

Formations of Identity

Formations of Identity:

Society, Politics and Landscape

Edited by

Floyd Martin and Eileen Yanoviak

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INTRODUCTION

As human beings are inherently reliant upon the land for survival, the physical landscape has been appropriated by artists throughout temporal and spatial history to represent (or present) political, social, and national identities. Artists have long imbued the landscape with personal and public ideologies. Beyond the simple representation of scenic beauty, artists adopt the landscape as a vehicle to comment upon, or as an effective instrument of, politics in any given period. From a Medieval fear of wilderness to the heroic landscapes of the French naturalists, from the topographical accuracy of the Dutch to the spiritual landscapes of the Chinese, landscapes have supplied a rich ideology and iconography that defines and redefines people and place.

This collection of essays on landscapes is an outgrowth of two conference sessions entitled *Landscape, Society, and Politics* held during the Southeastern College Art Conference (SECAC) annual meetings in 2012 and 2013. One of us (Martin) has had a long interest in landscape painting, particularly that of Britain in the 1750-1850 period, and has from time to time taught a special topics course on landscape painting. One of us (Yanoviak) was drawn to landscape through coursework as a Master's student, augmented by a personal affinity with the land and a growing interest in American environmental history through doctoral study. Both of us find the connections between landscape and poetry, gardening, and photography of interest. We also find the connections between landscape and politics compelling, as the title of this volume suggests. We think of the term "politics" broadly, ranging from a general idea of ownership and authority, to the more specific circumstances of power found in the activities of groups such as political parties in modern governments.

In issuing a call for papers for a session on landscape in 2012, we were pleasantly surprised at the number of responses we received. We intentionally included established and younger scholars, projects from very different historical or cultural eras or periods, and examinations of landscape that kept the definition of the term broad. We were grateful that the meeting organizers allowed us a double session in the first year, so that eight papers were presented. Because of the level of interest that year, we proposed a continuation of the topic for a second year and were able to offer a session of four more papers. Most of the papers in this volume are

expanded versions of presentations made at those meetings; a couple of the papers are ones that came to our attention through other means. We are, of course, grateful to all the authors for their efforts, as well as Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their interest and encouragement.

In many ways, this volume represents the diversity of thought and experience found in the world of art and art history in the United States. The older scholarly tradition was guided by classics such as Kenneth Clark's *Landscape into Art* (1976) and Malcolm Andrews' *Landscape and Western Art* (1999).¹ In the 1980s, scholars such as John Barrell and Ann Bermingham offered a new perspective on landscape, focusing on social and political aspects.² The writings of W. J. T. Mitchell, reflecting his background in both art history and literary studies, helped expand thinking about landscapes, whether images in works of art or actual spaces, in terms of nationalism, social problems, or ideology.³ In crafting first our conference panels and then this volume, we encouraged scholarship that in some way made use of Mitchell's ideas.

The diverse contributors to this volume include a practicing artist as well as art historians, younger professionals, and more established teachers and scholars. A quick look at the illustrations will show maps, prints, paintings, photographs, and environmental sculpture, and will show material ranging from that which was created centuries ago to contemporary works. Some of the essays center on one work, or on one artist, while others emphasize a place, in some cases a measurable location, and in others, an idea of a place. Some of the locations discussed in these essays are real, though perhaps ruined or altered, and in other cases, they are locations understood by conventions and tradition.

We selected essays that address the breadth of approaches to landscape across time and geographies. Referencing Mitchell's oft-quoted introduction in *Landscape and Power*, authors were encouraged to consider landscape as an "instrument of cultural power" and a "medium of cultural expression."⁴ Like a social hieroglyph, these landscapes can be read as a medium for expressing value and meaning.⁵ However, not merely a reflection of the times, the artists and images are actors within the political landscape itself in any given period and place.

The essays are generally arranged chronologically. It is appropriate that James R. Jewitt's essay is the first because it so closely aligns with the imperative presented by Mitchell to identify what a landscape *does* rather than what it *means*. Jewitt reads the Venetian landscape of the sixteenth century not merely as ideology, but as a tool of political identity. The 2007 panel of interdisciplinary scholars in the thought-provoking *Landscape Theory* nearly dismissed landscape as ideology because ideology can be

reductive and loses site of the physical landscape.⁶ However, Jewitt's essay proves otherwise, as ideology is intimately intertwined with the real, physical conditions of the land, appropriated as political advantage.

Jewitt's essay avoids the pitfalls of "national landscape" ideology that characterizes much of the scholarship of the 1990s that reduces national dialogue to a single univocal vision.⁷ As Denis Cosgrove states, "Landscape is an ideological concept that signifies the imagined relationship with nature."⁸ This understanding of ideology is reinforced by Allan Wallach, who claims that landscape forces the viewer to identify symbolically with dominant forms of political power.⁹ Jewitt's essay also revisits Jay Appleton's theory of prospect and refuge that emphasizes safety and opportunity as the keys to the aesthetic appreciation of the landscape.¹⁰

While prospect may have driven the Venetian view of the landscape, myth and memory were powerful motivations for the depiction of a ruined sixteenth-century Dutch pilgrimage site in Elissa Auerbach's essay. The mythic dimensions of landscape have long been explored by such authors as Geoffrey Alan and Susan Jellicoe, J. B. Jackson, and Simon Schama, who stated:

"Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock...once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery."¹¹

But the mythic takes on political tones in Auerbach's essay, as she explains that Catholics used pictorial means to symbolically reclaim sacred sites.

If religion mythologized the human relationship to land for the 16th century Christian, no human action has shaped the land more intimately and significantly than agriculture. Arguably the national history of the United States is the most profoundly intertwined with agriculture. Essays by Sandy McCain and Allison Slaby address important moments in the history of land use in the United States. McCain focuses on the tenuous divide between the North and South during the Antebellum era through the plantation portraits of Charles Fraser. She argues that Fraser's plantation portraits, belonging to both southern and northern patrons and hung together in purported harmony, were viewed by the gallery-going genteel public as a means to rectify social issues.

