prophet had revealed to him an insight into the vision of God, it was not one that included the vision of Christ as John the Revelator's later did. In other words, if Ezekiel were hypothetically to be introduced into this scene of the celestial throne, he would be 'standing behind' it and the figures sitting upon it would be invisible to him.

In spite of all of this more unequivocally apparent Old Testament imagery, perhaps one of the most prominent instances of decorative iconography is the conspicuous shell architecture above the Madonna's head, supported by reams of cloth held by the cherubim, which to the modern eye recalls perhaps classical rather than Christian antiquity. Looking at this now one may instantly think of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (c. 1486) based on Poliziano's *Stanze per la Giostra,* and his description of Venus arriving ashore on a sea shell. However, there does not appear to be any link here between the Virgin and the Roman goddess. The clue to the significance of these adorning shells seems to be the string of pearls. The author of the *Physiologus,* predecessor of the medieval bestiaries, describes how the pearl is born of the sea stone called the oyster, which rises from the sea at dawn to open its shell and receive the heavenly dew and rays of the sun and moon. Likewise, the Virgin Mary rose from her father's house and received the celestial dew in the words of the Archangel Gabriel, bearing the incarnate Christ, as prophesied by Isaiah 7:14 (1979: 34). As is well known, pearls are also used scripturally as an analogy for Godly wisdom (Matthew 7:6), and so in this section of Tura's panel, we may see in the pearls the second person of the Trinity, the pre-incarnate Christ, who is the feminine *Sophia,* prophesied in the book of Ben Sirach (1:1)[44] and fulfilled in the New Testament where the eternality of the Son is confirmed. Thus the pearls within the large shell mirror the incarnate Christ conceived within the Virgin's womb.

Thus, despite the painting's iconography, as its title suggests, being perhaps more focussed on the two human figures, I have built on existing scholarship to propose new interpretations of the 'mysterious' architectural and ornamental features of Cosmè Tura's *Virgin and Child Enthroned* which are derived from the natural world. I have explored these images within their function in the

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[44] 'All wisdom is from the Lord God, and hath been always with him, and is before all time.'

overarching message of covenantal fulfilment, using the scriptural texts which are their basis and the assistance of the patristic philosophy which was crucial to the life of the monastery and in wider Ferrara. Indeed, the monastery of San Giorgio, a house of the Olivetan branch of the Benedictine Order, was a seat of Greek and Latin patristic learning. In my analysis I have therefore appealed to texts found in the monastery's collection of manuscripts as well as the philosophy of related texts and authors. I will now move on to assess another aspect of the artist's sacred paintings which is an even more direct representation of the natural world, flora and fauna. Whilst in the panel discussed in this chapter the animal and plant allegory is depicted as sculpture and ornament, in other works of Tura's *œvre* flora and fauna are painted to be real and living organisms.

3. Bestiary Tradition and the Revelatory Role of Flora and Fauna

Nimirum interroga iumenta, et docebunt te, et volatilia caeli, et indicabunt tibi. Loquere terrae, et respondebit tibi, et narrabunt pisces maris. Quis ignorat quod omnia haec manus Domini fecerit?

(Job 12:7-9)

3.1 The continuity of the medieval bestiary tradition

In section 1.3 of my introduction, I drew on Gombrich and Panofsky's discourses on *iconography* versus *iconology* to illustrate the intrinsic importance of exploring 'secondary' and even non-human elements of painting for what they suggest to us about cultural premises and vice versa. I then discussed Simona Cohen's observations about how prevailing attitudes towards the Renaissance dissuade scholarship from exploring the direction of medieval continuity as it relate to the study of iconology from the natural world. She notes that studies on bestiary tradition and the man-beast relationship concentrate overwhelmingly on the medieval period and tend to ignore all possibilities of continuity. She asks, 'are we to conclude that the bestiary moralizations, as well as symbolic animal depictions in medieval sculpture, allegorical frescoes and manuscript illuminations, had no following after the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries?' (xxxiii) I too challenge this conclusion. One need only look, for example, to the *Historiae animalium* of Swiss naturalist Conrad Gessner, composed between 1551 and 1558, or the *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* by Englishman Edward Topsell (1607) to observe that even into the seventeenth century views of the natural world retained a great influence from the Old Testament, the *Physiologus*[45] and the medieval bestiaries. Even closer in time and place to Tura, though later on into the Renaissance, was the phenomenon of the *imprese,* which *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopaedia* describes thus: '…signorial heraldry was characterized by the use of devices (*imprese*) that consisted mostly of a combination of pictorial and written signs and could be ephemeral symbols of individual personality or could be inherited. With their motifs, in which courtly and religious symbolism and allegories of virtue were united, the *imprese* are, at the same time, personal creations of Italian heraldry and witnesses to the

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[45] The *Physiologus* is a Greek Christian didactic text composed by an anonymous author in the second century AD, offering allegorical and moral meanings of flora, fauna and inanimate beings.

international figurative language of courtly culture' (2004: 497). Cohen offers some motives behind the neglect of the continued bestiary traditions in such aspects of the early modern period among scholars and successors who perpetuated their approaches. One motive is precisely that which I am challenging in this thesis, the traditional view of the Renaissance as being fundamentally divided from the Middle Ages. Assumptions of periodic demarcation and a focus on classical rebirth have obscured many aspects of 'conceptual and moral conservatism as well as deliberate archaisms' (*Ibid.*).

In an article on the animal and plant life in the art of Giorgio Vasari, Mauro Di Vito (2011) comments on other types of flaw in contemporary studies of flora and fauna in painting:

> La recente tendenza dei botanici a identificare con precisione le piante
>
> e gli animali di un quadro è tanto minuziosa quanto carente di un
>
> approfondimento storico culturale. Questo spesso impedisce una
>
> identificazione certa di un dato naturale, in quanto per identificarlo ci
>
> si rifà quasi esclusivamente a scale tassonomiche linneiane, peccando
>
> così di presentismo. Innumerevoli sono infatti i casi in cui gli studi si
>
> fermano a un'analisi delle varietà vegetali (o animali) raffigurate,
>
> senza fornire al lettore le informazioni storiche su questi ultimi e
>
> senza proporre un'interpretazione sulle linee della struttura semantica
>
> ad esse soggiacente (154).

Of course, one must identify the kind of plant or animal depicted, but to leave the analysis there - even if the species is analysed as scrupulously as possible - without consulting historical, cultural and symbolic factors, is to neglect a wealth of information. For now, though, what concerns us is not to linger on these reasons for the neglect of animal and plant moralisations, but instead to reaffirm and reassert Cohen's response to her own question, that in Renaissance art 'animals continued to act as metaphors and similes and subtly provided the key to profound levels of meaning, which are not superficially evident to the viewer' (*Ibid.*).

I briefly touched upon the bestiaries and herbals in my previous chapter concerning the pearl, but will now explore other creatures as they feature in the works of Cosmè Tura. The bestiaries draw upon the *Physiologus* and on the Church Fathers' scriptural commentaries, such as St Basil's homilies on the *Hexaemeron*, as well as more recent literature. Cohen (15) notes that one source of animal symbolism which held prominence into the early Renaissance was the *Opus de*

natura rerum by the thirteenth century Dominican theologian, Thomas of Cantimpré. This was inspired by the homonymous work of Rabanus Maurus (9th c.), which was in turn derived from the twelfth volume of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (7th c.). The illustrious medieval hagiographical collection by Jacobus De Voragine*,* the *Legenda aurea,* remained an exceedingly authoritative source with respect to the lives of the saints, and in general was one of the most widespread works in the Middle Ages and beyond. Hence the animal and plant symbolism found therein was too carried forth into visual iconography. Campbell mentions in a footnote (177) that the sacristy of the cathedral of Ferrara in fact acquired an illuminated manuscript of the *Legenda aurea* during the episcopacy of Giovanni Tavelli, the ascetic *Gesuato* bishop I discussed earlier.

Therefore, this chapter is dedicated to the exploration of flora and fauna depicted within certain hagiographical or scriptural scenes in sacred works of Cosmè Tura's *opera.* These so-called 'peripheral' elements are not there to behave passively in the space around the human protagonists, but rather to fulfil a function as essential to the narrative as those figures who make known the iconographical motif. I will assess the animal and plant life in three of the artist's works, his *Saint Jerome* (c. 1470) in the National Gallery, London, his *Pietà* (1460) in the Museo Correr in Venice, and his *Annunciation* (1469) now in Ferrara's *Museo del Duomo,* painted on one side of the Cathedral of Ferrara's organ doors so as to be visible when the doors were closed, with a painting of *San Giorgio e la principessa* on the reverse. I will assess the paintings according to their scriptural or hagiographical foundational texts, bringing to the fore the relevant content of medieval bestiaries and also patristic exegesis, in light of what has been established of the extreme prominence of possession, study, and translation of texts of the Greek and Latin Church Fathers amid the humanistic culture of *Quattrocento* Ferrara.[46] I will also at times draw into the discussion animals or plants depicted in illuminated manuscripts of *Quattrocento* Ferrara and nearby, where the miniatures appear to fulfil analogous functions. Paolo Giovio in his 1555 *Dialogo dell'imprese militari et amorose* explains 'five universal conditions' for the aforementioned heraldic *imprese*, including that it must have a body and soul, a 'corpo', image, and an 'anima', motto. Another is that on the one hand it must not be so obscure that it would require a sibyl to comprehend it, but

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[46] See section 1.2 of my introductory chapter, where I outline the theological/philosophical cultural context of fifteenth-century Ferrara. I recall the Council of Ferrara-Florence and its implications, as well as presenting an overview of the patristic pursuits of humanist figures such as Camaldolese prior Ambrogio Traversari, Este educator Guarino da Verona, bishop Giovanni Tavelli, and Neo-Platonists Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola.

likewise not so clear as to be understood by every plebeian (Maffei 2007: 38).[47] As there was a mutual interaction between *corpo* and *anima* in the *imprese* of the Renaissance nobility, do floral and faunal symbols within painting not too interact with the work's overall message? When analysed individually, do they not too become kinds of *corpi* to an unwritten *anima*? In each of Tura's three paintings, the animal and plant life assumes a different role within the message of the iconography in its entirety. In the *Saint Jerome* painting, the animals, both those expected and those more 'unanticipated' function so as to reveal layer upon layer of implication for the desperately contrite penitent who yearns for reconciliation with God. It seems even that each creature pertains to an aspect of the saint's life, be it an episode or an emotional state. The iconological flora and fauna depicted in the Museo Correr *Pietà,* on the other hand, can be interpreted as invaluable signs from nature and scripture of the theology of the Passion and what one learns thereby of the natures of Jesus Christ and the Mother of God. In his *Annunciation* depicted on the organ doors, however, the squirrel on the side of the Virgin Annunciate appears, when considered according to the bestiary tradition, to act as a foil to the selflessness and strength of the young Virgin Annunciate, as the Incarnation is represented via auricular penetration by the dove at her ear. For the other bird in the painting, not easily identifiable, I propose a couple of potential interpretations on the basis of animals behaving as foils to human or human-esque figures.

3.2 *Saint Jerome*: Penitential fauna

I will begin with the saintly painting of Tura's corpus which I have selected for this floral and faunal study, and the messages of fervent asceticism conveyed by their presence. One of the most commonly portrayed saints in the early Renaissance was St Jerome, since, aside from St Augustine, he was the most prominent of the Latin Fathers and was a monk, scholar, and translator of the Vulgate Bible. Charles L. Stinger (1986) provides an apt summary of his popularity in a review of Eugene F. Rice Jr.'s work *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance*, labelling him 'in many ways, the prototypical Renaissance saint'. He elaborates that, 'not only was his cult livelier and his popular esteem greater from 1300 to 1600 than at any time before or since, but his image provides a

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[47] 'Prima, giusta proporzione d'anima e di corpo. Seconda, ch'ella non sia oscura di sorte ch'abbia mestiero della sibilla per interprete a volerla intendere, né tanto chiara ch'ogni plebeo l'intenda. Terza, che sopra tutto abbia bella vista, la qual si fa riuscire molto allegra entrandovi stelle, soli, lune, fuoco, acqua, arbori verdeggianti, inserimenti meccanici, animali bizzarri e uccelli fantastici. Quarta, non ricerca alcuna forma umana. Quinta richiede il motto che è l'anima del corpo e vuole essere comunemente d'una lingua diversa dall'idioma di colui che fa l'impresa perché il sentimento sia alquanto più coperto. Vuole anco essere breve, ma non tanto che si faccia dubbioso, di sorte che di due o tre parole quadra benissimo, eccetto se fusse in forma di verso o integro o spezzato. E per dichiarare queste condizioni diremo che la sopraddetta anima e corpo s'intende per il motto e per il soggetto.' (Giovio, *Dialogo*, quoted from Maffei 2007: 38)

touchstone to the religious sensibilities and spiritual aspirations of the Renaissance era' (884). In the review Stinger echoes what I aver in this thesis, that the portrait Jacob Burkhardt and other scholars have painted of the Renaissance as a 'heroically secular culture […], mired in paganism and skepticism, cannot be sustained' (885). The popularity of St Jerome reflects the contrary reality, and in the Renaissance there were two different images of his persona that were appealing: on the one hand he was the ascetic ideal of *sancta rusticitas* who inspired the Hieronymite orders, and on the other he was the man of letters embodying 'the humanist vision of a learned and evangelical Christian piety drawing sustenance from direct study of the Holy Scriptures' (*Ibid.*).

Tura's 1470 painting of Jerome **(Fig. 5)** presents him unequivocally in the first of these two roles, although to the second there is a clear allusion. This painting is one of the artist's most notable for featuring a remarkable *sui generis* selection of fauna. What emerges is that each creature in the painting seems to reflect some aspect or episode of the saint's life especially pertinent to the scene in which we find him, in the desert of Chalcis. Herbert Friedmann (1980) illustrates in his written work on St Jerome that it was not uncommon for Renaissance painters, and especially the Northern European figures, to represent animals in their scenes of the saint, drawing on sources such as those aforementioned, since the iconography used to reveal divine truths achieves such via a centuries-long chain of tradition. In her review of it, Elizabeth Cropper (1982) offers a summary of Friedmann's book. The latter discusses numerous examples of visual animal imagery in association with St Jerome, such as Cranach's unique inclusion of the beaver, chosen as a legendarily self-castrating creature and the roebuck to signify sexual continence (464) **(Fig. 6)**. The beaver was in fact an image used in the context of the Italian Renaissance *imprese,* even though when viewed according to modern-day scholarship on masculinity, the notion of self-identification with the act of castration may seem strange (Gouwens 2015: 536). The contribution to beaver lore of the *Physiologus*, Gouwens notes, was to gloss it as a symbol of the Christian's casting off of sin, a concept which was carried through into the bestiaries and into the culture of the Renaissance nobility, where one could use it for purposes of self-representation as a virtuous man (541).[48] In depictions of St Jerome however, not only is the beaver encountered, but Bosch for instance selected the chaffinch for its seasonal celibacy. Dürer's rendition features ostensibly peculiar flora and Antonello da Messina's *Saint Jerome in his Study* presents a peacock standing in the entrance.

Friedman begins the chapter 'Tura's Saint Jerome in Penitence' signalling that the painting was originally larger than the fragment now in London, probably one and a half times as high and

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[48] Gouwens refers especially to two Renaissance humanists who adopted the beaver as a symbol of self-representation, Paolo Giovio, whom I discussed earlier, and Giovanni Bernadino Bonifacio.

about twice as wide (173), so one could perhaps speculate that there were even more than the four creatures available to us today. We can, however, easily content ourselves with the painting we have, as well as a fragment of it which can be found today in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, *Christ Crucified.* To comprehend some of the metaphorical and revelatory functions of the faunal iconography, I wish to raise to attention Friedmann's viewpoint on the nature of the penitence expressed by Tura's Jerome, as compared with, for instance, Leonardo Da Vinci's (c. 1480) famous, unfinished Jerome in the Vatican Museums **(Fig. 7)**. He suggests that 'in Leonardo's version the face of the saint is a masterful expression of spiritual yearning, probing greater psychological depths, but without the immediacy and insistence of Tura's Jerome. It is a finer and subtler conception than Tura's, but its primary focus is different, more pleading for an eventual response than beseeching an immediate one' (175). Indeed, Friedmann's detection of an insistent and fervent element in the penitence of Tura's Jerome reiterates what I observed in my introduction (1.1) about the less 'harmonious' or 'calm'[49] nature of Ferrarese painting compared with that of other Italian centres. This intensity is also at the crux of the painting's message, according to which the animal symbols can be interpreted.

In his book on Tura, Stephen Campbell deals very briefly with the *St Jerome* painting, but comments in detail on something highly relevant to the painting, and I refer exactly to his discussion of the strong current of asceticism in *Quattrocento* Ferrara. He in fact recommends Friedmann's work as regards *St Jerome* in a footnote as the destination one arrives at when seeking an exegesis of the painting that takes into account its animal allegory. Campbell reinforces some of Friedmann's detection of fervour, aptly mentioning a translated excerpt from Jerome's *Epistolae* to Eustochium excerpted in the *Legenda Aurea* (80), which seems an inspiration for the very scene depicted:

> While I lived thus, the companion of scorpions and wild beasts,
> ofttimes I imagined that I was surrounded by dancing girls, and in my
> frozen body and moribund flesh the fires of concupiscence were
> lighted. For this I wept unceasingly, and subjugated the rebellious
> flesh with week-long fasts. Often I joined the days with the nights, nor
> stayed from beating my breast until the Lord restored my peace of
> Spirit…

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[49] See my reference to Wölfflin (1964) on p. 9 and his description of Renaissance art as the 'art of calm and beauty'.

St Jerome's own words convey a nuanced relationship between wild creatures and not just abstract fervour, but a fervent asceticism. Campbell observes that, despite St Jerome being such a popular subject in late medieval Italian painting, it was rare for him to be represented looking upon Christ dead or suffering. The sole extant examples of which Campbell makes note are firstly Ercole de' Roberti's painting, today in the London National Gallery, of the *Dead Christ* (1490) with Saints Jerome and Francis, and secondly Castagno's (c.1453) fresco in Florence's SS Annunziata of Jerome and another two saints looking up at the crucified Christ (*Ibid.*). It is worth noting that these other two paintings, unlike Tura's, do not have Jerome as their subject, but rather he is a collateral figure. Be that as it may, Campbell shrewdly highlights the significance of likely conceptions of sainthood by an artist in Ferrara at the time, and associates some of the formation of these notions with the charisma of contemporary holy men and women (77).[50] In his chapter on the relationship of asceticism to the representation of the saintly body, he emphasises the importance of such figures as mystical writer Caterina Vegri (1413 - 1463) - also known as Caterina da Bologna, since, although of Ferrarese descent, she was active in nearby Bologna - and *Gesuato,* Giovanni Tavelli, whom I introduced earlier as a popular and extremely ascetic figure who later became bishop. In addition to these, Campbell (*Ibid.*) lists some contemporary *beati* and advocates of asceticism who made noteworthy visits to Ferrara, including Franciscan friar St John of Capistrano and Bernadino da Siena, who had been offered the bishopric of Ferrara. Vegri and Tavelli Campbell notes, 'produced authoritative works on ascetic discipline, emphasising the conquest of the will or the *anima* and drawing on physical metaphors of warfare, combat and struggle…' (*Ibid.*), for instance Vegri's *Le armi necessarie alla battaglia spirituale*. With this ascetic context in mind - existing within the entire picture of cultural, religious and philosophical humanism in Ferrara - I will analyse the four faunal aspects of Tura's *Saint Jerome*, excluding some faintly painted cows in the background, building upon Freidmann's observations.

Firstly, it may be opportune to discuss the most conventional animal, the lion, since it is usually found in visual representations of the saint as one of his attributes taken from legend. I reiterate the parallel Friedmann draws between the emotional states of man and beast. Rather than supporting William Norton Howe's assertion that Tura's lion looks 'dejected', Friedmann proposes that the legendary episode Tura is evoking is that recorded by De Voragine in the *Legenda aurea* when Jerome's lion is accused of killing the donkey it was stationed to guard (176). He thus

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[50] For a fuller discussion of asceticism relating to the saintly human body in Cosmè Tura's work, see Stephen Campbell's (1997) chapter '"O Sacro Corpo": emotional Images and the Art of Sanctity' pp. 63 - 99

associates Jerome's psychological state with the lion's, as a fellow penitent figure miming him. Another moment from De Voragine's legend that the lion could call to mind is that in which it enters the monastery with a thorn in its paw, since the left front paw of Tura's creature is raised slightly. Nonetheless, it is scarcely lifted from the ground and it seems that not sufficient attention is drawn to it to make the assumption that this moment in the legend is the principal evocation. Both elements could perhaps even be combined in the image, bringing different moments in the legend together without one excluding the other. The contriteness in the lion's behaviour mirroring that of Jerome could be elaborated too in its interaction with the landscape, notably the stream passing by beneath the bridge on which it stands. The animal is gazing into the brook that Tura has painted snaking around the landscape from behind the saint. Its expression, open mouthed with tongue outstretched, calls to mind a demonstrable thirst, and indeed a fervent and intense thirst akin to what Friedmann observes in the manner of the saint himself. Its pose and expression, as well as the - perhaps unintentionally - cervine hind legs, recall Psalm 42, 'as the deer pants for streams of water…' There is in fact a Ferrarese miniature of St Jerome now in the Cleveland Museum of Art surrounded by the same border design as is found embellishing Ferrarese manuscripts of works of Pseudo-Dionysius and other Church Fathers which has been dated to c. 1500. I will discuss its landscape in my final chapter, but here it is of import in that it represents St Jerome beating his breast before a vision of the crucified Christ and behind himself and his lion is a deer drinking from a quenching light blue stream that snakes around the hills in a similar fashion to Tura's. Could Tura's panting lion represent some form of lion-deer hybrid? The Hebrew verb תַּעֲרֹג *ta·'ă·rōḡ* from עָרַג (*arag*) 'to long for' is used three times in scripture, here in Psalm 42 verses 1 and 2, and also in Joel 1:20. In two of the three the verb describes the actions of an animal, and the other the poet's soul. The implications of this linguistically and the very likening of the soul to an animal reinforces the connexion of the immortal soul with the mortal body and all that the fleshly experience entails, including temptations like those Jerome confronts in the desert. If the lion is to be regarded as an iconological reflection of Jerome's emotional state of penitence, as Friedmann believes[51], its apparent yearning for water can be freely likened to the saint's yearning for God, for which very reason he is in the wilderness of the desert of Chalcis, subduing the 'rebellious flesh'. The lion in its contriteness, and perhaps with a healing wound, seeks the peace of the cool waters as Jerome seeks the Lord's restoration of his peace of spirit in the ceaseless beating of his breast. The thirsting lion

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[51] Friedmann (176) also points out that Tura was not alone in using the lion thus; he indicates as an example of the same technique in Andrea del Castagno's fresco *The Trinity with Saints Jerome, Paula and Eustochim*, in the church of the SS. Annunziata, which I referenced earlier in relation to Campbell's comment on it.

and the stream therefore can represent allegorically Jerome's thirst for God in the wilderness, through the likeness and difference of man and beast St Augustine (1888) describes this in his exposition on Psalm 42: 'Nevertheless, it appears to me, my brethren, that such *"longing"* is not fully satisfied even in the faithful in Baptism: but that haply, if they know where they are sojourning, and whither they have to remove from hence, their *"longing"* is kindled in even greater intensity.' For Augustine, though the longing felt by the writer of Psalm 42 can be compared to an animal's panting for water, the former's can never be quenched until his life of pilgrimage has come to an end. If there is a figure who surely knows that he is a sojourner awaiting God's kingdom and repenting in expectation, it is Jerome. This perhaps explains some of the intensity of penitence that has been noted in the painting, and, what is more - albeit not in crude correspondence - the lion and stream come to represent respectively the penitent human being and the world to come.

Upon the gnarled tree behind St Jerome are an owl in the top right corner holding a frog in its talons and a wall creeper bird lower down to the left. Of the birds I will begin with an analysis of the first, which stares eerily from its bough at the rock in the saint's right hand. The owl traditionally represents those dwelling in the darkness of unbelief, interpreted at times as the Jews' rejection of Christ and hence 'preference' for darkness. Nonetheless, for a judicious moralising of the creature, one need only look to the twelfth-century Aberdeen Bestiary and its entry *De nicticorace* on folios 35v and 36r. It begins referencing Psalm 102:6 and states that the owl is a bird that loves the darkness, before the author arrives at the creature's mystical and Christological implications: 'Mystice nicticorax Christum\ significat qui noctis tenebras amat, quia non vult mortem peccatores\ sed ut convertatur et vivat'.[52] Christ, in this sense, is too a lover of the darkness in that he saves those dwelling within it, bringing them into the light. Indeed, Ephesians 5:8 is quoted to gloss the use of the term 'darkness' to denote sinners: 'Fuistis aliquando tenebre,\ nunc autem lux in domino.'[53] The paradoxical identification of Christ with the darkness is extended by the bestiary entry as it offers a vision of light that is the one sought by those who have not found Christ, that is vainglory. Thus: 'Lux igitur refugit lu\cem, id est veritas humane glorie vanitatem'.[54] That the night-owl does not live in the light of the glory of his fellow mankind has significance for Jerome in his very act of shunning community for the wilderness and company of 'scorpions and wild beasts' for four years. Moreover, according to the *Legenda aurea*, Jerome 'joined the days with

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[52] 'In a mystic sense, the night-owl signifies Christ. Christ loves the darkness of night because he does not want sinners - who are represented by darkness - to die but to be converted and live.'

[53] 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.'

[54] 'The light, therefore, shuns the light, that is, the truth shuns the vanity of worldly glory.'

the nights', in order to face the terrors of the night in penitence.[55] Judging by the hue of the sky in Tura's painting, the scene is not taking place during the night; at the very most it may be the onset of dusk or dawn, but it is not the typical scene to which an owl is accustomed. Similarly, Jerome has left the life to which he was accustomed; according to the *Legenda aurea,* he was a cardinal in Rome before entering the desert for four years. This past career that is evoked, as is extremely common in depictions of this saint, by the red galero lying abandoned on the ground - for the severe physical discomfort of the wilderness. Hence, the owl too, when one considers these prevalent bestiary traditions, further intensifies the comprehensive message of extreme self-privation and *imitatio Christi* sacrifice which the spectator can do no other than to intuit. If Tura is indeed appealing to Psalm 102, it can be noted that the description of the psalm is that it is a prayer of the 'afflicted' or 'humbled' that is לְעָנִי (le'ānî) in Hebrew, which can also signify 'depressed, in mind or circumstance', according to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. This appears to be the best known example of an owl in scripture and the most striking association with it for a contemporary beholder. As far as Friedmann claims to be aware, this is the only instance of an owl featuring in a depiction of a St Jerome context (178). He too turns to the bestiary tradition as well as to classical pagan myth. To illustrate this latter convention concretely, he discusses a medal in honour of Giovanni Bellini by Camelio (c. 1455-60 - 1537) which bears on the obverse a profile of the great artist and on the reverse an earless owl like Tura's, accompanied by the words *virtutis et ingenii*. In pagan Antiquity the owl was likewise conceived positively, sacred to Athena, who in her prophetic wisdom was said to see through the darkness (*Ibid.*). Notwithstanding the possibility that a Minervan element could have been intended, I have a somewhat stronger inclination towards the bestiary moralisation in this case, considering the overwhelmingly penitential quality of the painting which is a constitutive part of the iconographical subject. Friedmann (179) goes on to submit the potential relevance of late twelfth-century Middle English debate poem, "The Owl and the Nightingale", which famously draws on bestiary tradition, attributing to the nightingale a more celebratory attitude to the faith and holding the owl up as a conversely ardent proponent of repentance. The object of the owl's gaze in Tura's painting looks as though it is indeed the rock in Jerome's hand, which he seems to be on the verge of bringing down to strike his breast, already bleeding from presumedly repeated blows, as though the bird identifies to some degree with the flagellating gesture.

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[55] See Psalm 91:5

The third faunal element in Tura's painting of St Jerome is the frog held in the owl's claws. Jill Dunkerton observes that though it is now discoloured, it was once a rich 'copper resinate' green, and did not feature in the first white-highlighted drawing of the owl, but was conceived of later (1994). The *Physiologus* says that the frog is a symbol of those who grab at the transient pleasures of this world with no regard for the next. In this context, the owl as a penitent who embraces the darkness snatches and impedes the sinful and worldly, in a sense taming the desire for such pleasure as Jerome does in his prayers. This correlates with a line written by Jerome himself to Heliodorus (Epistle XIV): 'You are too pleasure-loving, bother, if you wish to rejoice in this world and hereafter to reign with Christ' (Friedmann 182). Numerous other sources - eg. Robert M. Grant - hold that medieval traditions distinguish between the land frog and the marine frog. The former is said to bear the heat of the sun, but dies when harsh winter takes over, and so can represent the noblest Christian who bears the heat of temptations and dies under violent persecution of his/her virtue. Conversely, the water-frog reflects in its behaviour the worldly and carnally weak, who, at the first exposure to the heat of temptation, plunge instantly back into their former wantonness (Miller 2000:18). Taking into account again the landscape in Tura's painting and the stream running around the saint, it would not be implausible to relate the frog in the owl's grip to the second of these binary species, the dominant penitential bird restraining the worldly creature from taking the regressive plunge back into the old ways of concupiscence.

A particular scriptural reference to the frog is the second plague on Egypt in Exodus 8. Origen - Latin translations of whose works were, as I have noted, in Niccolò Niccoli's manuscript collection - discusses this scourge of frogs in his work *On Prayer*. He is particularly interested in a word study of the term used by Moses for prayer when he says to Pharaoh: 'I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile' (Ex 8:9). The term is עָתַר (aw-thar'), which Origen (II.) insists is to be interpreted as 'prayer' as well as 'vow', since there is an exchange with God, a sacrifice 'made and spoken with the spirit' in order that something may be gained. Thus for Origen the plague is something to be remedied by prayer, which is for him a great gift 'offered from a conscience devoid of taint from Sin'. Viewed as a metonymic symbol of the Plagues of Egypt, this frog occasions prayer for Jerome like it did for Pharaoh, and the owl, with its powers of prayer and sacrifice, seizing the frog is to an extent Jerome seizing the opportunity. Holding the frog, the owl is almost willing Jerome with its large eyes to continue his breast-beating. Isidore of Seville, whose *Etymologiae,* as aforementioned, were influential on bestiary tradition, claims that figuratively the frogs stood for the songs of the poets, who brought forth deceptive and

conceited fables, 'for the frog stands for empty loquacity' (Oden 2001: 45). Whilst this interpretation does not seem to have much to do with especially carnal sins, it does render the anuran figure an agent of frivolity and distraction from Christian moral teaching. It is in relaying these subtle messages of saintly desert eremitism to the observer that the creatures are used by Tura in - as Friedmann notes - a 'totally new and unique capacity' (182).