Allison Slaby's essay on Grant Wood's agrarian landscapes illustrates a twentieth-century culmination of the centuries-long romanticized

relationship of man (deliberately gendered) to cultivated earth. She illustrates how Wood's agrarian images converted economic depression, political strife, and the farmer's anxiety into a stylized mythology harkening back to the artist's memories. Built upon the yeoman ideal of the Jeffersonian era – the ideal farmstead, from small subsistence farm to commercial plantation – has occupied the realm of the mythological no less than a sacred pilgrimage site.

While Wood's idealized landscapes defiantly ignore the political and environmental strife of the 1930s, ecocentric thinking of the late twentieth century, from environmentalism to environmental history, established the fact that human history is inseparable from natural history.¹² This collection of essays would be remiss to ignore the impact of environmental thinking. Literary scholar Lawrence Buell describes an environmentally-oriented text as having specific qualities. First, the non-human environment is not merely a framing device, but positioned as a presence to suggest human history is implicated in natural history. Second, these texts emphasize that human interest is not the only interest. Third, human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation. And finally, the environment is presented as a process, rather than a given.¹³

Debra Murphy's essay establishes contemporary Florida-based realist painter Jim Draper as the legacy of those great environmental writers that emerged in the 1940s, such as Aldo Leopold, and flourished in the 1960s and 1970s with writers such as Rachel Carson. Draper, like Leopold, uses the beauty of nature to help people realize the destructive forces of technology, industry, and humankind. Anti-utilitarian, Leopold's book proposes a land ethic that humans are part of a nature community that is not distinct from nature. He demonstrated the interdependency of ecosystems. Through elaborate and loving descriptions of nature, both Leopold and Draper question the concept of development and progress through nature's destruction.

The ritual of looking and observing is of interest to Draper, who employs series of images to re-create a visual pilgrimage. Murphy's discussion of the installation of twenty-nine works called the *Feast of Flowers* juxtaposes the artist's work with the anniversary of the arrival of the Spanish explorer Ponce de León to Florida. The state's early history as a place of exotic and pristine beauty is contrasted with the waste and destruction of the second half of the twentieth century.

Waste and destruction through war is the focus of artist Susanne Slavick's essay. She demonstrates how works inspired by war do more than document terrible events: they become screens for considering one's

own sense of reality. Placing beauty and horror together triggers reflections of what once was, and what might remain. In her own work, she finds parallels in the writings of Rainer Maria Rilke, particularly in considering differences between gazes: those motivated by desire, and those used to maintain distance. The images she presents, her own and others', are simultaneously repellent and desirable. Slavick discusses examples related to her book and curatorial project *OUT OF RUBBLE*, where the focus is not one particular arena of war, but a range of conflicts from World War II to the present. In her analyses of these very diverse works (in terms of techniques as well as subjects), she shows how an artist's understanding of aesthetic issues can draw the eye to certain landscapes and details of landscapes, both memorializing a situation and encouraging the use of memory to project a future. Memory is a powerful part of most landscape imagery of a specific location because, by virtue of its representation, the imagery is created through memory.

Alena Sauzade's "Brian Tolleson's *Irish Hunger Memorial*" straddles representation, as memorial, and presentation, as phenomenological object that must be experienced physically.¹⁴ As panelists in *Landscape Theory* point out, there is the relatable, but slightly different issue of the representable in landscape and the unrepresentable experience of landscape.¹⁵ Sauzade's essay clearly illustrates how Tolleson's memorial connects these two objectives.

Her argument is akin to the aims of Schama's goals in *Memory and Landscape*, where he explains that landscape is "an excavation, beginning with the familiar, digging down through layers of memories and representations toward the primary bedrock, laid down centuries or even millennia ago, and then working up again toward the light of contemporary recognition."¹⁶ For Schama, the landscape can act as a "kind of visual prompt to the attentive that the truth of the image was to be thought of as poetic rather than literal; that whole world of associations and sentiments enclosed and gave meaning to the scene."¹⁷ At the same time, there is a suspicion that the displaced, almost simulacral, landscape of Tolleson has a nagging sense of falsity when so far removed from its original context. How is meaning constructed through memory if the memory is contained in the land and the memories are reconstructed over more than a century? Sauzade is careful to reserve that kind of outright judgment, a testament to the complexity of the physical land as a bearer of memory. That complexity is layered, as she points out, by the political conditions under which the memorial was erected.

That pervasive sense that landscape is constructed by human and natural action and political motivation is powerfully illustrated through

Jessica Stephenson's essay on portrayals of Botswana. Her essay is built upon a dichotomy between the landscape imagery propagated by Botswana tourism and the one portrayed by the San people of Botswana. J. B. Jackson's seminal text *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* offers insight into this comparison, richly illustrated by Stephenson. Jackson distinguishes between the political and the vernacular landscape. He says, "By *political* I mean those spaces and structures designed to impose or preserve unity and order on the land, or in keeping with a long-range, large-scale plan."¹⁸ On the other hand, the vernacular landscape is where people are "organizing and using spaces in their traditional way and living in communities governed by custom, held together by personal relationships."¹⁹ While Jackson was referring specifically to the physical landscape, Stephenson's essay shows the poignancy of his theories in the depiction of land. Stephenson expresses clearly how the concept of ownership can be integrated into portrayals of landscape. She emphasizes that a single image can include assumptions of dominance of one group over another, and she further shows how an oppressed people can construct visual narratives through a group style to suggest an alternate narrative of ownership.

Juxtaposing in this volume considerations of the grasslands of Botswana, the sea around Venice, a ruined chapel in the Netherlands, antebellum Southern properties, and rolling farmlands of Iowa, among others, underscores the many meanings that the term landscape can have. In the theories of art that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, landscape was considered a lesser genre when compared to works showing historical or religious events. Perceptions of the role of landscape began to change in the later eighteenth century. For example, in 1790, Sir Joshua Reynolds suggested to the members and students of the Royal Academy that while each young artist should follow his "own particular pursuit" in terms of genre, he should also strive for the kind of grand and sublime content traditionally associated with historical subjects.²⁰ Subsequent artists such as J. M. W. Turner followed this advice, changing attitudes towards the integrity and seriousness of the genre.²¹ Two centuries later, not only is landscape among the most beloved genres of art (especially if one considers popular taste), the term "landscape" covers many types of scenes and situations, and can be discussed with some very different methodologies. Almost every scholarly volume on landscapes, from art history to environmental history to landscape design, presents the fluctuating and nebulous use of the term "landscape" according to period, discipline, and perspective.

In developing this project, we started with one important methodological contribution to the scholarship of landscape and art—Mitchell’s call for a reevaluation of landscape as cultural practice. Each essay in this volume can be understood through juxtaposing the idea of landscape to a related idea: ideology, religion, myth, environmental consciousness, trauma, war, and memory. By virtue of these juxtapositions, each essay explores how humankind owns the land—physically and ideologically. Landscape is co-opted as a means to justify imperialism—showing social or political bonds that are formed within an adopted landscape; emphasizing established ownership; or revealing the “other” within a particular landscape. In addition to identifying personal, social, and political agendas, essays may reflect on the idea of ownership of nature itself. We and the contributors to this volume echo the sentiments of the eighteenth-century poet James Thomson. He found that no subject more than landscape was “...ready to awake the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment...”²²

Floyd Martin and Eileen Yanoviak would like to thank the Hite Art Institute of the University of Louisville for their support of this project.

Notes

¹ Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) and Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

² John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: the Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: the English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

³ W. T. J. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁴ Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 14.

⁵ Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 14.

⁶ James Elkins and Rachel DeLue, eds., *Landscape Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 89.

⁷ Angela Miller, “Everywhere and Nowhere: The Making of a National Landscape,” *American Literary History* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1992), 207-229.

⁸ Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

⁹ Alan Wallach, “Between Subject and Object,” in *Landscape Theory*, eds. James Elkins and Rachel DeLue (New York: Routledge, 2007), 315-320.

¹⁰ Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley), 63-67.

¹¹ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 61. See also J. B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) and Geoffrey Alan and Susan Jellicoe, *The Landscape of Man*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

¹² Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹³ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 8.

¹⁴ Elkins and DeLue, *Landscape Theory*, 316.

¹⁵ Elkins and DeLue, *Landscape Theory*, 91.

¹⁶ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 16-7.

¹⁷ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 11.

¹⁸ Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 150.

¹⁹ Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 150.

²⁰ Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), 269, 276.

²¹ See Andrew Wilton, *J. M. W. Turner, His Art and Life* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 28-29.

²² James Thomson, Preface to 2nd ed. of *Winter. A Poem* (1726). See Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, 68.

LIBERTY ON THE LAGOON: VENETIAN IMAGES OF THE RED SEA, 1480-1530

JAMES R. JEWITT

The first three decades of the sixteenth century were arguably the most violent in the history of the Venetian republic. During the War of the League of Cambrai (1508-17), then the War of the League of Cognac (1526-29), Venice was embroiled in battle with the papal states, France, the Holy Roman Empire, Ferrara, Mantua, and, at one time, nearly every major European power.¹ Seeking to halt Venice's rapid annexation of mainland territory and imperialist ambitions in northern Italy, the anti-Venetian League's armies set about to divest the republic of its satellite cities in Lombardy, Friuli, and the Veneto. By 1513, Venice's defeat appeared imminent as hostile troops pillaged neighboring terraferma towns. Having climbed the bell tower in Piazza San Marco, the Venetian diarist Marino Sanudo reported watching in horror in 1513 as Swiss and Spanish mercenaries sacked the village of Mestre just across the lagoon. From its heights, he observed smoke from regiments burning coastal villages as far away as Croatia across the Adriatic Sea.² Cannons were fired upon Venice from the lagoon's far edge and spilled into its waters. Despite this proximity, however, Venice was never invaded. The treacherous shoals of the lagoon provided a natural line of defense that was nearly impenetrable to foreigners unfamiliar with its perils.

Significantly, contemporary images of the conflict point to several interconnected ideologies of the landscape relevant to Venetian artists and patrons that merit further consideration. These include the unique protection afforded to Venice by its natural environment, the havoc that warfare wrought upon the Veneto, and the overtly political ends the representation of the landscape entailed. It was not only Venetians but also artists working for the anti-Venetian League who reaffirmed this distinctive identity for Venice and its lagoon as a powerful natural barrier.

Near the midway point in the Cambrai War, for example, the court artist to the Holy Roman Emperor, Albrecht Altdorfer, and his workshop

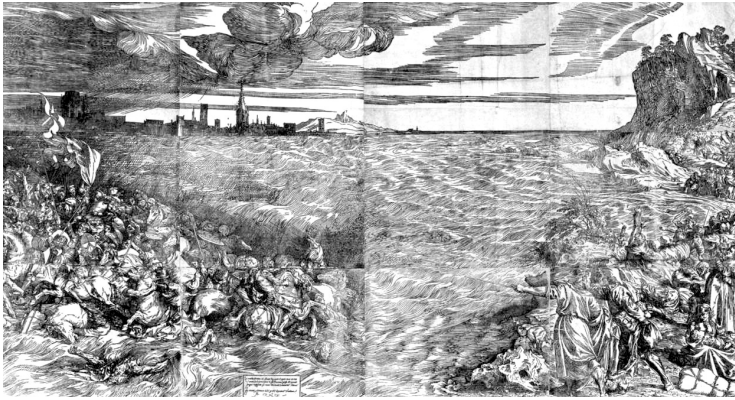


Fig. 1. Titian, *Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea*, c.1512-15, 12-block woodcut, 122.5 x 221.5 cm.

made a series of watercolor miniatures illustrating *The Triumphal Procession of Maximilian I*. The manuscript gave Altdorfer the chance to represent actual battles. In luminous strokes, he painted continuous pages of soldiers who carry banners depicting conquered cities. One banner is devoted to Maximilian's campaign in the Veneto and bears the heading, "*Der große Venedigischkrieg*" (The Great Venetian War).³ The miniature presents a broad vista of Venice and its lagoon on the left, with the mountainous terraferma on the right (p. 1.1). The mainland is swarming with invading cavalry and infantry bearing the imperial standard and rushing down from the Dolomites; fortresses lie in ruins or burst in wispy streaks of smoke and flames. Flushed from the mainland is the lion of St. Mark—attribute of Venice's patron saint—forced to retreat across the lagoon toward the safety of Venice.