The fourth and last creature Tura includes in this painting is the somewhat little known wall creeper bird, resting on a short branch on the tree to the left of the saint's abdomen. It is a bird 'of exceeding rarity in religious art, not only in the art of Renaissance Italy, but all of Europe' (Friedmann 183). In fact, it has been observed that only three paintings feature the wall creeper, two of them by Tura - the *Saint Jerome* in question and the *Madonna dello Zodiaco* (1459-63) - and one other, Pietro di Domenico's (1457-1506) *Adoration of the Shepherds with Saints Galganus and Martin,* which Friedmann deems a 'miserable transcript of the bird' inspired by its presence in Tura's works. Friedmann indeed goes into some detail regarding this avian species, and I will summarise his interpretative work before offering my analyses. The bird is *Tichodroma muraria* to zoologists, 'picchio muraiolo' to the Italians, a native to European high mountain areas, though some before have misidentified the bird depicted by Tura, for example as a woodpecker. The artist has depicted it in its winter plumage, since it would only have been in Italy with such plumage, and even then rarely. Compared to the owl, this bird has been represented with meticulous accuracy and remarkable verisimilitude. As for an interpretation of its meaning as included in this hagiographic scene, Friedmann firstly associates the bright red in its wings with that of the cardinal's galero and the vermillion-bound Latin Vulgate Bible, as an aesthetically unifying element. Whilst this is so, perhaps more intriguing is the connection he draws with the traditional belief that this bird frequented and nested in graveyards, tombs and skulls, which is also reaffirmed by the folk names for the bird even as late as the eighteenth century, 'todtvogel' ('deathbird') in German, French name 'oiseau des cimetières', Italian 'picch de la mort'. In rural Italian communities the names for the wall creeper even assumed a religious tone with 'usel de la Trinita' and 'osel della Madona', for instance (184). Friedmann then provides a thorough account of why it is highly likely that this would have been the wall creeper lore in Tura's mind as a background to his inclusion of the bird in his painting. However, I would like to focus on its function within the context of the penitent St Jerome in the wilderness. Friedmann makes a connection between the red colour so striking on the bird and Christ's Passion, particularly since the painting would have originally included the vision of Christ on the cross, the previously mentioned fragment now in the Brera in Milan (*Ibid.*). There could feasibly be an additional implication of the resurrection, given

that the bird was known to give new life to its offspring in places of death. Nonetheless, in parallel with the message of fervent asceticism, the red hue could be considered in another way; as the painting's iconographical subject is not principally of the Christ-Event, but is instead inherently hagiographical, and given also the specular roles of the other fauna, it may be suggested that the bird stands for the aspect of the saint which is his new persona as distinct from his career as a cardinal. As I have noted, according to the *Legenda aurea* Jerome was a cardinal before leaving this office behind to spend four years in the desert. The fact that the wall creeper's eggs were reported to hatch in the cemetery reflects the 'rebirth' that Jerome underwent in the desert, dying in Christ so that the body of sin might be done away with.[56] Taking a look back at scripture, if the owl is to be associated with Psalm 102 as the bestiaries expound, then there can surely be a connection between the wall creeper, the other bird of this painting, with the other bird of the Psalm: 'I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof' (102:7). The noun used is צִפּוֹר (*tsippor*), which, though the KJV translates it as 'sparrow', is a rather non-specific term for a general 'bird'. Already the owl is associated by the poet with the wilderness, but is also a lover of the darkness and echoes St Jerome's merging of night and day into fast and mortification. If this psalm provides inspiration for Tura then it can be supposed that the undetermined species of the avian creature would have given him scope to choose whichever he wished. As the psalm's counterpart to the owl in the wilderness, this bird becomes a symbol of the waking state during the night. In this case, the wall creeper indicates an outcome achieved by facing the 'dark night' of one's sins, which results in new birth and freedom, conquering death in Christ. The words of Gregory Nazianzen (329–389), whose theology was popular in *Quattrocento* Ferrara[57], are called to mind:

> O untended body, and squalid garments, whose only flower is virtue!
> O soul, clinging to the body, when reduced almost to an immaterial
> state through lack of food; or rather, when the body had been
> mortified by force, even before dissolution, that the soul might attain
> to freedom, and escape the entanglements of the senses! O nights of
> vigil, and psalmody, and standing which lasts from one day to
> another! […]   O fervour of spirit, waxing bold in prayerful longings

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[56] See Romans 6:6

[57] See section 1.2 of the introductory chapter to this work. The crucial humanist and educator to the Este family, Guarino da Verona obtained from Constantinople illuminated manuscripts of authors including Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen. Renowned Florentine humanist Niccolò Niccoli and the Sicilian-born Giovanni Aurispa also circulated Gregory's works in Ferrara, as well as those of Origen etc.

against the dogs of night, and frosts and rain, and thunders, and hail,

and darkness! (*Oration VIII,* 14)

This overt allusion to penitence and mortification, undertaken alongside days and nights that run into one another consumed by fervent prayer could almost be an expression of the imagined thoughts of Jerome in the desert of Chalcis. The notion of the soul's escape from the sensible juxtaposes its immortality with the temporal body, as the wall creeper offspring folklorically hatch and ascend to freedom from graveyards, sites of mortality.

3.3 *Pietà*: The monkey in the orange tree

Moving onto Tura's *Pietà* in the Museo Correr **(Fig. 8)**, there is equally captivating flora and fauna, chiefly that which is found in the top left hand corner of the painting, a monkey sitting in an orange tree. This fruit tree is the main feature of the landscape aside from the twisting Mount Calvary - the latter of which will be discussed in the next chapter - and when considered as an integral part of the painting's message rather than a mere space-filler, one may start to meditate upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The freshness of Christ's death in the work, his body held by his rather young-looking mother, and their role in Salvation History must be seen to interact with the tree. The evocation of the tree of knowledge and of Adam and Eve's temptation leads one to consider their respective parallels with these two figures in the painting. Paul famously draws the parallel between Adam the first man and the incarnate Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians 15: 'So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven' (45-47). To consider once more the philosophy of St John Chrysostom, he elaborates on this concept in his *Homily 10 on Romans*:

> Now this is why Adam is a type of Christ. How a type? It will be said.
> Why in that, as the former became to those who were sprung from
> him, although they had not eaten of the tree, the cause of that death
> which by his eating was introduced; thus also did Christ become to
> those sprung from Him, even though they had not wrought
> righteousness, the Provider of that righteousness which through His
> Cross He graciously bestowed on us all.

59

Indeed, as the temptation to eat of the fruit tree and the consequential Fall brought suffering and death to the human race after Adam, Christ's death on the wood of a tree brought righteousness. In this way not only is the immediacy of Christ's death in Tura's work emphasised but also its impact on the whole of the human race, from Adam until the day the painting's beholder looks upon it. The Marian attribute of 'Undoer of Knots' is hence brought to the fore together with Christ as the New Adam, for she is the New Eve holding her dead son. Irenaeus writes:

> In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word." But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. […] And thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith. (*Against Heresies*, Book III, Chapter 22)

As something of a lapsarian symbol, the fruit tree therefore reveals key messages about Christ's Passion and the necessity of the Virgin Mary, the *Nova Eva*, in humankind's redemption.[58]

A clue to this simian character in the tree that ties in with this lapsarian interpretation lies in the medieval bestiary tradition. The monkey has for centuries been construed as an imitator of man, whence we derive the English verb 'ape', used in the context of imitation, parody, or mockery. Michel Pastoureau (2011) explains the Christian moralisation which started to proliferate in the thirteenth century:

> La scimmia non assomiglia all'uomo « per natura » (*per naturam*) ma « per artificio » (*per artificium*); fa finta di assomigliargli mentre in realtà è del tutto diversa. « Simula », come indica bene il suo nome latino: *simius*. In questo modo, appare ancora di piú demoniaca perché inganna e tradisce; è l'immagine stessa del diavolo che cerca costantemente di « sciommiottare » Dio. (100)

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[58] A traditional role of the Virgin Mary alongside *Advocate* and Mediatrix of all Graces, is Co-Redemptrix.

The monkey is - in the Latin sense also etymologically - an imitator of good, and of the actions of humankind, of which he/she is capable only by virtue of having been made in God's image. What implication might this man-beast interaction then have when understood in terms of the created universe's role as naturally revelatory? Pastoureau goes on to explain the point of view of many theologians, that the monkey is in fact a man who rebelled against God, and whom the latter has punished and degraded, just as he did to Lucifer the rebel angel (*Ibid.*). Indeed, the bestiaries, drawing on theological scholarship, expounded such an idea. Composing his bestiaries in the first half of the twelfth-century, Anglo-Norman monk, Philippe de Thaün (or Thaon), wrote of the monkey:

> LI singe par figure, si cum dit escripture,
>
> Ceo que il vait contrefait, de gent escar hait;
>
> E quant il est iret senes est merguillet;
>
> E les feuns qu'il ad, ces ki plus chers averat,
>
> Devant sei porterat, ces que il arrad,
>
> A sun dos les lairad; signefiance i ad.
>
> LI [sic] signe senz dutance de Diable ait semblance;
>
> Il est feus e veins, de mals faiz echivains;
>
> Il escharnist la gent que il en mal suprent,
>
> E issi merguillerat celui ki l' servirat,
>
> Devant sei les metrat en enfern ù irat,
>
> E à sun dos lairad bons humes que arrat,
>
> Ceo est, od Deu remaindrunt; Dès tel grace nus doinst![59]

Depicted in many miniatures with an apple in its mouth, the monkey thus becomes a symbol of the Fall. (Pastoureau *Ibid.*) Tura's monkey clinging to the fruit tree could be viewed in this manner, as the tempting Satan of Genesis, imitating God by his pomps and snares but leading the tempted to their ultimate downfall. Even if the simian metaphor is not taken quite as far, and the monkey is

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[59] The monkey by figure, as the writing says,/ counterfeits what it sees, it mocks people;/ and when it is angry, immediately it is misled;/ and the young ones it has, those which it will have most dear/ it will carry before it; those which it will hate,/ it will leave them at its back; there is a meaning in it./ The monkey without doubt resembles the Devil;/ he is false and vain, fond of evil deeds;/ he mocks the people whom he surprizes in evil,/ and thus misleads him who will serve him,/ he will place them before him in hell where he will go,/ and will leave at his back the good men whom he will hate,/ that is, they will remain with God; may God give us such grace!
- Trans. Wright, Thomas (1841)

viewed along the traditional line of a man who has rebelled against God and is punished as a brutish chimp, it sits in the tree in stark contrast to the principal two human figures, the dual natured God-man and the Mother of God. Even the diabolical monkey's tree imitates the three crosses crucifying men on Mount Calvary in the backdrop, tall, thin and wavering slightly to the left. However, whilst that tree and its tempter brought about the fall of humankind, Christ's death on the new tree, the cross, brings about the salvation which is the message of this painting, and which has only recently been completed as we see from his dead body in his mother's arms. An example I have found of a monkey possibly used in an analogous way is in a codex of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* now in Ferrara's Biblioteca Ariostea, which I mentioned in regard to Tura's *Roverella* polyptych in section 2.1 of the previous chapter (Cl. II 167). It belonged to Bishop Lorenzo Roverella before, at his death, he left it to the Olivetan monastery of San Giorgio. The page on which begins the *Liber primus* (13r), '*Gloriosissimam civitatem Dei sive in hoc temporum cursu…*' features rich illumination by a miniaturist who was close to Taddeo Crivelli (Bonazza 2002: 174). The miniature in the 'G' shows the saint seated in his study, with a bare leafless tree in the background, but it is also illuminated with three animals amidst the decoration, including a *bas de page* scene in a medallion of a tailed monkey holding a long plant frond, with its back turned away from the reader and its head turning to look into the distance to the left. Could this monkey indeed be an image of the Devil turning its back to ignore Augustine's words of truth in order to continue maintaining that Christianity led to the fall of Rome? As a being, according to the bestiary tradition, expelled from the City of God, could this imposter be clinging to the imitation and false structures of power of ancient Rome? It certainly appears to be a species like a barbary macaque, which would have been commonly found in Rome as a pet. Ferrara's *Museo della Cattedrale* has a collection of *manoscritti miniati* from the *Quattrocento* which feature the monkey quite prominently. Many illuminations are the work of miniaturist Jacopo Filippo Medici - known as Filippo d'Argenta - who drew on the work of Cosmè Tura, and Fra' Evangelista da Reggio. The pages on display of illuminated Ferrarese antiphonaries commonly show tailed monkeys, eating fruit for example (eg. MC076), or in one case holding fruit but staring up from its medallion at the Archangel Michael, who defeats sin, vanquishing the wickedness and snares of the Devil and therefore his monkey substitute. Another place in which the monkey is commonly found in illuminated medallions is the great *capolavoro* of early Renaissance miniature, the two folio volumes of the Borso D'Este Bible (completed between 1455 and 1461) in Modena's Biblioteca Estense universitaria (Mss. Lat. 422 and Lat. 423), which Mariani Canova notes 'ebbe un ruolo seminale nella storia della miniatura padana' (26). The illuminators include principally the renowned Ferrarese Taddeo Crivelli (1425 - 1479) and also

Franco dei Russi (d. 1482). Amidst the extravagant and rich illuminations are an array of flora, fauna and landscape of considerable interest, but with regard to Tura's *Pietà* it is key that it features a number of monkeys, turning their backs or turning from the text eating fruit. Could Tura's monkey of sin beside the Virgin and dead Christ be vanquished by the death of the Son as these monkeys are vanquished by the text of sacred scripture? Perhaps it is noteworthy too that in miniatures frequently the monkey is found alongside a deer, an animal whom the Church Fathers and later medieval texts persisted in transforming from scarcely valued by the Romans into a Christological creature (Pastoureau 69). A symbol of light and of the resurrection, most bestiaries paint it as 'un animale puro e virtuoso, un'immagine del buon cristiano, un attributo o sostituto di Cristo alla pari con l'agnello e l'unicorno' (*Ibid.*). The deer is perhaps the antithesis of the diabolical monkey, paired with it in the Christian's perpetual struggle between the good of Christ and the evil of the Devil's traps and pomps. [60]

To return to the tree and offer an alternative approach to it, the tree in Tura's *Pietà* though recalling that original tree from Genesis, does nonetheless have a specific kind of פְּרִי (*peri*), growing on it, this Hebrew term being the one spoken by the serpent in Genesis 3:2 to tempt Eve, which signifies general fruit. The tree to the left of this painting is an orange tree. In another potential interpretation, these citrus fruits perhaps bring to mind Proverbs 25:11: 'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver' (KJV). Since there is overt Old Testament as well as Solomonic imagery in other works of Tura's like the work around which the previous chapter focusses - *Virgin and Child Enthroned* from the Roverella alatarpiece -, this suggestion that the orange tree could allude to Solomon's words may also be taken into account. The fruit of this scriptural simile, though it has puzzled many commentators, is commonly associated with the citron fruit or the orange (Ironside 2006: 216). 'Golden' apples זָהָב (*zahab,* 'of gold') in this case seems to be a poetic term denoting the warm yellowy orange of the peel. Oranges and citrons were plentiful in Palestine during the time of Solomon and so this could quite possibly be the source of his imagery (*Ibid.*). The alluring and sumptuous imagery of such fruits offset by silver filigree Solomon likens to matters spoken of when inspired by divine wisdom. This fitly pronounced utterance is to the ear as enticing as the oranges are to the appetite and eye. But what could this have to do with the *Pietà*? Perhaps the orange is indeed Jesus Christ, the דָּבָר (*dabar*), the felicitous 'word' that is in

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[60] It is worth noting also, and this could surely be explored in greater comparative depth, that there is also evidence of such animals in illuminated Italian Hebrew manuscripts. Codex 16577 in the British Library is from the third quarter of the fifteenth century from an Italian rite Jewish festival prayer book, and f. 287v shows the owner's inscription illuminated with a blue monkey turning its back and a stag, as well as a medallion with a blue squirrel in profile. Other folia likewise show miniatures of various kinds of mammal and bird, but the monkey is particularly common (ff. 1, 29v).

Greek the **Λόγος** given by the Father at the most fitting time. Coupled with the monkey, the entire image to the left hand side of the painting could perhaps be viewed as having both an exotic and a Solomonic air. If this were to be inferred then the image would seem to conform to the whole impression given by the luxurious descriptions in 1 Kings 10 of Solomon's splendour and especially to verse 22: 'For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks' (KJV). In Biblical terms, the only mention of an ape or monkey is in this very verse, brought back along with a wealth of precious materials on the ships from Tharshish. As a Solomonic decorative scene, the exotic orange tree and monkey would evoke Solomon's fame as a king of great wisdom - for which reason the Queen of Sheba sought him - and therefore the prophecy of the kingship of Christ, the pre-incarnate *Sophia*, the feminine Wisdom.

In a more classical capacity, in the chapter of his book *Adonis: The Myth of the Dying God in the Italian Renaissance,* Carlo Caruso (2013) notes that Latin poet and humanist Giovanni Pontano (1426–1503) from the Duchy of Spoleto wrote one of his last great works on the cusp of the century, *De hortis Hesperidum sive de cultu citriorum libri duo.* The title is misleading, since the poem deals with the cultivation of three different varieties of citrus tree: *Citrus aurantium* (oranges), *Citrus medica* (citrons), and *Citrus limonum.* However, the title alludes to the mythical garden 'situated in the African Atlas, where golden apples were grown under the surveillance of a dragon and three nymphs, the Hesperides' (11). The raiding of this garden was in fact Hercules' eleventh labour, who after defeating the brought the fruits to Greece. Pontano however turned the myth into an *aition* intended to explain the presence of citrus trees on the Neapolitan shore, declaring the fruit to be the mythical golden apples of the Hesperides. The orange he claimed to be the plant into which Adonis had been transformed by Venus (*Ibid.*). Thus perhaps the orange tree makes reference to Adonis if such trends were present in Italy at the time in interpreting their introduction to the country.