Altdorfer's watercolor is notable for its imaginative landscape. His panoramic *veduta* of the city is a delightful blend of craggy mountains, churning marshes, and the dense architecture of urban Venice buoyed up by the lagoon. Yet it also offers a valuable vision of the Cambrai crisis from an anti-Venetian perspective. The lion's escape from the terraferma to the safety of the island-city epitomizes the insulation from foreign threats that the sea provided. The lagoon stood as a safeguard ensuring maritime Venice's liberty, apparent not only to Venetians but also their enemies.

During the Cambrai crisis, episodes of salvation through divinely ordained water miracles assumed special significance for the Venetian republic. Titian's panoramic woodcut of *The Submersion of Pharaoh's*

Army in The Red Sea (c.1512), for example, served as an allegory of wartime anxiety in early sixteenth-century Venice (fig.1).⁴ This monumental twelve-block print is one of the most striking images produced in Venice during the war years. Conceived around 1513, when anti-Venetian forces encircled the banks of the lagoon, its imagery celebrating the Israelites' deliverance through miraculous control over the waters reverberated for Venetian audiences. The story occurs in the Book of Exodus, when, at the Lord's bidding, Moses commands the waters to wash away the Egyptians:

So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.⁵

The enormous scale of Titian's woodcut indicates the civic stature that such a subject commanded. It contains an inscription describing the scene as the righteous salvation from oppression of a predestined people loved by God, as the heretic militants pursuing His chosen people are drowned.⁶ It is reasonable to hypothesize that these words would have been read in terms of the several European kings who were leading armies against Venice.

The episode from Exodus of the Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea symbolized the republic's miraculous deliverance during periods of political and social unrest. Insulated by its treacherous lagoon, the city was ultimately spared from foreign invasion. While much emphasis has been placed upon Titian's grandiose seascape, other equally dynamic images produced along this theme have received little attention thus far. The collection and display of numerous Red Sea images produced between 1480-1530 recast the harnessing of water resources, whether by divine or human intervention, in decidedly political terms. These images and practices aligned with the Venetian State's environmental policies emphasizing manipulation of the lagoon and its hydrology. Yet scholars to date have overlooked a number of suggestive interventions wrought upon the environment of the Veneto, which would have conditioned the reception of Red Sea imagery. This story quintessentially epitomized Venetian expertise in water management. Furthermore, by commissioning paintings of this subject for the Palazzo Ducale and various civic guilds – a practice that private collectors quickly emulated – Venetians reasserted

the republic's mythical control over the environment that saved the city from being sacked.

In this way, Red Sea images installed in private and public spaces around the city helped reframe the local ambience as a highly symbolic commodity of political power. The introduction of this subject matter in Venetian art, so rooted in land management traditions, accords with the process with what W. J. T. Mitchell has identified as “the way landscape *circulates* as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity.”⁷ Landscape painting served a key role in civic mythmaking, in which Venetian liberty was predicated upon the city's relationship with its lagoon. This extends the hypotheses of environmental historians that landscape painting was one activity resulting from the new consciousness of the physical environment as being gravely important to Venice's well-being.

Threats to their environment led Venetians to reassert their control over the symbiotic relationship that the city maintained with its lagoon. Artists helped to promote this connectivity with the landscape in private and public spheres. Red Sea imagery stood as an unusual landscape type introduced in this era in Venice. As Beverly Louise Brown notes, Red Sea subjects, “had always had a powerful resonance for the Venetians, who themselves looked to the waters of the lagoon for protection.”⁸ However, Red Sea subjects warrant further study, their themes expressive not only of martial circumstances, but also the nascent environmental bureaucracy that the Venetian State exploited to reinforce its political and religious identity. The proliferation of Red Sea iconography parallels dynamic attempts to harness Venice's water-systems in order to thwart hostile military threats. For Venetians who regularly believed their empire to be on the brink of ruin, this subject matter vividly reaffirmed the lagoon and its hydrology as supernatural instruments of salvation.

It is only recently that scholars have begun to examine the political implications of Venetian environmental history. The cogent studies of Karl Appuhn on forestry management in the Veneto from the trecento to settecento, and of Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan on the hydrological history of the republic have demonstrated the ideologically charged approaches Venetians took to reshaping their landscape and seascape.⁹ Foreign forces and Venetians themselves wrought drastic changes upon the landscape, foregrounding it as a political commodity—as territory. Civic institutions and private collectors in Renaissance Venice visually appropriated this process (to borrow a phrase from Mitchell) by exploiting Red Sea landscape subjects in the formation of their republican identities during the Italian Wars and their aftermath.



Fig. 2. Jacopo de' Barbari, Bird's-eye-view map of Venice, woodcut on six blocks, 132.7 x 281 cm. London, The British Museum.

Rather than a history of the Italian Wars' impact on art in general, a topic that Krystina Stermole has recently explored in-depth, it remains necessary to further examine the representation of Venice and the Veneto landscape as a fiercely contested commodity of *venezianità*.¹⁰ Deborah Howard, Paul Kaplan, and Phillip Cottrell have all rightly emphasized how art during this wartime period was concerned with invoking protection from man-made and natural cataclysms.¹¹ Their insightful studies have shed light on the tumultuous social and political context as a means of exploring artistic production.