3.4 *Annunciation*: The squirrel, the dove, and the unidentified bird

The final instance of iconological flora and fauna that I will explore is that found in Tura's depiction of the Annunciation **(Fig. 9)**, another frequently represented iconographic subject popular throughout the Middle Ages with origins even in early Christianity of the fourth century. As I have mentioned, this scene was found on one side of Ferrara Cathedral's organ doors, with a painting of Saint George on the reverse. The architectural structures usually found in Byzantine Annunciation

scenes, in reverse perspective framing or enthroning the Virgin annunciate, Tura has turned into a building symmetrically reflected also on the half of the doors that shows the Angel Gabriel. Behind are rock formations of an unexpected kind. The first faunal element I will discuss is the squirrel, whose inclusion Stephen Campbell ascribes perhaps to Tura's squirrel-hair paintbrush, since for him the negative and sinful associations of the animal seem 'undesirable or inappropriate' for this contextual scene (136). Whilst this initially seems true, I would suggest that the ostensibly inappropriate squirrel may be deliberately so in order to convey a meaning by its very antithetical nature. A clue to how it may do this lies in the golden panels on the walls. Along those walls behind the two protagonists are gyrating figures which have been identified as planetary deities with their origins in pagan Antiquity.[61] Such imagery one may find more in keeping with the more zodiacal fresco cycle in the *Salone dei Mesi* at Ferrara's Palazzo Schifanoia - to which Cosmè Tura contributed alongside Francesco del Cossa and Ercole de' Roberti - rather than with what can be seen in other sacred works of Tura's. Aby Warburg (2011) discusses the content of the month of July and nuptial scene of Bianca D'Este, Borso's sister, and Galeotti della Mirandola, brother of the Neo-Platonist humanist whose philosophy I have discussed, Pico della Mirandola. The latter he defines as 'il coraggioso pioniere della lotta contro la superstizione astrologica', asserting that it is understandable that a man such as he, who 'riusciva a penetrare questa ridda di demoni astrologici […] sorgesse in armi contro un'idolatria del destino così barbara', bringing into the debate also Ferrarese Dominican friar Savonarola[62] as another enemy of astrology (17). Perhaps, then, on such premises, these figures whose poses seem almost disreputable and mocking stand to a certain extent for this very 'idolatria del destino'. They stand, according to such an interpretation of their planetary function, juxtaposed to the predestined moment of the Annunciation. This notion of predestination which is a core tenet of the Catholic faith is aptly explained in Romans 8:29: 'For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.' God in creating mankind in the image of Jesus Christ conceived before Creation of the plan for the incarnation of the Word. The pagan planetary symbolism, evoking beliefs in astrological determination of the future, when considered in the total iconographical context of the Annunciation seems to stand at conspicuous odds with the painting's overall message. The details of the figures, scantily clad and in frivolous gyrating postures also

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[61] eg. by Stephen Campbell

[62] In section 2.2 of this work, *Contemporary Judaism in Quattrocento northern Italy,* I mentioned Girolamo Savonarola for his preaching against usury. He was Ferrarese-born but moved to Florence where his preaching attracted large crowds of supporters.

reinforce in opposition the gravity of the exchange between angel and woman and its implications for the future of humankind.

If the planetary figures embedded in the architecture stand for something contrary to the overall iconography of the Annunciation, it is possible that the squirrel above the Virgin Annunciate could too stand at odds with her. She conveys a humble and selfless attitude manifest in her position, eyes downcast toward a book - possibly intended as prophetic Old Testament scripture or as a Book of Hours - and with hands joined in prayer. On the contrary, regarding the traditional bestiary interpretation of the squirrel, it may be noted that it was even rather an evil and selfish creature:

> Per la cultura medievale non è l'animaletto simpatico, allegro e giocherellone che conosciamo, ma « la scimmia della foresta », come lo presenta un bestiario tedesco del XIV secolo. Passa per essere pigro, lubrico, stupido, avaro. Trascorre la maggior parte del tempo a dormire, a prendersi delle libertà con le femmine della sua specie, a giocare e folleggiare tra gli alberi. Inoltre, mette da parte molto piú cibo di quando gli serva — un peccato gravissimo — e non si ricorda nemmeno in quali nascondigli lo ha messo — segno di grande stoltezza. Il pelo rossiccio, del resto, è simbolo esteriore della sua cattiva natura, in quanto ricorda la capigliatura di Giuda. (Pastoureau 111)

If we take the animal as though it is intended to be viewed with such attributes, there could be no other explanation for the creature's inclusion than to provide a foil for the Virgin. Tura has depicted the creature with its typical attribute, holding a large nut in its hands, which was commonly done to distinguish it from other animals it may potentially resemble in painting, especially when small or seen from a distance. The way it looks greedily to its food, sitting on the branch almost oblivious to the other happenings in the painting, mirrors the bestiary conception of the squirrel as a lazy and avaricious beast. Bishop and Cappadocian Father St Basil the Great (or Basil of Caesarea) (330–379), - whose homilies, as previously stated, were translated in Ferrara by prominent humanist and Este educator, Guarino da Verona - in one homily on Luke elaborates upon the dilemma of taking and owning more than one needs: 'When someone steals a man's clothes we call him a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked but does not? The bread in your

cupboard belongs to the hungry man; the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the man who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the man who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor' (1971: 16)[63]. The hoarding of money which is condemned by Basil is perhaps the 'human' equivalent of the comportment for which the squirrel is condemned by the bestiaries, hoarding far more food than it needs for itself. Likewise, keeping an unused coat in one's wardrobe due to a forgetfulness permitted only by luxury and surplus reflects what Pastoureau describes of the squirrel, viz. that it forgets even where it has stored its excess food. Such a weakness for material goods is strictly opposed to the Virgin Mary's strength of character which is arguably most famously evident in the episode of the Annunciation. What is more, the selfless act of accepting the responsibility for the sake of all humankind of bearing in her womb the Son of God - and thus of enduring all the suffering which was to ensue - is starkly contrasted to petty egoism. If Tura has indeed opted to depict the squirrel in opposition to the Virgin Annunciate above her on the branch, its obedience to the temptation of worldly excess highlights all the more the obedience to divine will expressed in the Virgin's words in that moment when she states, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word' (KJV). Pastoureau notes that the squirrel's red coat represents treason by way of analogy, as Judas, the traitor *par excellence,* was represented as red-haired. This may even have been more clear once in this case, but as Dunkerton has pointed out, the colours are muted now owing to the damaged condition of the organ shutters. Perhaps the creature in this context may also foreshadow to an extent the betrayal of Christ and the other trials the Virgin was to face henceforth. Judas in medieval art was usually portrayed in profile so as to evoke incompleteness and suspicion, as Tura's squirrel is.

The Virgin seems rather oblivious to the squirrel here, however, and her attention is inclined towards the tiny dove fluttering by her ear. Often in western Annunciation scenes the dove descends in a diagonal flight path[64], whilst in Tura's rendition of the iconographical subject this particular iconological feature departs from the canon and hovers as though speaking into the Virgin's ear. This manner in which Tura has chosen to depict the bird has interesting medieval roots. The dove is a dissimilar similarity[65],a representation of a bodily form of the Holy Spirit, present also at Christ's

[63] Quoted in Miranda, José P. (1971) *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression,* Eugene (OR): Wipf and Stock

[64] See, for example, Fra' Angelico's *Annunciation* (c. 1425 - 1426) now in the Prado in Madrid, or Carlo Crivelli's (1486) in the National Gallery, London.

[65] In my introduction I discussed Pseudo-Dionysius's Neo-Platonic concept of 'dissimilar similarities', images comprehensible for humans which, though incongruous because they are earthly, reveal something of a hidden divine truth.

Baptism in the Jordan (Luke 3:22)[66]. Christ's Incarnation is figured by the auricular penetration 'based on the scriptural figures of angelic speech and Divine *logos*' (Campbell 136). In Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi's 1333 Sienese *Annunciation* now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, which bears notable Byzantine influence, Gabriel's salutation, 'Ave gratia plena Dominus tecum' is emitted from his mouth and enters the ear of the Virgin. This reflects the medieval trend of depicted speech on scrolls or streaming from the speaker's mouth, which is found in medieval Books of Hours in the context of the Annunciation. The inscription serves as a devotional cue, prompting the opening of the Ave Maria and the image reinforcing the angelic origins of the prayer (Van Dijk 1999: 422). The early Church Fathers often associated the dove of the Holy Spirit with that of Noah and the Ark, the first assuming the same likeness as the latter creature in order that in the mystery of the Baptism the same sacrament might be recognised. St Ambrose in his work *On the mysteries* discusses this very point in depth, and arrives at the implications of the Holy Spirit's descent upon the Virgin in relation to the peace and rebirth brought about after the Deluge and by the waters of baptism: 'Have we entered a second time into our mother's womb and been born again? […] If, then, the Holy Spirit coming down upon the Virgin wrought the conception, and effected the work of generation, surely we must not doubt but that, coming down upon the Font, or upon those who receive Baptism, He effects the reality of the new birth.' The dove, though fluttering by the Virgin's ear, seems to be accompanied by a highly unconventional flight path which resembles red string falling in loops from the bar above where the squirrel perches. It seems even to encircle the squirrel's neck as though it were some tamed pet. In its descent from heaven to conceive Son of God, does the dove of the Holy Spirit somehow tame and defeat avarice as well as death?

As for the other bird of the painting - that perched above the Angel Gabriel on the metal beam farther into the distance than the branch where the squirrel sits - it is difficult to identify, owing to its peculiar form. It is possible that Tura had a particular bird species in mind but failed to execute it accurately. Nonetheless, a case could be made that this hypothesis is unlikely, given the unambiguous depictions of the wall-creeper and night-owl in the *Saint Jerome.* Its fantail perhaps suggests some kind of dove or pigeon, but since it would make little sense that it could represent the dove of the Holy Spirit, it is not clear what significance it could have. In any case, its beak certainly does not resemble that of a bird from the family Columbidae. I would rule out the chance of it being another wall-creeper, since its beak is not sharp and downward curving like that of the bird of this species in the *Saint Jerome,* and nor is there any visible hint of its iconic red section of feathers.

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[66] 'and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."'

Given its prevalence around Ferrara and the wider countryside of Emilia-Romagna in the wetlands and drainage channels, could this bird be a heron? The form of its beak and its colouring - though this maybe the result of fading - make this a conceivable identification if one considers that its distinguishable long legs may be tucked behind and invisible to the viewer because of its position. Likewise, considering the distance of the bird from the viewer, farther away than the squirrel, it must also be rather a large bird. If it is indeed intended to be a heron, we may look to the bestiary tradition for some clue as to its presence, since the only mention of the heron in the Bible is in an Old Testament list of unclean birds not to be eaten, which does not seem highly relevant here. We may then be able to glean some message regarding the angelic nature of the Archangel Gabriel. The heron is associated with the soul of the elect, sustained by the world during its bodily time there but focussed always on heaven as its destination, as the heron is sustained by the waters on the ground but flies high above the rain and storms that it fears. Folio 53v of the Aberdeen Bestiary tells us, referencing the source as Rabanus: 'Hec avis potest signi\ ficare animas electorum, que formidantes perturbationem\ huius seculi, ne forte procellis persecutionum instigante diabo\ lo involvantur, intentionem suam super omnia tempora\ lia ad serenitatem patrie celesti[s]s ubi assidue vultus dei\ conspicitur, mentes suas elevant.'[67] As the heron is sustained by the water found on land but then nests in tall trees, so the soul of man is sustained by transitory things before ascending to rejoice in the eternal. If the avaricious squirrel - representing the greedy and petty egoistic human being - highlights all the more in contradistinction the selflessness and humility of the most revered fully human being in the Christian faith, could it be that the heron similarly highlights something of the angelic nature? As a soul sustained by the transitory that seeks elevation, the heron stands in contradistinction to the immortality of the archangel. Pseudo-Dionysius says in Chapter Six of the *Divine Names:* 'Let us now praise Eternal Life, since from it comes life itself and all life and by it life is appropriately distributed to all who in any way partake of life. From it and through it exist and subsist the life and immortality of the immortal angels, and the indestructibility of the angelic eternal life. That is why they are described as ever-living and immortal' (103). As for the soul of the elect which looks forward to ascent, it could in a sense be juxtaposed to the angelic descent to the earthly in their ministry, since they are 'ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation' (Hebrews 1:14). In this instance the Archangel Gabriel descends to serve humanity in announcing this most crucial message in Salvation History.[68] I point out here that notions of ascent

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[67] 'This bird can signify the souls of the elect, who fear the disorder of this world, lest they be caught up by chance in the storms of persecution stirred up by the Devil, and raise their minds, reaching above all worldly things to the tranquility of their home in heaven, where the countenance of God is forever to be seen.'

[68] 'Archangel' comes from Greek *arkhangelos,* 'chief messenger'.

will in fact be especially crucial to my next chapter on landscape and rock formations in Tura's sacred works. Here, however, I have aimed to offer new interpretations of the 'secondary' features of these paintings of Tura's, by focussing on the implications of flora and fauna rather than human protagonists in the entire iconographic message, doing so with the assistance of the medieval bestiary tradition which was a cultural continuity into the Renaissance. Philosophical and religious patristic concepts, which are often connected to those found in the medieval bestiaries, have also played a key role in the assessment. The final aspect of the natural world that I will now explore are indeed the settings in which both human and animal can be found, landscapes.

4. *Itinerarium ad deum:* Landscape and Divine Ascent

Seest thou nought how lystly and how graciously He hath pulled thee to the thrid degré and maner of leving, the whiche hight Singuleer? In the whiche solitari forme and maner of levyng thou maist lerne to lift up the fote of thi love and step towardes that state and degré of levyng that is Parfite, and the laste state of alle.[69]

(anonymous, *The Cloude of Unknowyng*)

4.1 'Unharmonious' Ferrarese landscapes

The final aspect of Cosmè Tura's painting that I will explore in my aim to shift the art historical focus away from humans and their verisimilitude are his somewhat 'unharmonious' landscapes. I will assess them in their capacity as natural structures of materials occurring in the natural world but also as sites of sacred events. In my introduction I discussed Vasari's focus on the verisimilitude of Renaissance painting and faithful imitation of nature as a requisite for laudable work. A similar attitude towards the relationship between art and nature was exemplified by the episode of a pictorial contest described by Pliny in his *Naturalis Historiæ,* whereby Zeuxis, a painter active in the fifth century BC, so deceives the birds into believing that his painted grapes are real that they peck at them, only to be deceived himself by his contemporary and rival Parrhasius, whose painted curtain Zeuxis asks to be drawn back (XXV 36). The reverse of the art-nature paradox that was prominent in the Italian Renaissance is the idea that although art is a mere imitation of nature and can never approximate it, one may artistically incorporate the most beautiful elements from nature in order to produce an aesthetic result that surpasses it. Leon Battista Alberti in his *De statua* alludes to Zeuxis, 'the man from Croton', for a different reason, describing how the latter produced a marvellous statue of a female deity by imitating and assembling the most harmonious parts of a variety of women in one work. He elaborates on this anecdote with his own emulation:

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[69] 'See you nothing how Mistily and how graciously He has privily pulled you to the third degree and manner of living, the which is called Singular? In the which solitary form and manner of living, you may learn to lift up the foot of your love; and step towards that state and degree of living that is perfect, and the last state of all.' (*The Cloud of Unknowing,* trans. Evelyn Underhill 1922, updated by Ted Hildebrandt 2010)

In questo medesimo modo ho io scelti molti corpi, tenuti da coloro che
più sanni, bellissimi, e da tutti ho cavate le loro misure e proporzioni;
delle quali, avendo poi insieme fatto comparazione, e lasciati da parte
gli eccessi degli estremi, se alcuni ve ne fossero che superassino, o
fossero superati dagli altri, ho prese da diversi corpi e modelli, quelle
mediocrità, che mi son parse le più lodate. (1804: 129)

What Alberti advocates here - harmonious and measured beauty attained by selecting from the most
pleasing studies - is not necessarily best achieved mathematically by the calculation of mean
proportions; Zeuxis, whom he praises and with whom he identifies as a forerunner, took the nose of
one woman, and the leg of another, for example, rather than measurements. As Jane Andrews Aiken
(1980) notes, 'although the details of the story about the Croton maids do not dovetail with the
techniques and methods described in *De statua,* they do stress the important notions for Alberti that
beauty exists in the products of nature and can be discovered through a selective process' (85). The
representation of nature in Cosmè Tura's works seems to adopt this kind of method, as we have
observed in his assemblage of faithfully represented Old Testament symbols and in his inclusion of
symbolic flora and fauna. It would seem a method more adherent to Zeuxis's than to Alberti's, since
it would appear that there has been a selective process involved in combining nature's forms into
one work as they would not occur in the natural world beside one another in the same scene. This is
also apparent in his landscapes. Nonetheless, his landscapes including rock formations and clouds
are often incongruous and almost absurd rather than harmonious or measured. Kristeller (1964: 166)
notes that *καλόν* - and *pulchrum* in Latin - connoted a beauty which was never distinguished from
the moral good, and perhaps therefore in Tura's sacred landscapes it is the beauty of the spiritual
and the journey of the soul through nature which is as important as, or even more important than,
that of the body. His landscapes do not take into account perfectly measured averages as advocated
by Alberti but rather exaggerate naturally occurring forms and juxtapose pieces of landscape with
others which are almost 'unsuited', as well as overlapping chronologically incompatible scenes and
creating 'unharmonious' spatial interactions. For this reason, as previously in this thesis I have
emphasised the importance of shifting the focus of Renaissance art away from rebirth and towards
medieval continuity, it is fruitful in this chapter to do the same. To this end I will assess the potential
influences continuing from Byzantine art, whose theology is often linked to that of the very Church
Fathers I have discussed thus far whose works were being studied and translated in fifteenth-century
Ferrara. Though Vasari dismissed as crude and primitive the art of the Byzantine Greeks, their styles

of rock formation and other landscape features, as well as spatial conceptual traditions - as manifest in icon paintings, frescoes and mosaics, eastern and Italian - provide an insight when beginning to interpret Tura's landscapes. An additional interesting area to explore is once more the Ferrarese illuminated manuscript miniatures, which in fact make use of landscapes as both physical structures and conceptual places in an analogous fashion.

In my introduction (1.3) I alluded to a fragment of Solomon's words in the Book of Wisdom regarding the revelation of the 'secret' and hidden divine by means of the incongruous images of the natural world. Indeed, in the very same *Prayer for and Love of Wisdom* Solomon prays for discernment and in his appeal the wisdom of God comes to him (7:7), interpreted later, as I have mentioned, as the pre-incarnate Christ, the feminine *Sophia.* He tells of how this wisdom teaches him of what is both manifest and what is secret through 'the structure of the world and the activity of the elements', and more comprehensively:

> the beginning and end and middle of times,
> the alternations of the solstices and the changes of seasons,
> the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars,
> the natures of animals and the tempers of wild beasts,
> the powers of spirits[70] and the reasonings of men,
> the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots… (7:18-20)

Though listed as individual components of nature, once assembled and depicted all together, these factors would constitute a landscape, replete with structures of divine revelation. Veronica della Dora (2012), though she applies this more specifically to Byzantine and post-Byzantine icons, acknowledges that landscape features of visual art such as 'mountains, rocks, trees, caves, or the River Jordan were part of a collection of symbols or models of the invisible, for, in the words of John of Damascus (A.D. 676 - 749, "visible things are corporeal models which provide a vague understanding of intangible things"'(89). John of Damascus here summarises to an extent the school of thought of Pseudo-Dionysius and his philosophy of 'dissimilar similarities', rendering the spatial wholes of landscape 'windows to Heaven'[71].

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[70] Or *winds.*

[71] In Orthodox Christianity, icons are often referred to as "Windows to Heaven".

Within all of these components which assemble to form a natural landscape, an aspect of *Quattrocento* Ferrarese painting which has received little scholarly attention is what Jacob Wamberg refers to as the 'peculiar rock formations which appear in the backgrounds of numerous paintings from the second half of the century' (1990: 129). When comparing the painting of Cosmè Tura to that of other Ferrarese artists of the early Renaissance, and above all to artists of other centres, what stands out in perhaps an even more salient way than the flora and fauna as idiosyncratic is the landscape, 'unharmonious' and unrealistic. Bernard Berenson (1952) summarises his own perspective on Tura's landscapes, that they 'are of a world which has these many ages seen no flower or green leaf, for there is no earth, no mould, no sod, only the inhospitable rock everywhere. He seldom finds place even for the dry cornel tree which other artists, trained at Padua, loved to paint' (159). Whilst, especially in light of the previous chapter, it cannot be said that Tura's paintings are devoid of plant and animal life altogether, it is reasonable to note the prevailing dominance of 'inhospitable rock' in them, the mineral structures jagged and at times creating elaborately intimidating formations. Whilst there is for instance an orange tree and monkey at the edge of Tura's *Pietà,* as assessed in section 3.3 of chapter 3, there is also an enormous, twisting Mount Calvary, looming and rising to dominate the background. Whilst the *Saint Jerome* features small clusters of ivy and other plants on the ground and the dry gnarled arboreal perch for the birds - not to mention the stream - the landscape is arid and rocky with a twisted helter-skelter formation. The architecture of the Annunciation scene on the organ doors opens out unexpectedly onto a landscape of huge and quite bizarre rock formations which seem out of sync with the arches *a tutto sesto* and adorned capitals. Whilst Berenson's commentary on Tura's landscapes remains little more than a descriptive observation, what this chapter aims to do is to propose an interpretation of how the landscape functions as part of the painting's sacred iconographical subject.

4.2 Rock formations as means of ascendency

Robert Colby (2008) has written about the contribution to the painting of landscape by Dosso Dossi, a Ferrarese artist active only around half a century later than Cosmè Tura, and who was praised by both Paolo Giovio and Giorgio Vasari. The latter, in his *Lives of the Artists* states: 'Ebbe in Lombardia titolo da tutti i pittori di fare i paesi meglio che alcuno altro' (201). Colby characterises the landscape sections of some of Dossi's work as being in the same vein as the

Flemish tradition, visible from an elevated viewpoint and represented in quite minute detail (203).[72] The remark of Vasari's is for the purpose of this thesis not especially pertinent as a value judgement with which to agree or not, but it is valuable in that it attests to Dossi's conformity to Vasari's renowned aesthetic tastes that I have discussed as pervasive to the detriment of alternative conceptions of early modern visual art.[73] The same could not be said for the landscape sections of Tura's paintings; not only are they often somewhat barren and evocative of desert asceticism, but, as I have noted, they lack the verisimilitude that Vasari praises and would probably deny him from Vasari's perspective the title of a great 'imitatore della natura'[74] of his times. Rather than aiming to resemble realistic scenes, Tura's landscapes are often both incongruous and exaggerated beyond verisimilitude. To interpret his landscape features - as for the Old Testament architectural embellishments and flora and fauna in my previous chapters - one may be aided by underpinning 'cultural premises', which indeed include philosophical and visual cultural continuities from the Middle Ages. Roberto Longhi (1934) in the *Officina Ferrarese* alludes to these medieval continuities:

> His medieval ascendency gives him the conviction that painting must
> from the outset be made of rare and precious materials [...]: in this
> imaginary material composed of the most incorruptible minerals the
> power of movement which breathes life into the people, the trees, and
> the rocks, can do nothing else but twist and concentrate into petrified
> maelstroms. A stalagmitic nature, a humanity of enamel and ivory,
> with crystal joints.

'Medieval ascendency' is arguably one the most apt ways to encapsulate the tendencies of Tura's almost living rock formations, which have continued to be interpreted in this 'stalagmitic' fashion.

In a more recent discussion of Ferrarese *Quattrocento* landscape painting, Wamberg considers a panel from the presumed 1460s of the stigmatisation of St Francis by an unknown Ferrarese artist, now in the Museo Civico in Pesaro. He categorises the rock formations in this painting as an especially striking example of the notion of rock as a living being, undergoing a

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[72] See, for example, Dossi's *Mythological Allegory* (c. 1530), Galleria Borghese, Rome

[73] By this, I refer to Vasari's love of the classically-inspired and harmonious as opposed to, for example, the 'crude Greek style'.

[74] See the quotation from Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* regarding Giotto in my introduction.

continual metamorphosis, stalagmitic, growing and bending (132). In regard to the wider implications for the Ferrarese School, he makes a suggestion specifically in relation to Tura's contemporary Francesco del Cossa[75]: 'If a certain consistency can be assumed in the Ferrarese landscape tradition, it may not be unreasonable to imagine that Cossa's rock landscapes represent a further development of these tendencies in the Pesaro panel' (133) In terms of contemporary northern Italy, one may bring to mind also Marco Zoppo's *Stigmatisation* (1471) now in Baltimore's Walters Art Museum **(Fig. 10)**, in which plant-like arching rocks sprout from the ground almost encircling Saint Francis and his companion, Brother Leo. For all of the contemporary instances that exist in which rocks are depicted in a comparable way, Wamberg also appeals to medieval continuity in order to better comprehend this *Quattrocento* Ferrarese approach to living stalagmitic rock, highlighting that:

> these paintings are not without precedent in the previous history of painting, [that is] a phenomenon […] first adopted by Byzantine art and then absorbed into early Italian painting. It can be described as bundles of stalagmites, cut off into horizontal surfaces — often with an intensified dividing into storeys in the upper regions. The impression given is frequently that of an upward striving, at times of actual growth as in the rocks of *Christ in Gethsemane* (c. 1220) in San Marco, Venice. Here the highest of the rocks seem about to burst into flower. Not rarely this dynamism seems to have been crossed with architectonic tendencies, as in the natural arches that grow into one another along the circular horizon in *St. John the Baptist bears Witness to Christ* and the *Three Temptations of Christ* (1315-21) in the Cora Church, Istanbul (138-9).

Christ is even supported by a plinth of rocks growing from the ground in stalagmites in the late twelfth-century mosaic of the *Temptation of Christ* in Monreale Cathedral above Palermo *(Fig. 11)*, where he stands resolute with his hand raised to shun the levitating devil. In his refusal to turn stones into bread, he is lifted above his interlocutor by the stone podium, emphasising his steadfast

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[75] It was in conjunction with Francesco Cossa, as I briefly mentioned in 3.3, that Tura frescoed the Palazzo Schifanoia. Their more secular nature means that these frescoes have not been a focus of this thesis dedicated to Tura's sacred artworks.

reliance on the words from God's mouth and the empty foundation of the devil's temptations.[76] In the Cora Church mosaic too, Christ in human flesh triumphs over Satan in the wilderness, and yet the most imposing and dramatic feature of the scene are the jagged rock formations, twisting upwards as though natural creation itself may be able to ascend through this act. The idea of creation's strengthening against temptation - and thus ascent closer to God - being a consequence of Christ's temptation can be identified as a continuation in medieval thought. Aquinas in Question 41 of the *Summa* answers the article *Whether it was becoming that Christ should be tempted?* thus: 'Christ wished to be tempted; first that He might strengthen us against temptations. Hence Gregory says in a homily (xvi in Evang.): "It was not unworthy of our Redeemer to wish to be tempted, who came also to be slain; in order that by His temptations He might conquer our temptations, just as by His death He overcame our death."' Thus, in the strong jagged rock structures of the landscape, the natural world rises above temptation and closer to God. Likewise, the 'upwards striving' of the rocks in *Christ in Gethsemane* play a part in reflecting the desperate striving of Jesus during the Agony in the Garden to allow the Father's will be done.[77]

The concept of rock storeys and varying strata or levels can too be identified in Byzantine tradition, and particularly in images of one intrinsically rocky scene, the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.[78] Thirteenth and fourteenth-century icons typically represented a mount split into three, with Moses and Elijah occupying their own peaks either side of Jesus. This iconography 'accentuated the unity of all previous mystical ascents to Christ, with the incessant upwardly aimed spirituality represented as a triangular mountain (Strezova 2014: 104). Additionally, Transfiguration icons tend to divide the rock formations into strata, with the apostles below cowering on one stratum of rock, and Christ above on another with the lateral prophets on separate offshoots, such as the c.1200 icon of the subject in the Louvre **(Fig. 12)**. To return to Ferrara, I will explore how one may interpret the incongruous and dynamic rocky forms in Cosmè Tura's sacred landscapes, as well as other landscape features.

4.3 *Saint Jerome*: Ascent to God

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[76] The episode is taken from Matthew 4:4, and the devil's first temptation that commands Jesus to turn stones into bread to relieve his hunger. Jesus responds: "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

[77] Luke 22:42

[78] The Transfiguration is recounted in the three Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 17:1-9, Luke 9:28-36 and Mark 9:2-8. Jesus ascends the mountain traditionally identified as Mount Tabor with apostles Peter, John and James, where he is transformed and begins to shine bright like lightning.

To revisit Tura's *St. Jerome* **(Fig. 5)** – whose stream of water I briefly discussed in the context of flora and fauna in my previous chapter – the first thing to note is that the landscape behind the saint is composed of two halves, which distances it from realism; the right side of the painting from the spectator's viewpoint, behind the penitent man and the tree, is a cliff of dark reddish stone upon which are stalagmitic arches of the same mineral, whilst the left side is dominated by a pale twisting mountain. The two sides, when one imagines the absence of the tree, bear no realistic continuation from one into the other. The iconographical subject matter of the scene is to an extent reminiscent of that of Christ in Gethsemane, in that the two are suffering agony, Jerome in his act of *imitatio Christi.* Jerome's agony in the desert, rather than in a garden, occurs for the reasons that have already been established[79]; he desires to subdue his rebellious flesh in penitence. Christ during the agony in Gethsemane is visited by an angel for strength, 'and being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground' (Luke 22:44). The fine trickles of blood running down the saint's torso in Tura's painting seem to draw parallels with this imagery, bearing a resemblance to droplets of perspiration although produced by his beating of his breast with the rock as he stares at the image of the crucified Christ. As Christ came to dwell on earth incarnate and suffered at the hands of his fellow man, Jerome enters the desert of Chalcis to be in the company of only the land and its beasts and uses a piece of that very landscape to make himself suffer. The rock in his hand is the very colour of the great mount spiralling from the ground behind him. Contemplating the Crucifixion and taming his flesh with the mineral of the landscape, does the rising formation mirror his soul's ascent towards God through penance? The mountain of rock identical to the penitential instrument has a form that rises in an ascending path to the apex like a helter-skelter. This highly exaggerated notion of ascendency could call to mind Mount Sinai, Moses's ascent of which has traditionally been interpreted as symbolic of the soul's mystical ascent to God. To draw once more upon the philosophy of the Church Fathers and in particular the Cappadocian Fathers[80], there is a certain trend in landscape conception originating with Gregory of Nyssa (c.332–395). He maps the tripartite mystical ascent of Moses onto three "iconic landscapes": *Katharsis,* the purification of the soul from egoistical passions, he likens to a moonlit desert at night; *fōtisis,* the enlightenment of the soul by the Holy Spirit, he equates with the ascent of a foggy mountain; and finally *theosis,* union with God, he compares to disappearance into the impenetrable

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[79] See section 3.2 of the previous chapter, *'Saint Jerome*: Penitential Fauna'.

[80] The Cappadocian Fathers are St Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea (whose homilies were translated into Latin and popularised by Guarino da Verona), his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa, and their close friend Gregory Nazianzen, who became Patriarch of Constantinople (and whose works were also studied in Ferrarese humanist circles).

darkness of a thick cloud (della Dora 89). Following the same Platonic influence, Pseudo-Dionysius also equates Moses's ascent with the soul's, the apex becoming the 'mysterious darkness of unknowing' where one is 'supremely united with the unknown by inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing' (Rorem 1993: 214).[81] In regard more specifically to artistic landscapes of the Last Judgement, Joanne Snow-Smith (2000) indicates how crucial was the long-established belief in a destination of reward or punishment at the end of the 'journey of the soul', as well as the importance of the idea of the soul's gradual ascent through knowledge, the *itinerarium ad deum,* with its roots in Plato's philosophy (47).[82] The very rock formation in question in the painting is tripartite, each stratum divided by the snaking path, and the rock in Jerome's hand is raised to the highest, the desired destination for his soul. It may be noted too that according to the *Legenda Aurea,* Jerome relates to Eustochium: 'And as our Lord is witness, after many weepings and tears, it seemed to me that I was among the company of angels, this during four years.' The tripartite rock tower thus reflects also the three Pseudo-Dionysian spheres of angels from the *De Coelesti Hierarchia*: the first, the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; the second, the Dominions, Virtues and Powers; and the third, the Principalities, Archangels and Angels.