Flooding is an issue central to understanding the Venetian climate and the reception of Red Sea images. Manipulation of hydrological resources had been a preoccupation of Venetians since the fourteenth century, expertise greatly refined over the next two hundred years and even used in battle. As glimpsed in Jacopo de' Barbari's great bird's-eye-view map of about 1500, urban Venice comprises a string of one hundred fifteen islands connected by a carefully managed network of waterways, bridges, ferry-crossings, and jetties (fig.2). The need to control the lagoon, its estuary and its tributaries, was of great social concern. Seasonal flooding was accepted as an unavoidable danger. The *acqua alta* and occasional floodwaters, however, brought with it the risk of deadly contagion. As Sanudo complained during a flood in November 1517, high water ruined many wells and merchandise warehouses, displaced the city's poor, and gave rise to numerous diseases.¹²

It was protection from this constant risk of flooding that lay behind the cult of St. Christopher in Venice. According to legend, Christopher miraculously ferried the Christ child on his shoulders across a river,

leading to the saint's association with safe passage over bodies of water. This held obvious significance for Venetians, who navigated *traghetti*, canals, and bridges to move about their archipelago. Images venerating the saint appeared throughout the city. The subject often assumed civic connotations, such as Bartolomeo Bon's sculpture over the portal of the Church of the Madonna dell' Orto, or Pordenone's fresco in San Rocco, as well as in private collections such as Gabriele Vendramin's palace. The subject also served to frame the power of the Doge in judiciously guiding the body politic and safeguarding citizens. In 1523, Doge Andrea Gritti commissioned from Titian a fresco of St. Christopher with Venice in the background for the ducal apartments in the Doge's Palace, which is still *in situ*.¹³

As early as 1460, lengthy reports appeared on the ecology of the lagoon and risk factors such as flooding. New legal bodies were founded for lagoon maintenance, which indicate Venetians' mounting desire to more actively shape their landscape. In 1501, the *savii alle acque*, or water managers, were created to coordinate lagoon management efforts and to curtail terrestrialization of the lagoon—the gradual filling of organic material, usually sediment. Four years later, a larger body, the *collegio alle acque*, was formed to hear and rule on proposals to modify its waters.¹⁴

Rampant deforestation on the mainland led to erosion and, as a result, large quantities of silt were dumped into the lagoon from waterways further upstream. The gradual sedimentation of the lagoon compromised daily life for Venetians, since it shrunk urban canals and impeded boat traffic. In 1505, an engineer named Piero Sambo measured the alarming recession of water levels that had occurred in the past several decades since his father was in charge of lagoon projects. In some places, the salt water had receded from fourteen feet to three or four; at other points, shallow depths of four or five feet were now dry *campi* and pasture land.¹⁵ Regular dredging of the lagoon was necessary to prevent the drying up of citywide canals, which grew fetid and noxious when their channels became over-silted. This instability of the lagoon is at odds with its robust representation in sixteenth-century Red Sea imagery; this is true especially in Titian's print. That artists selected the moment of submersion certainly elided the reality that the lagoon was endangered and weakened.

The Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea remained a rare subject matter before the end of the fifteenth century, though references to several autonomous paintings of this theme are recorded. The 1492 Medici inventory lists a panel of Moses parting the Red Sea, apparently painted in the "French manner," though little else is known about this untraced painting.¹⁶

Capitolo. XIII.



Fig. 3. Anonymous artist, *Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea*, 1490, woodcut, Niccolò Malermi, *Biblia Italica*, Venice, p.20r.



Fig. 4. Michael Wolgemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurff, *Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea*, 1493, hand-colored woodcut from Hartmann Schedel, *Nuremberg Chronicle*, Nuremberg.

Slightly more has been discovered about a lost panel of the *Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea* attributed to Jan van Eyck. In 1506, Isabella d'Este tried unsuccessfully to obtain it at the post-mortem auction of the Venetian collector Michele Vianello. After being outbid, she was forced to purchase it directly from the Doge's brother, Andrea Loredan, for the lofty sum of 115 ducats, and spent just as much on a crate to ship it from Venice to Mantua. It clearly captivated Isabella, who admitted it to be the work "which we had desired more than any other object he owned"

and had authorized her agents to pay “whatever additional amount is required” to possess it.¹⁷ Ludovico Mazzolino’s *Crossing of the Red Sea* (1521; National Gallery of Ireland) was made at the Estense court of Isabella’s brother in Ferrara and possibly even reflects van Eyck’s picture.¹⁸

In Venice, Red Sea imagery deriving from Exodus was known through historiated bibles such as Niccolò Malermi’s *Biblia Italica* or woodcuts for the widely circulating *Nuremberg Chronicle* (figs. 3 and 4). These somewhat schematic compositions were essential models which subsequent artists working in Venice adapted. Some autonomous paintings along this theme were known prior to these book illustrations and Red Sea subjects first appeared in civic institutions. In 1466, the Scuola Grande di San Marco commissioned Gentile Bellini for two pictures of a “submersion” of the pharaoh and his army and a painting of “the people of Moses in the desert.” Giovanni Bellini was likewise awarded a commission from the same Scuola for a *Noah’s Ark* and the *Great Flood of Sin* in 1470.¹⁹ Unfortunately, a fire destroyed these works in 1485 and no record of their appearance remains.

The aforementioned moralizing gloss added to Titian’s print helps to clarify the religious and political associations of the Bellinis’ lost pictures. It seems that the episode must have paralleled Venetian civic myths at several registers. According to one medieval legend, Venice was itself founded by refugees, who like the Israelites, fled religious persecution in Rome to establish the first republic of the new Christian era in the Veneto. Yet Venice was not just an *altera Roma*, but rather a new Jerusalem, a city beloved by God and therefore preserved from barbarian armies that had driven them to the marshy waters of the lagoon. This rhetoric was often reasserted during the wars. When French troops prepared to raid Venice in 1509, the diarist Girolamo Priuli took comfort in the lagoon’s mythical power as an impregnable barrier, comparing it to “the holy walls of the fatherland.”²⁰ The wider narrative of the Book of Exodus would also have been relevant during the war years. It must be remembered that the context of the biblical exodus is militaristic, when, “The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle.”²¹ This would have conditioned the reception of Red Sea imagery, as well as the fact that flooding was employed as a battle tactic in nearby Treviso and Padua.