Another feature, however, of the paler left hand side of Tura's *Saint Jerome* landscape is the Albertian church, of a similar colour to, if not a little fainter than, the twisting mountain. As well as the monk clad in what is probably a Hieronymite habit who presents the donor to the right of the painting - the latter possibly a representation of Borso D'Este -, Jill Dunkerton (1994) points out the friars in the background to the left, who she presumes are Franciscans. They carry building materials to the church, which Dunkerton suggests may be a reference to Jerome's status as a Father of the Church, rather than an allusion to any real church being constructed at that time. If this aspect to the landscape emphasises Jerome's role as a foundational character in Church history, both as a whole body and for its religious orders, the mountain may well be linked to it symbolically as well as in hue and ostensible material. According to the *Legenda aurea,* it was indeed after his long penance in the wilderness, becoming one with the harsh landscape, that the saint began to assemble his disciples and carry out constructive work for the church through his continent example thenceforth and his scholarly pursuits. His experience in that very landscape led to his reputational ascent within the Church to being considered one of its great Fathers and his popularity in

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[81] One of the most notable works on the Christian Neo-Platonist concept of 'unknowing' is the anonymous Middle English mystic work from the latter half of the fourteenth century, *The Cloude of Unknowyng,* quoted above to introduce this chapter. It deals with the Pseudo-Dionysian ascending journey to union with God into this incongruous landscape feature, a cloud.

[82] See also Franciscan Saint Bonaventure's famous thirteenth-century work *'Itinerarium mentis in Deum'.*

Renaissance painting, and the spiritual ascent to heaven, as is considered to be the destination of the saints after death.

The same type of mountain shape is also found in Ferrarese miniatures, where it recalls a message of ascendency, for instance in an illumination by the artist Guglielmo Giraldi. In a gradual from c.1469 - 1474 painted for the Carthusian monks of San Cristoforo alla Certosa, today in the Museo di Schifanoia in Ferrara[83], the initial R of the Resurrection painted by Giraldi shows the risen Christ triumphant above his tomb with a rising mountain of an analogous helter-skelter form that twists upwards in the background above an adorning cherub who holds words from the twelfth-century Marian hymn *Regina Cœli: 'Resurrexit sicut dixit, alleluia'.* Whilst the mountain bears the three crosses atop it evoking the crucifixion, it seems also to preempt the next mystery, the Ascension into heaven. Even more pertinent images from the Ferrarese school of illumination are in fact the miniature Saint Jeromes themselves. In the c.1500 Ferrarese miniature in the Cleveland Museum of Art that I mentioned in the previous chapter for its thirsting deer, the same twisting formations can be identified behind the saint, beating his breast with a stone and bleeding whilst looking upon a vision of the crucified Christ. There are almost two distinct landscapes. The more distant hills of stalagmites are exceedingly more lush and verdant than Tura's landscapes and echo a paradise more than a wilderness. The dominant rock form, however, is his cave beside him, which strikingly resembles the Byzantine rock structures I have discussed, angular and stalagmitic, growing and ascending from the barrenness of the earthly. The fact that behind this desert-like foreground is such a paradisiacal and fertile landscape suggests that it is perhaps more of a vision produced by penitential rapture than a physical reality, or indeed a metaphorical realm to which his soul ascends. Another miniature with a similar kind of mineral formation, pliant strips growing like plant fronds, is Taddeo Crivelli's c.1469 *Saint Jerome in the Desert* in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles **(Fig. 13)**. Within this green cave lie Jerome's lion and possessions, and rather than gazing up at a vision, the saint embraces a life-size image of Christ crucified, ostensibly almost kissing the bleeding wounds produced by the nails through his feet. The immediacy and humanity of the real-sized crucifix seems to transport Jerome so that he is both in the wilderness of Chalcis and simultaneously present at the Crucifixion centuries earlier. Hence, the jagged, peaked cave begins to assume a likeness to Mount Calvary, the landscape too transcending time.

4.4 *Pietà*: Mount Calvary and simultaneous landscapes

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[83] N, OA 1343, fol. 1

In light of this notion of the overlapping of landscapes in time and space - a phenomenon occurring in medieval art in order to represent multiple aspects of a story in the same frame -, Cosmè Tura's 1460 *Pietà* **(Fig. 8)** that I explored in the previous chapter, in the Museo Correr in Venice, is particularly interesting. It is useful when coming to consider its rock formations and landscape to call to mind not only the notable influence of Byzantine traditions in depicting architectonic rock forms, but also Byzantine notions of spatial and temporal landscape. Icons particularly representing narratives from the life of Christ - the Baptism, Transfiguration, Crucifixion, etc. - are intended as *loci memoriae,* recalling a memory of sacred history and at the same time providing a glimpse of what is promised to come (della Dora 87). Concepts that I outlined in my first chapter regarding the fulfilment of the Old Testament in the New, the latter coming to fill in the outline of the Old, like the popular exegetical *skiagraphia* trope, are applicable to the depiction of sacred landscape and its spatial interactions. Often in New Testament Byzantine iconography, the subject is superimposed on an Old Testament scene which prefigures it, such as when Mount Tabor in the Transfiguration is split on top into the two Old Testament peaks, Sinai and Horeb, upon which are their respective Old Testament figures, Moses and Elijah. An instance of this is Theophanes the Greek's fourteenth-century or an early fifteenth-century *Transfiguration* in the Tretyakov Gallery (*Ibid.*). Another example is the allusion to the Red Sea at the River Jordan during Christ's Baptism with two figures often depicted at Christ's feet who are personifications of the two bodies of water. Arguably one of the very richest examples of merging landscapes linking the New Covenant to the Old is only around forty-two miles distant from Ferrara, in Ravenna. The Basilica of San Vitale, begun in 526 AD, is home to the precious mosaics which make use of many vividly captivating landscapes in their role in prophecy. The apse is decorated with scenes such as the Hospitality of Abraham[84] prefiguring the revelation of the Holy Trinity, Abraham serving loaves baked by Sarah to the three guests who sit beneath an oak of Mamre. There are also Old Testament prefigurations of sacrifice; beside the very scene of Abraham and Sarah, the hand of God prevents another Abraham from making the sacrifice of Isaac by the rocks, and elsewhere are depicted the offerings of the High Priest Melchizedek and of Abel, accepted by God beneath a sky of streaked colour. There is a prevalent tradition of covenantal fulfilment in Byzantine art, landscapes as meeting points for the convergence of scriptural *topoi*. In my chapter 2. I assessed this notion of fulfilment and continuity between the Old and New Testaments in the intricate decoration of the throne in Tura's *Virgin and Child* from the Roverella polyptych, but how might early Renaissance Italian sacred painting have

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[84] The story of Abraham and Sarah's Hospitality (Genesis 18:1-15) tells of how the couple receive three visitors outside their tent, understood as emblematic of the three persons of the Trinity.

also witnessed the carrying through of these palimpsests of landscape? If, as the Book of Wisdom asserts, nature is an instrument of revelation, this explains why so many significant scriptural events and theophanies involve features of landscape: the Burning Bush, the rock struck by Moses to release water, or divine fires coming down from heaven. Another instance of the covenantal convergence are representations of the Virgin Mary as the Unburnt Bush, prefigured by that in which Moses encountered the angel of the Lord[85].

Like in the scenes of Abraham in the San Vitale mosaic, Tura's 1460 *Pietà,* presents two moments in the same figures' lives. Whilst the instances depicted are chronologically closer together than the two overlapping landscapes of Abraham, they are nonetheless separate points in time represented as overlapping landscapes. In Marian devotion and art, the piercing of Jesus's side and his descent from the cross are one of the seven dolours of Mary Our Lady of Sorrows, and the *Pietà* is one means of depicting this, even though it is perhaps more usually found as a subject in sculpture. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus's mother Mary stood at the foot of the cross along with a group of other women and men[86], and, whilst it is not explicitly stated, the common inference is that she remained until her son's body was taken down by Joseph of Arimathea, whereupon it would have been passed to her. Since realistically the scene would have occurred upon Mount Calvary, Tura's portrayal of the *Pietà* such a distance away from the mount isolates the moment in which Mary took him in her arms from the moment of his descent from the cross. The empty central cross in the background on the mountain suggests to the viewer that the body has just been taken down, whilst the two thieves' bodies remain. In the landscape, there is in fact an interpolation of three separate chronologically linked events: Jesus's body being taken down from the cross upon Calvary; the Sorrowful Mother holding her son's body that has just been taken down; and finally the burying of Jesus in the new tomb built by Joseph of Arimathea, alluded to by the sarcophagus. Tura's c. 1474 *Pietà* in the Louvre, the lunette from his *Roverella* Polyptych - in a depiction of the iconographical subject typically named *Lamentation* - takes the Virgin and her son as well as six other lamenting figures and places them in an architectural form, on top of a kind of plinth beneath an arch. In the Museo Correr *Pietà* in question, on the other hand, the central iconographical scene of the two principal figures, which is traditionally conceived of and depicted as occurring on Mount Calvary beneath the cross, is superimposed onto an underlying landscape of Mount Calvary from a distance. Another very similar instance of landscapes of different times overlapping in space also

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[85] Exodus 3:2

[86] John 19:25: The thirteenth-century Marian prayer, *Stabat Mater,* set to music by many western composers, is based on this event.

comes from the *Quattrocento* School of Ferrara, albeit three decades later. Ercole de' Roberti's *Pietà* in Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery (c. 1495) **(Fig. 14)** shows the black-cloaked Virgin with her son's dead body over her lap and the crown of thorns lying by his head. Behind the crags around them, only perhaps a mere hundred yards away, the three crucified figures are still all upon the crosses, including Christ. It would appear, then, that de' Roberti's work emphasises all the more the overlapping of two events by showing at a relatively close proximity Christ both in the midst of the Crucifixion in the background and again descended from the cross in the foreground. A similar merging of landscapes is found in the *Lamentation (Pietà and the Two Marys)* (sixteenth-century, date unknown) by Italian-born painter Ambrosius Benson, today in the Bowes Museum, County Durham. Christ's body has been brought some yards from the cross and behind is not a representation of his simultaneous Crucifixion but of his entombment, the site of which has been superimposed onto the summit of Calvary.

To focus on Tura's painting, in addition to its function in highlighting immediate chronological proceedings, it strikes the viewer that the Mount Calvary landscape, given that it is so imposing, could have a special symbolic significance. To draw a comparison with other Renaissance *Pietà* paintings, when one confronts Tura's landscape here with the mountainous landscape behind the figures in Bellini's 1505 *Pietà Martinengo* in Venice's Gallerie dell'Accademia, or to the soft crepuscular peak in Van der Weyden's c.1441 rendition of the subject now in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Belgium, these latter two landscapes seem to sweetly and gently frame the main iconography. In contradistinction, one notes that Tura's is demonstrably less 'picturesque' or, one may say, 'harmonious' and instead the great mountain is almost as dominating as the human figures themselves. Ercole De' Roberti's whole landscape, though harshly bleak and rugged, is set on the mountainside itself and thus too features no imposing peaks. A textual place where the mountain motif is favoured in the life of Christ is in Matthew's gospel, where it is extremely prominent. There are six Matthean mountain scenes which in a way demarcate important events in Jesus's ministry: 4:8, the culmination of Jesus's three temptations ending in victory over the devil; 5:1, when Jesus ascends a mountain to begin his 'Sermon on the Mount'; 15:29, the mountain where Jesus heals the lame, blind, crippled, and mute; 17:1 the mountain on which the Transfiguration occurs, traditionally identified as Mount Tabor; 24:3, the site of the Olivet Discourse[87]; and 28:16, the mountain in Galilee where Jesus commissions his disciples to

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[87] Jesus in the Olivet Discourse uses apocalyptic language to describe the sign of his coming and of the end of the age. This has been interpreted on the one hand as a telling of the destruction of the Temple nearly four decades later during the Roman suppression of a Jewish rebellion (70 AD), and on the other as a description of how the Church will suffer trials before Christ's second coming.

baptise and evangelise all nations. Thus, the gospel plot culminates at a mountain, as the rising helter-skelter formation of Tura's mountain emphasises its culmination to a peak. Perhaps the faint mount to the right hand side behind Calvary echoes the integral presence of the numerous other mountains. Could Tura's Mount Calvary also, then, be to an extent these other mountains, landscape features crucial to Christ's ministry on earth that culminates in the Great Commission?

Within Ferrarese circles, one could perhaps draw parallels even with an image I mentioned in my first chapter in regard to the codices of Chrysostom's writings, Cl. II 333 and Cl. II 334 in Ferrara's Biblioteca Ariostea. The three-peaked mountain constituting the emblem of the Olivetan monks has been identified by Mirna Bonazza (2002: 311) as Mount Calvary, given the large red cross at its centre denoting the Crucifixion. Nonetheless, the flanking olive branches growing out of the lateral peaks recall also the mountain after which the original hermitage of the congregation was named, Mount Olivet, or the Mount of Olives. Thus the emblem merges scriptural episodes within one mountain, a site of convergence of various scenes. The crucifixion on Calvary is conjured up alongside the events for which Mount Olivet is known, including Old Testament and New Testament correlations that occurred there; David wept as he ascended, fleeing Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel: 15:30), whilst Jesus, 'Son of David'[88], was later to weep as he descended over the fate of the city Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). These are amongst numerous other accounts featuring the Mount of Olives - such as the very Ascension of Jesus recounted in Acts 1 - which all render it a key part of the Bible's landscape. Thus, the triune mount of the Olivetan *stemma* merges a site of Old and New Testament continuity and the site of the Passion. Particularly given Tura's contact with the monastery and this branch of the Benedictine order a few years later, it is conceivable that he could have been acquainted with the image and perhaps it may follow that his *Pietà* should employ an analogous idea in representing the landscape feature so imposingly.

Chrysostom himself links the Old Covenant and the New at the very site of Mount Calvary, suggesting that 'the place of the skull' - that is Golgotha, or Calvary (*Calvariæ Locus*) - is indeed where Adam was buried and still lies, 'and that Jesus [the new Adam] in this place where death had reigned, there also set up the trophy. For He went forth bearing the Cross as a trophy over the tyranny of death' (Homily 85). In late medieval and early Renaissance Italian painting the perpetuation of this patristic tradition linking the Old and New Testaments can be identified: in both Mantegna's c.1457-60 *Crucifixion*, the central panel of the predella of the *San Zeno* altarpiece (whose Madonna and Child is considered in my first chapter), and Carlo Crivelli's c.1487 rendition

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[88] Luke 13:38

of the subject, the artists have included a skull at the base of the cross to allude to Golgotha and perhaps to represent Adam's skull according to this patristic tradition. In a similar vein, one not dissimilar from the Byzantine pictorial tradition, does Tura's mountain landscape also assume a role in evoking typological links between mountains and biblical protagonists? I have already discussed how the monkey and orange tree may in a prelapsarian capacity emphasise the roles of Christ and the Virgin and the respective new Adam and Eve. Whether or not one infers that Adam's remains may lie behind the *Pietà* scene at the mountain, one certainly could consider the Old Testament implications of the natural structure, as a recollection of Sinai. The exegesis of Moses' symbolic ascent of Sinai for which Gregory of Nyssa is famous, carried through into other conceptions of clouds of unknowing, may also be intimated. In Tura's *Pietà,* the crucified figure on Jesus's right hand side from the viewer's perspective in fact seems about to disappear into the cloud above him, its wisps coming down to enfold him. We may propose that this figure is the penitent of the two thieves, he who asks "Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom"[89], as opposed to the impenitent thief crucified alongside Jesus, who taunts Jesus asking him why he cannot save himself[90]. The figure on Jesus's left remains untouched by the cloud, which is strikingly illumined white against the dark hue of the sky. This conforms to the positions in which the two thieves are often depicted, for example in Hans von Tübingen's c.1430 *Crucifixion,* which shows the penitent thief on Christ's right looked upon by an angel, and the impenitent counterpart to his left danced on by a small devil. Cranach's 1532 *Crucifixion* represents the thieves in the same positions, the 'good' thief looking to Christ whilst the other, bloated and ugly, looks away from him. In Tura's *Pietà* the cloud may show the closeness of the penitent to God and the heavenly realm as the destination at the end of the *itinerarium ad deum.* Of all destinations, however, the surest is that of Jesus Christ, who directly ascended thence. Much in the same way that the mountain in the backdrop of the Giraldi miniature in the gradual illuminated for the Carthusians representing Christ's triumphant resurrection evokes his future ascension, Tura's empty tomb and the mountain's spiralling ascendency could too foreshadow his resurrection and ascension.

Other *Quattrocento* Ferrarese works with similar rock structures ascending to ethereal cloud are once again miniatures, to which Tura's painting - albeit more intricately detailed owing to its larger scale - bears a resemblance. Giorgio D'Alemagna's c.1449 miniature of the Crucifixion for the *Missale secundum consuetudinem Romanae Curiae* now in Modena's Biblioteca Estense

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[89] Luke 23:42

[90] Luke 23:39

Universitaria has a backdrop of bright orange Byzantine-esque mountain forms ascending towards stylised cloud shapes which could be mistaken for ribbons and become more striking and golden as they rise towards higher celestial realms where the cherubim dwell, symbolically collecting Christ's blood.[91] Likewise, another Giraldi illumination of the initial *R* of *Reminiscere* for the Introit for the Second Sunday of Lent depicts the Transfiguration with somewhat ribbon-like clouds adorning the upper part of the sky where Christ and the two Old Testament figures are raised upon the mountain, the apostles cowering on the ground as in Byzantine iconography. The intangibility of the ethereal clouds both in the miniatures and in Tura's *Pietà* as the finest bright wisps, exaggerates the dual earthly and celestial natures of Christ as well as the division between his earthly place of rest and his celestial destination.[92]

4.5 *John the Evangelist on Patmos*

A painting of Tura's that I have not yet discussed in this thesis, but which is especially notable for its landscape, is his (c. 1470-75) *John the Evangelist on Patmos,* today in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid **(Fig. 15)**. According to a note in Ruhmer's work on Tura, it was probably one of the panels of a predella (175). This is more a minimalistic work than the others assessed thus far, and it can be viewed as three distinct parts: the human figure, John the Revelator; the eagle perching on him; and the landscape, consisting of sky and curious rock formations. Before exploring the landscape and its curious mineral formations, it is valuable to consider the situation of the human being set within it. The identity of the author of the Book of Revelation, John of Patmos, has long been and continues to be a matter of dispute for numerous reasons, but what is of consequence here is that Tura equates him with John the Evangelist, in accordance with the unanimous opinion of the early Church.[93] This is evidenced in the painting by the eagle perching over the man and ostensibly reading from a book which can be presumed to represent the apocalyptic text itself. The author claims to have written the Book of Revelation on the island of Patmos whence he was banished during the Christian persecutions under the emperor Domitian:

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[91] Elsewhere in the missal (Ms. Lat. 239), the same ribbon-like cloud forms are depicted on the level where God is enthroned encircled by angelic choirs of cherubim and seraphim.

[92] The landscape can also be compared to Andrea Mantegna's c.1457-60 *Crucifixion* in the Louvre, which was the central panel of the *San Zeno* altarpiece predella. Mantegna too represents rock formations with an air of ascendency, but they are more faithful to reality and without exaggeration. Likewise, the clouds in the sky are depicted with far more attention to those perceived in the sensible world than Tura's ethereal wisps or the miniatures' ribbon clouds.

[93] For an exploration of the authorship of the Book of Revelation, see chapter II 'Authorship' in Robert H. Mounce's *The Book of Revelation* (1997, pp. 8-15). Many scholars are reluctant to accept the apostolic authorship of Revelation for reasons such as the lack of the author's explicit reference to himself as an apostle, and the lack of indication that the author was acquainted with the historical Jesus.

'Ἐγὼ Ἰωάνης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συνκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ' (1:9).[94] It is common for artistic portrayals of Saint John on Patmos to feature John the evangelist's symbol, the eagle, as Tura has depicted, but what is also a usual feature, which is nevertheless lacking here, is the representation of at least a part of the vision itself. A painting from c.1450, *Vision of St John the Evangelist* in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne by an unknown German master, shows a large sphere above John with aspects of the vision enclosed within: the seven lamp stands symbolic of the Seven Churches of Asia whose guardian angels the Son of Man addresses[95]; the twenty-four elders enthroned and dressed in white around the heavenly throne[96]; the four living creatures symbolising the evangelists derived from the book of Ezekiel (as discussed in my first chapter for their inclusion in Tura's *Virgin and Child Enthroned*)[97]; and the seven-eyed, seven-horned lamb opening the first seal[98]. Numerous other renditions of John's reception of the revelation also portray similar levels of scriptural detail, for example the early *Quattrocento* illumination in the *Très Riches Heures,* which has many of these aspects and others, including trumpeting angels and tetramorphs[99] **(Fig. 16)**. Hieronymus Bosch's late fifteenth-century *Saint John on Patmos* in Berlin's Gemäldegalerie also presents John gazing up and recording what he sees in his book, but he is portrayed seeing another stage or aspect of the vision, the woman 'clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head'[100], though here holding a child rather than giving birth. In Tura's treatment of John receiving the vision, however, no elements of what he sees are represented at all. Rather, he is reclining and smiling contentedly with his eyes closed to experience the vision, and, whilst he is holding the book, he is not yet in the process of making any written record. Without any visionary features, most of the work is dominated by landscape, and indeed a rather peculiar one. The mosaic above the door to the Cave of the Apocalypse on the island of Patmos itself - believed to be the exact site where the visions were received - depicts John and his disciple Prochorus, who is commonly

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[94] 'I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.'

[95] Rev 1:20

[96] Rev 4:4

[97] Rev 4:6-7

[98] Rev 6:1

[99] A tetramorph is a figure comprising four individual elements; it unites the four evangelist symbols in this case, that is the human, the ox, the lion, and the eagle.

[100] Rev 12:1

considered his scribe. The mosaic lacks references to the vision, and instead features the ascending, stalagmitic rocks common in Byzantine art. In this sense, Tura's painting has more in common with continuities from the Byzantine phenomenon that Jacob Wamberg identifies as prominent in *Quattrocento* Ferrarese painting, in other words the depiction of rocks as bundles of stalagmites that was absorbed into Italian painting. The very rock on which John leans for support as he reclines, composed of stalagmites cut off into a surface, closely resembles the platform from which Christ shuns the devil in the aforementioned Monreale cathedral mosaic. Perhaps the arid nature of the painting, nothing surrounding John other than 'inhospitable rock' as Berenson describes it, emphasises the barrenness of the author's exile. The absence of any representations of the vision, the saint merely experiencing it privately with closed eyes, draws the viewer's attention all the more to the landscape. From the uneven, greyish ground grow reddish tinged rock forms that reach upwards in stalagmites narrowing into points. They seem therefore to be indeed indicating something above, ascent *per visibilia ad invisibilia*; the most distant, to the left of the scenery, even resembles a pointing hand. The viewer is left to contemplate what the landscape is pointing to instead of sharing in John's vision, which is in his mind alone as he lies with closed eyes, and can only be imagined by the viewer from what he/she has read of it.

In contemporary discussion, 'apocalyptic' is used to refer to texts which, albeit not lying within precise boundaries, generally purport to be 'divine disclosure, usually through a celestial intermediary to some prominent figure in the past, in which God promises to intervene in human history to bring times of trouble to an end and destroy all wickedness' (Mounce 1). The genre is therefore firstly eschatological in nature, dealing with the period of time in which God is to bring about a final reckoning, and secondly, it is dualistic. This dualism is not metaphysical but temporal and historical, God and Satan distinct as two opposing supernatural powers, and two distinct ages: 'the present one that is temporal and evil, and the one to come that is timeless and perfectly righteous' (3). It may be, then, to an extent that what the rocks are very conspicuously 'indicating' - what the viewer must heed given the absence of depicted vision - lies in this intrinsic duality of apocalyptic subject matter. The distinction is drawn between the earthly present, epitomised by the fleshy man reclining in a landscape with his eyes closed, and on the other hand the vision he is privately experiencing, mediated by an angel[101] and with its origins in the celestial. Even the direction in which the rock formations point, upwards, is a 'dissimilar similarity' of sorts, since the divine realm is believed to be outside of time and space all together, rather than literally above the

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[101] See Rev 1:1

sky.[102] A common metaphor in the philosophy of the Middle Ages drawing on the notion of 'ascent' toward heaven, like the mountain imagery discussed earlier in this chapter, is that of a ladder. It is associated most notably with the treatise by St John Climacus, the *Scala Paradisi,* or the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, which was in fact made available in *Quattrocento* Ferrara thanks to the translation by prominent humanist Traversari. In the overall apocalyptic message implied by the painting, the movement of ascent in the growing stalagmitic rocks is a movement also of convergence of the two sides of the duality which is proclaimed in the Book of Revelation. Augustine, one of the most influential Neo-Platonic philosophers, gives an exegesis in the section 'On the new heaven and the new earth' of *De civitate Dei*, a *Quattrocento* Ferrarese codex of which is now in the Biblioteca Ariostea[103]:

> …then shall the figure of this world pass away in a conflagration of universal fire, as once before the world was flooded with a deluge of universal water. And by this universal conflagration the qualities of the corruptible elements which suited our corruptible bodies shall utterly perish, and our substance shall receive such qualities as shall, by a wonderful transmutation, harmonize with our immortal bodies, so that, as the world itself is renewed to some better thing, it is fitly accommodated to men, themselves renewed in their flesh to some better thing (664).

The ultimate end of the revelation being shown to John is therefore this convergence of heaven and earth and the world to come which is glimpsed in his vision.[104] In Tura's painting, the rocks that ascend into pointing tips, whilst it may be inferred that they symbolically point to the heavenly realm described incongruously as 'above', also point physically to the sky. It transitions in colour ascending from a bright light of a golden to a very dark shade against which fine ethereal clouds similar to those in Tura's Museo Correr *Pietà* are marked. It may not be inconceivable to imagine that the transitioning of colour, merging in the centre in a greyish cobalt, mirrors also the transitioning between the two worlds, the temporal present and the 'timeless and perfectly righteous' world to come. To finally return once more to the bestiary and herbal tradition that was

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[102] In Psalm 148:4, the mysterious reference to the 'waters above the heavens' is even made.

[103] See section 2.1 of my first chapter, which discusses some codexes in the San Giorgio Olivetan monastery for which Cosmè Tura painted his *Roverella* altarpiece.

[104] The final article and climax of the Nicene Creed is: 'Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum, et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen', because it is the ultimate goal of the Christian faith.

such a great part of the previous chapter in the analysis of flora and fauna, the upwardly striving rocks may be tenuously related; Twelfth-century poet Philippe de Thaün, composed as well as his extensive bestiaries, two lapidaries, one of which was strongly allegorical and dealt exclusively with the twelve precious stones presented in the Book of Revelation as the foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem (Pastoureau 25). This is perhaps indicative of the medieval consideration given not only to animal and plant but also to mineral, which in Tura's image the viewer is left to contemplate whilst John privately witnesses his vision.

I thus hope to have effectively shifted the scholarly focus away from human protagonists by exploring the landscape surrounding both the figures in the Pietà scene and the two saints, Jerome and John of Patmos, and to have simultaneously challenged the prevalent idea that Renaissance art is characterised by harmony and verisimilitude. Stalagmitic and almost living rock formations that twist into helter-skelters or rise up in stalagmites as though pointing to the skies exaggerate reality beyond harmony and give Tura's sacred subject matter that air of 'medieval ascendency' that ostensibly draws on continuities in Byzantine rock and landscape depiction. I have also offered an analysis of parallels between Byzantine icon painting that merges different chronological events into one scene and Old and New testament typological links.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Why Ferrara?

As I noted in my introduction, the School of Ferrara has often been neglected, and even perceived negatively, by historians over the centuries, since it does not conform to the aesthetics traditionally considered to belong to the Italian 'Renaissance'. In the last century, art historians Eberhard Ruhmer and Bernard Berenson both made respective observations about the work of Tura which expressed why the impression it gives is not of calm, harmony, and verisimilitude, which are the attributes typically associated with the art of this period.[105] From Vasari to Wölfflin, what has been sought after and praised in early modern Italian art is indeed this precise kind of 'beauty' characterised by a gentle and faithful representation of reality and a 'demonstrable harmony of parts'[106]. The 'unusual' painting of *Quattrocento* Ferrara, and especially of Cosmè Tura, consists not only of strikingly 'unharmonious' figures - described as 'feverish' and 'demonic', with 'archaic grimaces'[107] - but also of landscape features exaggerated far beyond verisimilitude, and of other iconological features often derived from the natural world which have been considered ostensibly 'complex' or 'arcane'[108]. Ruhmer in fact wrote that 'the traditional symbols and attributes are given a curiously heightened meaning in Tura's pictures. […] The extraordinary mind of Cosimo Tura had its roots in tradition, but he avoided being conventional and availed himself of every hitherto unused means of giving new life and significance to the traditional interpretations of his milieu' (6). It is indeed for his departure from traditionally conceived Renaissance convention that I have sought to offer some new insights into the painting of Cosmè Tura throughout this thesis.

Challenging this traditional conception, as I also explained in my introductory chapter, is what drove this thesis to explore the work of a preeminent artist of the Ferrarese School, rather than focussing perhaps on the work of a Florentine or Venetian painter. In a similar vein, the traditional focus I have challenged in terms of my approach to the selected paintings has been the preoccupation in studies of the *Quattrocento* with 'rebirth' of classical pagan culture, a focus in

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[105] See section 1.1 of the introduction to this thesis.

[106] See section 1.1, John Summerson (1963: 8)

[107] Berenson and Ruhmer were the ones to offer these descriptions. See 1.1.

[108] Joseph Manca (2001: 58) challenges this myth. See section 1.3 of the introduction.

scholarship which has dominated to the detriment of cultural continuities from the Middle Ages. The distinct periodisation separating *Renaissance* from *Aetas Media* has perpetuated the notion - which is central to Vasari's *Lives* - of cultural and artistic golden ages, 'peaks' separated by the 'trough' of the Dark Ages[109]. Continuities of religious, philosophical, cultural, and artistic kinds having been explored in this thesis, Ferrarese painting can also be put into a wider context of early modern Italian culture that can be understood via medieval continuity. After all, aside from visual art, one may turn to the literary in order to ascertain an impression of this culture as replete with medieval continuities. Renaissance literature often draws on aspects of the Dark Ages, rather than consciously peering 'over' this defined period of alleged shadow *ad fontes* to the glory of pagan Antiquity. In regard to the continuation of the medieval epic in literature, Ferrara is a particularly noted centre: Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato,* published between 1483 and 1495, Ludovico Ariosto's 1516 continuation, *Orlando furioso,* and then Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* are fine examples of this variety of cultural continuity. Hélène Adeline Guerber (2012) notes that during the Renaissance a number of medieval epics were reworked, taking Roland, or Orlando, as the 'stock-hero'. Epics were reworked in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*, Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, Ariosto's *Orlando Fuorioso*, and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*.[110]

Indeed, for these epic works the *chansons de geste*[111] and the Arthurian cycle provided material and inspiration, and thus these medieval literary traditions continued to live on into the early modern period, perpetuated in the city of Ferrara. Boiardo, though brought up as a child in Scandiano in the modern day province of Reggio-Emilia, moved to Ferrara where he frequented intellectual circles and the Este court. Ariosto - a statue of whom looks triumphantly over the square in Ferrara named after him, Piazza Ariostea - published *Orlando furioso* in Ferrara. Likewise, Torquato Tasso, originally *bergamasco,* was court poet to the Este family in *Cinquecento* Ferrara.

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[109] As I mentioned in my introduction, Petrarch was the first to coin this expression 'Dark Ages' to distinguish classical civilisation from the subsequent centuries up to his own time.

[110] Roland—or, as he is known in Italy, Orlando—is the stock-hero of this new school of poets, several of whom undertook to relate his love adventures. Hence we have "Orlando Innamorato" by Boiardo and Berni, as well as "Morgante Maggiore" by Pulci where Roland also figures. In style and tone these works are charming, but the length of the poems and the involved adventures of their numerous characters prove very wearisome to modern readers. Next to Dante, as a poet, the Italians rank Ariosto, whose "Orlando Furioso", or Roland Insane, is a continuation of Boaiardo's "Orlando Innamorato." Drawing much of his material from the French romances of the Middle Ages, Ariosto breathes new life into the old subject and graces his tale with a most charming style. […] The next epic poem of note in Italian literature is Torquato Tasso's "Gerusalemme Liberata," composed in the second half of the sixteenth century and still immensely popular owing to its exquisite style. Besides this poem, of which Godfrey of Bouillon is the hero and which is *par excellence* the epic of the crusades, Tasso composed epics on "Rinaldo," on "Gerusalemme Conquistata," and "Sette Giornate del Mundo Creato."