It was Venetian commanders who exploited controlled floods as strategic military maneuvers on the mainland. In his *History of Venice*, Pietro Bembo recounted how the *provveditore* of Treviso, Gian Paolo Gradenigo, redirected the course of the Sile River in 1509 to thwart German troops advancing toward the town from the west:

The river Sile flows through the town, and to hold back its water in order to have it pour out over the enemy as they advanced and flood the entire area around the town, Gradenigo built very solid brick channels with many stone mouths, designed to have any amount of water gush forth in short order, and strong vaulted outlets which led under the walls and through the rampart...finer and more attractive structures are scarcely to be found elsewhere, nor ones better suited to the fortification and security of a town.²²

Bembo tells us that the Venetian forces had concocted a similar stratagem to divert the Brenta River as a means to insulate nearby Padua from siege. In this case, they flooded the countryside for half a mile in all directions. Surely these real-life parallels led viewers to equate Red Sea pictures with contemporary events.

It was not only professional soldiers and engineers who harnessed the power of the water. When Emperor Maximilian was plowing through Monselice, Este, and Montagnana en route to Padua, the doorstep to Venice, the local peasantry temporarily impeded advancing troops, again by forced flooding. On the night of August 27, 1509, they re-routed the waters of the Bacchiglione River, making several of the bridges in Tencarola and Brentella impassable. This was accomplished by constructing makeshift dikes from boats filled with earth and deploying them throughout the riverbed.²³ The Venetian Senate was moved by these displays of loyalty that the terraferma peasants showed. In gratitude, they dispatched vessels to facilitate the lagoon crossing from Mestre to Venice for incoming refugees displaced by war. This was a highly symbolic act. Once again, the natural water-barrier of the lagoon was only navigable by local experts—and breachable by those faithful to the Venetians' cause.

Unified support across social classes was instrumental in the republic's success, and was commemorated in a prominent painting which was originally installed in the Doge's Palace. Near the end of the Cambrai war, Andrea Previtali was commissioned for a canvas of the *Submersion of Pharaoh in the Red Sea* (fig.5). It exploits the basic composition of the woodcut from Malermi's bible, though it underlines the supernatural landscape elements that safeguarded the Israelites, who in the painting resemble contemporary Venetians. The rushing seawater turns blood red from the drowning soldiers, who wear modern Renaissance armor. Previtali presents an array of citizens dressed in the latest fashions, making the connection between the plight of the Israelites and Venetians clear. Well-dressed nobles and soldiers are interspersed with rustic peasants, alluding to the refugees flocking to Venice who remained faithful to the city and its government. As with Titian's woodcut, the moment

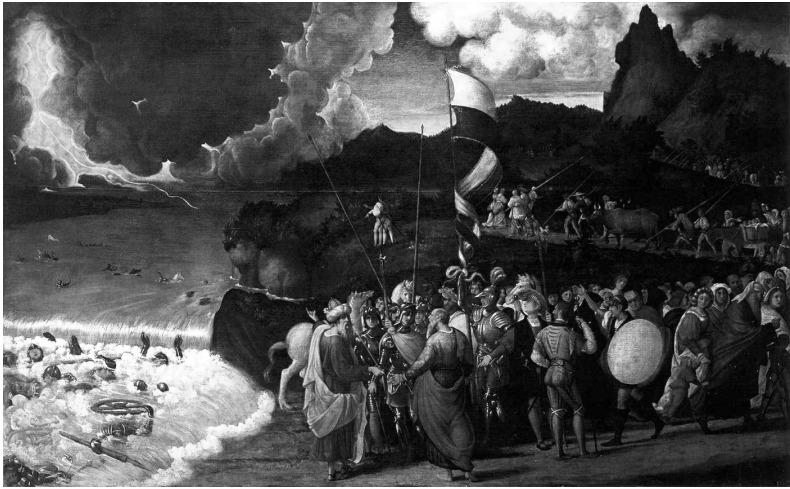


Fig. 5. Andrea Previtali, *Submersion of Pharaoh in the Red Sea*, c.1515-20, oil on canvas, 132 x 213 cm. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia.

from the episode that Previtali selected is significant. Rather than Moses' parting of the water, the artist shows the vindictive drowning of the Egyptians. On shore, the Venetians' gesture toward the golden cloud mass that has saved them from ruin: the pillar of fire through which God had led them through the desert.

Imitating this civic commission, private patrons adapted Red Sea themes to the Venetian home, where its imagery resonated with new immediacy. The collector Francesco Zio owned Jan van Scorel's *Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea*, which he acquired when the Netherlandish painter passed through Venice (fig.6).²⁴ Scorel's *Submersion* showcases his competency with bird's-eye-view perspective and other optical delights: tonal progression of blues and greens creates deep recession from the foreground shore—where the Israelites gather to watch Pharaoh's soldiers being swallowed by the sea—to the horizon blackened by a massive encroaching storm.

Zio's *Submersion* is unusual because it focuses on the Israelites and their safe arrival upon shore. Nearly equal space is given to the landscape and the seascape. Waves of Hebrews loaded with belongings, some emerging from tents and encampments, trudge along with an army at their heels. Distended and drowned bodies resembling plague victims litter the coast. In the clouds above, Scorel has painted God the Father, who sweeps away the Egyptians with the waters of the Red Sea. Zio must have

approved of the final product since Scorel repeated the disaster imagery in his *Flood* canvas, now in the Museo del Prado in Madrid.²⁵ Bonifacio de' Pitati would place similar emphasis on the turmoil of drowning Egyptians in his *Crossing of the Red Sea*, included in a cycle of wall paintings which were executed in the sacristy of the Venetian Church of San Sebastiano in the early 1550s.²⁶



Fig. 6. Jan van Scorel, *Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea*, 1520, oil on panel, 54 x 134 cm. Milan, private collection.



Fig. 7. Lorenzo Lotto, *St. Nicholas of Bari in Glory* (detail), c.1529, oil on canvas, 335 x 188 cm. Venice, Santa Maria dei Carmini.

Scorel's dynamic image for Zio was redeployed in other display contexts throughout the Veneto. Lorenzo Lotto certainly knew Scorel's *Submersion* and quoted its panoramic landscape in the intarsia panels for

the choir of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo (1525–32), as well as in his altarpiece of *St. Nicholas of Bari in Glory* in Santa Maria dei Carmini in Venice (fig.7). Lotto would have seen the Netherlandish picture in the collection of Zio's nephew Andrea Odoni, who commissioned a portrait of himself from Lotto in 1527.²⁷ The *St. Nicholas* altarpiece was made for a Scuola of sea-faring merchants with shops along the Rialto, for whom the stormy seascape would have evoked the hazards of mercantilist trade on the seas.

Occupying the lower quarter of the picture, Lotto's harbor scene repeats the low horizontal format of Scorel's picture and functions almost as a predella. Recognizing the distinctly Netherlandish palette of muted browns, green, and blue, Ludovico Dolce criticized its "bad colors" in his 1557 dialogue on painting published in Venice.²⁸ Yet Vasari praised the "very beautiful landscape...with a bit of sea," as did the painter and theorist G. P. Lomazzo in his chapter "*Composizione del pingere & fare i paesi diversi*," citing it among examples of bizarre effects of light, nighttime, mist, fog, and other atmospheric conditions.²⁹ As Lotto's first major commission after his return to Venice from Bergamo, it demonstrated the degree to which Scorel's picture was known, as well as the appeal of its maritime imagery for other civic guilds.³⁰ Indeed, the Scuola Grande di San Marco commissioned a grandiose *Sea Storm* canvas from Palma Vecchio, hinging upon Venice's saving from disastrous flood. The picture ordered by this civic lay confraternity, who contributed men and funds to the Cambrai war effort, has been read as a poignant political allegory relating to the city's resistance to sacking; Venice is saved from ruin through water miracles performed by its patron saints.³¹

Even after the Cambrai crisis, Red Sea subjects served as testament to the Venetian triumphalism ensured by power over the seas, a hallmark of *venezianità*. Evidently the theme also struck a chord with merchants whose livelihood hinged upon the vitality of Venetian ports and seafaring traditions. Recorded in the merchant Gabriele Vendramin's art collection in 1569 was "A picture of a submersion of Pharaoh."³² Another "submersion of Pharaoh," attributed to Lambert Sustris, belonged to the Dutch merchant Jan Reynst (1601-46), who worked in Venice and avidly collected Venetian art. Also Dutch, Sustris was active in the Veneto, first in Titian's studio by about 1535, then in Tintoretto's. According to one of his biographers, Carlo Ridolfi, he served in their workshops painting landscape backgrounds of larger compositions.³³ Archival sources record even further autonomous Red Sea pictures attributed to artists working in the Veneto in the first half of the cinquecento.³⁴ By the 1530s, the cultivation of Red Sea subjects was symptomatic of the new prominence

that landscape imagery had begun to assume in northern Italy over the preceding fifty years.

Although images by Titian, Previtali, Scorel, and the others mentioned thus far framed the lagoon as a mighty energetic bastion, the wider narrative of the Hebrews' exodus likely resonated for Venetians in further ways. The drying up of the sea is referred to in the textual account at several places and underscored, in some cases, nature's submission to human control. The biblical text emphasizes the sudden conversion of marshy sea to dry land. As told in Exodus 14:21-23:

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.³⁵

The conversion of marshland (for the Hebrew word for "Red Sea" also translates to "Sea of Reeds") to pasture related to other Venetian enterprises. It is in the first decades of the sixteenth century that land reclamation efforts on the terraferma began in earnest. Venetians were aware that human artifice could be used to control nature and the draining of marshlands produced large tracts of arable farmland. After the Cambrai war, territories regained by Venice were redistributed and converted for agricultural use. Those disloyal (such as the patriciate in Vicenza) had their lands confiscated. Yet those who remained loyal were awarded acreage and many nobles invested heavily in mainland Treviso and Padua.³⁶

The shift toward mainland enterprise is occasionally evident in some artists' emphasis on landscape in Venetian civic art, such as Carpaccio's *The Lion of St. Mark* (1516). This painting is characteristic of the *leone andante* type, used from the mid-quattrocento onwards. In Carpaccio's grandiose picture, the lion's hind legs remain in the waters of the lagoon, while his forelegs are on dry land, where various plants and flowers grow. Carpaccio's painting hung in the office of the *Officiali al Dazio del Vin*, located on the Riva del Ferro near the Rialto, and its patrons were patricians who shared in Doge Antonio Grimani's campaign to recover the *Stato da terra*. Girolamo Bragadin, Francesco Foscarini, Jacopo Venier and Marcantonio Manolesso all offered their services in defense of Padua or Treviso.³⁷

In this era, Venetians would possibly have equated Moses' miraculous control of the waters of the Red Sea with official power structures put in place to manipulate the hydrology of the Veneto. The missions of Moses and Doge Grimani were, in a sense, analogous: salvation was to be found

on dry land. For the Venetians, it was the *terraferma* in the peaceful period after 1517. A city such as Padua proved, like Canaan for the Hebrews, to be the Promised Land. It was within its precincts, for example, that the patriciate invested in farming and agricultural practices and other sites on the mainland as a means to economic security and rehabilitation in the post-war period.

In any event, the anxiety aroused by potential invasion and the subsequent deliverance from danger prompted artists and patrons to produce dynamic images of this evocative subject matter. Venetians mediated their wartime experience through the familiar narrative from the Book of Exodus of God's chosen people who miraculously saved by the floodwaters—a story which uniquely epitomized the Venetian expertise in water. Yet it would be hazardous to suggest that the pictures of warfare and natural disaster were direct illustrations of historical events. Undoubtedly, they remain largely allegorical. In the end, we can conclude that the mythology of the lagoon and its fluid visual culture served as one cornerstone of the city's independence and political power in the first half of the sixteenth century.

The legacy of this rich visual tradition weighs upon the lagoon management projects implemented to this day. In 2003, the Italian Public Works Ministry invested roughly six billion dollars to construct a network of inflatable barriers at inlets where the lagoon meets the Adriatic Sea. The project, designed to safeguard Venice from the threat of rising seas and flooding, has been dubbed with the acronym MOSE, which in English translates to Moses and, intentionally or not, redeploys the highly charged Renaissance vision of the Venetian landscape ensconced by the Red Sea. As the official campaign slogan states, it is intended, “Per la difesa di Venezia e della Laguna...”³⁸ or, “For the defense of Venice and its Lagoon...”