[111] A *chanson de geste* (French: 'song of deeds') refers to one of the Old French epic poems surviving in manuscripts from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, primarily based on eighth and ninth-century events from the reign of Charlemagne and his successors.

Regarding these literary works, Massimo Leone explores semiotic continuities from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance in the form of the evolution of a 'language of the soul', a kind of 'spiritual language' used in order to imagine and voice the 'relation with transcendence' (2014: 85). He discusses how this applies to the theme of religious conversion within the Italian Renaissance epic poems, a theme which to him 'offers a synthesis of the models of spiritual change that prevail in a culture' (86). This 'spiritual language', which undergoes slow evolution over time, Leone chooses especially to identify in the motif of religious conversion in literature, but it can indeed be read in a semiotic exploration of other motifs, and in other media such as painting. Semiotic relationships in visual art are dynamic, not a one-way process but complex inter-relationships between individuals, images, and all the other factors at play, such as religion, culture and society (Curtin 51). Why should the 'spiritual language' whereby relations with transcendence are understood in literature not also be found in visual art? Dynamic semiotic relationships between artist, viewer, culture, society etc., when pertaining to themes in sacred painting, can too be considered a 'language of the soul' voicing and imagining transcendence *per visibilia ad invisiblia.* As Leone notes in regard to the epic works, this language consists in semiotic continuity from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance. Thus when assessing aspects of the work of Cosmè Tura, I have taken into account medieval cultural continuities which are pertinent to the aspects and therefore constitute and influence parts of this dynamic spiritual language. Having chosen to explore the artist's sacred paintings in particular, I have accordingly concentrated somewhat heavily on semiotic relationships between artist, viewer, and especially religious culture and society. This has been an approach often underpinned by patristics, given that the Church Fathers were so widely studied and translated in *Quattrocento* Ferrara by eminent members of humanist circles. As I have discussed, these included amongst many others the Camaldolese Prior General and theologian, Ambrogio Traversari - an ascetic humanist -, and the esteemed humanist scholar and educator to the Este family, Guarino da Verona.[112] With this assessment of humanist perpetuation of patristic philosophy laid as a groundwork, I have been able to explore facets of Tura's sacred works according to relevant cultural continuities integral to the spiritual language by which they may be interpreted. In this way, I have challenged the first two art historical focusses I outlined in my introductory chapter: firstly the preoccupation with art that is perceived as more 'harmonious'; and secondly the focus on the dominance of 'rebirth' of classical pagan culture. Given the richness of literature and art influenced by aspects of medieval culture and the equally rich complexity of this 'spiritual

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[112] Section 1.2 of my introduction explores in greater depth the background of theological, and especially patristic, scholarship in fifteenth-century Ferrara.

language' which can be read in them, this thesis by focussing on the fascinating work of Este court painter Cosmè Tura has illustrated that Ferrara is the ideal artistic centre for a study of Renaissance culture which challenges the prevalent preoccupations with rebirth and instead concentrates on continuity.

5.2 Why nature?

Fruitfully challenging these first two preconceptions, I also shifted the focus away from human protagonists of painting and towards non-human features. Applied perhaps more specifically to Florentine art than Ferrarese, but pertinent to it nonetheless, Amanda Lillie (2010) observes that

> there was a common misconception among Italian Renaissance art historians that because landscape painting was not a separate genre in the fifteenth century, it functioned as passive background, or as a case of Italy imitating the art of the Low Countries, or, at best, as an exercise to display the artist's skill in the perspectival representation of deep pictorial space. Artists' contracts could be cited in support of this approach since, on the occasions when they do refer to subject matter, they focus on the inclusion of figures and very rarely mention landscape. As scholars we therefore legitimise and perpetuate the notion that in the art of the Italian Renaissance the human figure always dominates. This is particularly the case with Florentine art history which still largely follows Kenneth Clark's conclusion formulated in 1949 that 'landscape had no part in the pictorial traditions of Florence'. If we take an alternative approach, treating the so-called peripheral or contextual parts of images as equal protagonists, and putting aside the anachronistic search for progressive naturalism, a richer understanding of artistic practice and visual narrative emerges (315- 316).

If 'peripheral' features such as landscape have been somewhat dismissed in studies of Tuscan Renaissance art, it most certainly has also been an art historical barrier where the Ferrarese *Quattrocento* is concerned. As I noted in my introduction, citing Simona Cohen, a great obstacle in

the approach to Renaissance painting has been a secularising kind of homocentrism, which Cohen juxtaposes to theocentrism, but which can equally be confronted with this idea of considering landscape and other natural, non-human elements as equal protagonists. In light of the distinction Panofsky draws between iconography and iconology, it seems that the former is something often determined above all by the human protagonists. However, given that iconological features, including landscape and other aspects, are grounded in underlying 'cultural premises'[113] more than in iconographical canon, it follows that treating and interpreting these as equal protagonists must surely provide a richer understanding of a painting's overall message. Throughout the analysis of Cosmè Tura's sacred painting in this thesis - to an extent a 'case study' of this method - I have illustrated how a richer understanding of artistic practice and visual narrative does indeed materialise.

The decoration and ornament of Tura's *Virgin and Child Enthroned* is perhaps the least 'natural' of the features I have explored, since it is in a sense the furthest removed from reality. Being not only an artistic depiction of nature, but an artistic depiction of ornamental representation of natural images, it is not once but twice removed from the natural world. This renders the ornamental throne more iconologically conspicuous and less 'peripheral' than strict landscape features. The overt Old Testament decorated richness demands treatment as an equal protagonist alongside the New Testament human figures, thereby giving equal weighting to the two Testaments and covenants. Treating the two with this equal weighting enhances understanding of the narrative of covenantal fulfilment, a notion foundational to Christianity and to religious philosophy continually throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.[114] The Hebrew Tablets, trumpets, and cherubim - whose derivation is less obviously from the natural world -, as well as the four living creatures of Ezekiel's vision, the gourds, vines, grapes, shell, and pearls, all function as iconological parts of the iconography of the Virgin with Christ Enthroned in Heaven. Thus they are integral to the divine narrative message, the Virgin and Christ child coming to take their seat on the images of the Old Testament just as the colours of the New Testament come to fill in the underdrawing of the Old.[115]

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[113] Layton (1991:35) on Erwin Panofsky (see section 1.3 of my introduction).

[114] This is not to dismiss that the New Testament's fulfilment of the Old still continues to be crucial to the Christian faith into the modern day.

[115] See Cyril of Alexandria's exegetical conception of *skigraphia* and Chrysostom's likening of the New Covenant's fulfilment of the Old to the *eikon*'s ('image') completion of the *skia* ('shadow') in section 2.4.1.

The floral and faunal aspects of Ferrarese painting are perhaps even less conspicuous as iconologically significant than the painted ornament of the aforementioned throne. However, when plants and animals are too treated as equal protagonists to the humans who principally constitute the iconographical subject, interesting messages are revealed within the visual narrative. This I have illustrated via an exploration of three paintings in which flora and fauna reveal something of the divine, as kinds of Pseudo-Dionysian 'dissimilar similarity'. The divine revelation they are traditionally interpreted to offer can be found in their bestiary moralisations, the bestiary and herbal tradition being another cultural continuity from the Middle Ages. According to the scriptural, hagiographical and bestiary origins as well as the closely related writings of the Church Fathers, the especially avian fauna in Tura's *Saint Jerome* - when considered as just as significant as the penitent saint himself - provides a richer understanding of the visual narrative, hagiographical in origin and centred on fervent asceticism. The monkey and orange tree in Tura's *Pietà* can likewise be interpreted equally as personages in the principal narrative of the work. They contribute layers to it when read as elements of the spiritual language used to voice relations with the divine, and especially the two human figures' mystical natures as a concrete manifestation of earthly relations with the divine. Though harder to begin to 'decipher', I have also ventured in the same chapter to offer potential readings of the fauna in Tura's *Annunciation* painted on the organ doors of Ferrara's old cathedral. Looking to the bestiary tradition as a core facet of the semiotic floral and faunal language, and judging by the ornamental planetary figures, gyrating and mocking in starkly opposing contrast to the main figures, the squirrel and and unidentified bird seem too to be respective antitheses of them.

The final aspect of nature I have explored in order to challenge the legitimised notion that the human figure dominates Renaissance art is indeed landscape. Rather than dismissing it as mere periphery, one can read them as having key roles in the visual narrative, and in sacred narratives they can indeed act in the revelation of divine messages. This is overwhelmingly apparent in the rock formations found in some of Cosmè Tura's scriptural and hagiographical paintings, as they emulate Byzantine rock structures as growing and almost living stalagmites that rise or point to the heavens in their 'medieval ascendency'[116]. The *Saint Jerome* painting is an interesting case in point; given that the animals surrounding him interact with his fervently penitential state, the upwards striving of the arid scenery seems to mirror the penitent's striving for God and provide a richer understanding of this narrative. The landscape of *John the Evangelist on Patmos* is undoubtedly the

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[116] Roberto Longhi, *Officina Ferrarese* (see section 4.2 for the full quotation.)

most strikingly exaggerated of all, rock formations reaching from barren land as hands stretching their index finger to the firmament whence comes the apocalyptic revelation that the human protagonist experiences privately behind closed eyes. I have explored how not only can landscape features can behave within a scene as physical structures, but also how they evoke other scenes entirely, overlapping times and places within one work. This can be illustrated by the same Museo Correr *Pietà,* where landscapes and chronological sequences cross over one another, and Mount Calvary seems to evoke other mountains from other scriptural landscapes.

Thus the dynamic semiotic relationships involved in visual art can indeed be best read as a language that is understood to gradually evolve alongside cultural continuities. For early Renaissance painting, as in literature, this language evolves from the Middle Ages and the perpetuation of cultural phenomena. In sacred narratives, as Cosmè Tura's work aptly illustrates, images of the natural world are an integral part of that language, a spiritual language that leads via visible signs, 'dissimilar similarities', to the invisible hidden divine.
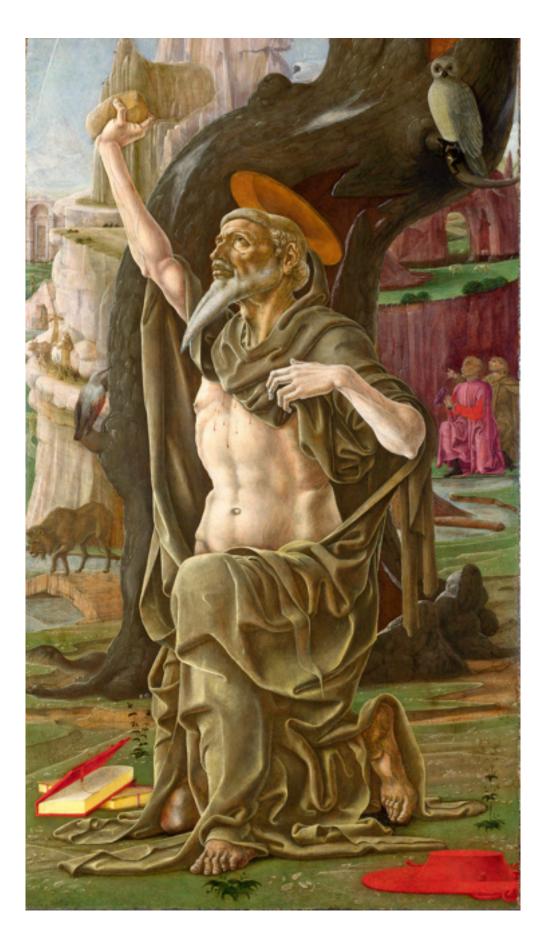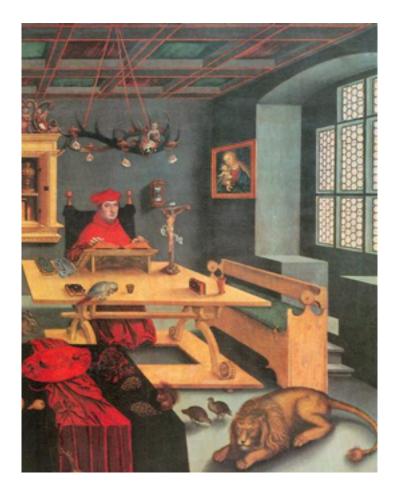
Illustrations

Fig. 1

Fig. 2 (above)   **Fig. 3** (below)

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6 (above)   **Fig. 7 (below)**

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Fig. 10 (above)   **Fig. 11 (below)**

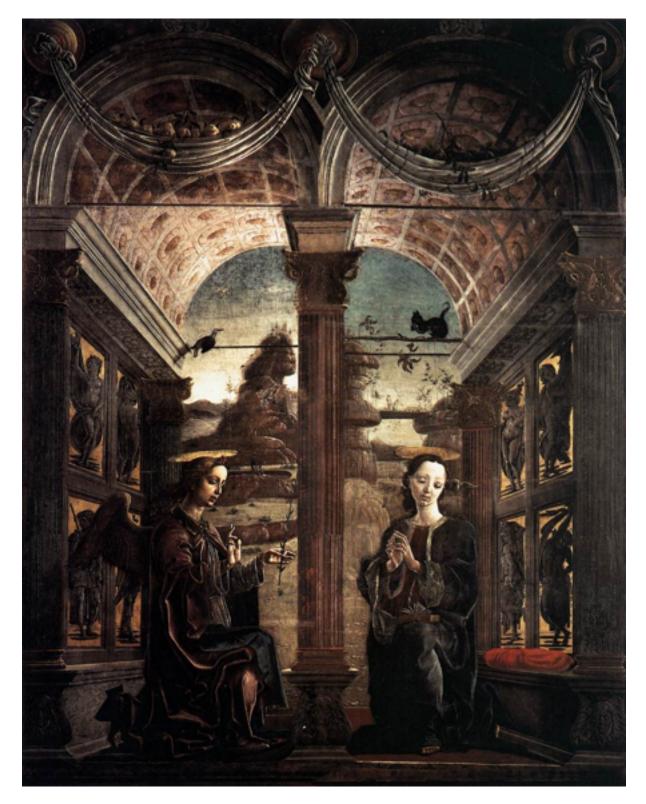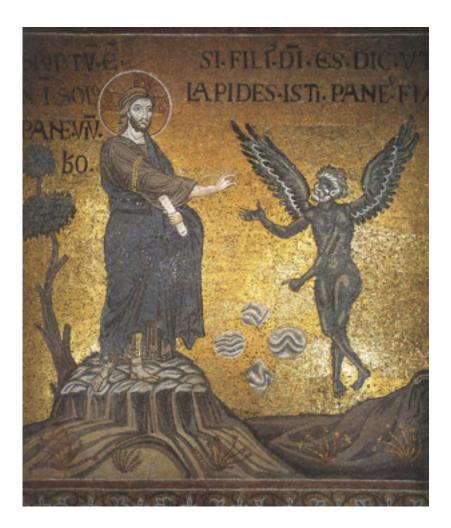**Fig. 12 (above)**   **Fig. 13 (below)**
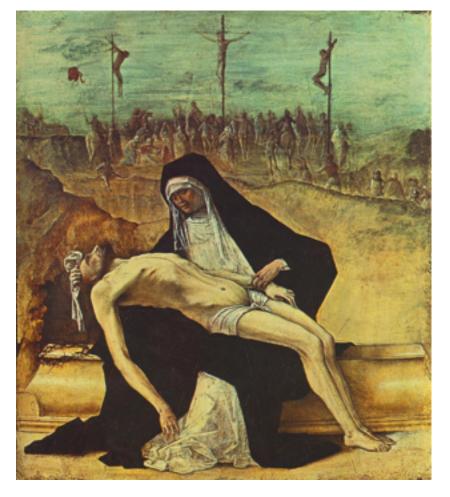
Fig. 14 (above)   **Fig. 15 (below)**

Fig. 16

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Provoost, Jan (c. 1525) *The Last Judgement,* Detroit Museum of Art, Detroit, oil on oak panel, 57.8 x 60.6 cm

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Unidentified Ferrarese artist (probably 1460s) *Stigmatisation of St. Francis,* Museo Civico, Pesaro, tempera on wood, 35 x 58 cm

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