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Notes

¹ The standard history is still Felix Gilbert, "Venice in the Crisis of the League of Cambrai," in *Renaissance Venice*, ed., J.R. Hale (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), 274-92. For the war's wider context, see Felix Gilbert, *The Pope, His Banker, and Venice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); and David S. Chambers, *Popes, Cardinals and War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

² Gilbert, "Venice in the Crisis of the League of Cambrai," 276.

³ For more on the commission, see Christopher S. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* (London: Reaktion, 1993), 199-201.

⁴ David Rosand and Michelangelo Muraro, ed., *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut* (Washington, D.C.: International Exhibitions Foundation, 1976), cat. no. 4, 72-73.

⁵ Exodus 14:27-29, Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 103. Compare to Niccolò Malermi's *Biblia Italica* (Venice, 1490), 21r: "*Et moises havendo exteso la mano contra il mare: subito la matina per tempo ritorno il mare al primo loco: et le acque venero incontra alli egiptii li quali fugivano et il signor li involgete in mezo dele unde del mare et le acque ritornorno et copreno li carri et li cavalieri del tutto lo exercito de pharaone li quali sequitando erano entrati nel mare; et pur uno de loro non scappo: & li figlioli de Israel andorono per mezo del secco mare, et le aque cosi dall parte dextra come dala sinistra aloro erano come muro et i quali giorno el signor libero Israel delle mane delli egipti et videro li egiptii morti: sopra il lito del mare...*"

⁶ Rosand and Muraro, 72: "*La crudel persecutione del ostinato Re, contro il populo tanto da Dio/ Amato...*"

⁷ W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 2.

⁸ Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown, *Renaissance Venice and the North. Crosscurrents in the Time of Bellini, Dürer, and Titian* (New York: Rizzoli, 1999), 462.

⁹ Karl Appuhn, *A Forest on the Sea. Environmental Expertise in Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Venice Triumphant. The Horizons of a Myth*, trans., Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Krystina Karen Stermole, "Venetian Art and the War of the League of Cambrai" (Ph.D. Diss. Kingston, ON: Queen's University, 2007). This cogent thesis focuses on the visual culture produced in response to the war. Stermole examines how the Cambrai conflict provoked a profound spiritual and political crisis for Venetians, who became concerned with commissioning art to mitigate its fallout. Stermole's study is indispensable for its sensitive reading of art's function and role in framing a narrative of the war's events for everyday Venetians. However, she neither analyzes landscape painting in depth, nor discusses the environmental factors impacting on the production, collection, and reception of art in Renaissance Venice.

¹¹ Deborah Howard, "Giorgione's *Tempesta* and Titian's *Assunta* in the Context of the Cambrai Wars," *Art History* 8, 3 (Sept., 1985), 278; Paul H.D. Kaplan, "The Storm of War: The Paduan Key to Giorgione's *Tempesta*," *Art History* 9, 4 (Dec., 1986), 407; Philip Cottrell, "Vice, Vagrancy, and Villa Culture: Bonifacio de' Pitati's 'Dives and Lazarus' in Its Venetian Context," *Artibus et Historiae* 26, 51 (2005), 131-50.

¹² Marino Sanduo, *Venice Città Exceletissima. Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, ed., Patricia H. Labalme and Laura Sanguineti White, trans., Linda L. Carroll (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 363.

¹³ Cf. Pordenone's *St. Christopher*, c.1515-20, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 74.3 cm, Bloomington, Indiana University Art Museum. On the use of images of St. Christopher in the Venetian home, see Margaret A. Morse, "Creating Sacred Space: The Religious Visual Culture of the Renaissance Venetian casa," in *Approaching the Italian Renaissance Interior: Sources, Methodologies, Debates*, ed., Marta Ajmar Wollheim, Flora Dennis, and Ann Matchette (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 95-128.

¹⁴ Karl Appuhn, "Friend or Flood? The Dilemmas of Water Management in Early Modern Venice," in *The Nature of Cities*, ed., Andrew C. Isenberg (Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2006), 88.

¹⁵ Crouzet-Pavan, *Venice Triumphant*, 40.

¹⁶ Clifford M. Brown and Anna Lorenzoni, "An Art Auction in Venice in 1506," *L'Arte* V (1972), 135, n.26: "*panni dipinti alla franzese...colla Storia di Moise quando passa il Mare Rosso.*"

¹⁷ Brown and Lorenzoni, "An Art Auction in Venice in 1506," 125. Although no such painting by the Bruges master survives, a sense of its appearance is best judged from van Eyck's *Last Judgment*, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (33.92ab). It likely resembled the narrative strip dividing paradise from hell that depicts a tumultuous landscape, in which bodies are drawn out of the barren earth and churning ocean. On the left, a city engulfed in flames on the horizon sends billows of smoke over the expanse of sea. Flemish artists such as van Eyck introduced more detailed landscape elements such as these to the iconography.

¹⁸ Alessandro Ballarin, *Dosso Dossi: la pittura a Ferrara negli anni del ducato di Alfonso I* (Padua: Bertonecello, 1994), I: 247-8, cat. no.164.

¹⁹ Contracts for these works are extant in the records of the Scuola and Archivio di Stato, Venice, respectively. See Oskar Bätschmann, *Giovanni Bellini* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 28, 216.

²⁰ Priuli's entry is discussed in Crouzet-Pavan, *Venice Triumphant*, 44.

²¹ Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 102; Malermi, 20v: "...& li figlioli de israel se partirono armati dela terra degipto..."

²² Pietro Bembo, *History of Venice*, ed., and trans., Robert W. Ulery, Jr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), III, 243.

²³ This incident is recounted in the chronicle of the war written by the Paduan Giovan Francesco Buzzaccarini, *Storia della guerra della Lega di Cambrai*, ed., Francesco Canton (Padua: Programma, 2010), 80.