ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN: A NETHERLANDISH ARTIST AND THE FERRARESE COURT

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ABSTRACT

Northern European and Italian Renaissance art have tended to be treated art historically as two opposing styles. Rooted in statements by artists such as Michelangelo and Leon Battista Alberti, it has become a common misconception that Italians did not hold Northern European art in high regard during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This thesis seeks to complicate and critique this conventional understanding by looking at the similarities and transalpine exchanges between the artistic styles and practices of Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1400-1464) of Brussels and Cosmè Tura (c. 1430-1495) of Ferrara. By looking at the writings of contemporary humanists at the Ferrarese court and technical analysis of select paintings, it is evident that Cosmè Tura strove to emulate and incorporate aspects of Rogier van der Weyden's northern manner, especially in his handling of oil paint, use of underdrawings, and emotive effects. In reconsidering this cross-cultural relationship, this thesis demonstrates that the traditionally constructed animosity between Northern and Southern Renaissance art is a common misperception and an oversight in art history.

Dedicated to My Family

For Always Reminding Me that the Key to Happiness is

Sharing what You Love with the World.

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CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION

Northern and Southern European Renaissance Art has traditionally been considered as two distinct artistic styles. In contradiction to familiar scholarship, which traditionally presents Netherlandish and Italian Renaissance art and artistic practices at odds with one another, we know that there were instances when Italians embraced certain aspects of Netherlandish art. Through exploring the contemporary reception of Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1400-1464) of Brussels within the Northern Italian court of Ferrara during the Quattrocento, we can gain a more complete understanding of the reception and appreciation of the Northern Netherlandish style - the *ars nova* - in Renaissance Italy.

Marcia Hall, in *Color and Meaning*, described the Northern Renaissance *ars nova* as displaying a sense of a fleeting moment that is captured eternally, with reality being recorded in a thousand minutely observed details comprised of glinting textures and surfaces. The Northern European style, she argued, embodied a use of light, color and perspective operating through a system different from those demonstrated by Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti in the Italian peninsula.[1] Both regions had strong economic, political, social and educational opinions that have been traditionally constructed as confrontational towards one another. The differentiation between the styles of Northern and Southern Europe has perpetuated this common misconception of disdainful conflict. Paula Nuttall's book, *From Flanders to Florence*, is one of the first

[1] Marcia Hall, *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 70-71.

full acknowledgements that the perceived marginalization of Netherlandish painting by Italian Renaissance culture may not have been an accurate construction of contemporary views on artistic style and value.[2]

Considered by scholars as one of the most prominent artists of the Northern Renaissance, Rogier van der Weyden is given merit on par with that of the renowned Northern Renaissance artists Jan van Eyck and Robert Campin. Born in Tournai in 1400 under the name Rogelet de la Pasture, documents show him as having trained within the workshop of the prominently established artist Robert Campin.[3] Apart from basic biographical information, the history of scholarship pertaining specifically to the life and artistic practices of Rogier van der Weyden is quite limited. Despite this limitation, this thesis will briefly discuss the history of scholarship concerning Rogier and focus on particular oversights made when looking specifically at his connection to the Ferrarese court artist Cosmè Tura (c. 1430-1495). To look beyond the traditional debate concerning the plausibility of Rogier's physical presence in Ferrara and to interrogate the ways in which his work may have been received is to initiate a break with previous scholarship on the artist's physical presence as superfluous when there is documented proof of his work present in Italy. At variance with traditional scholarship, which regularly refers to Rogier's painting entitled *The Descent from the Cross*, this thesis will investigate further Rogier's *Entombment* (c. 1463-4), which was owned by the Medici

[2] Paula Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Paintings, 1400-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 3. Also see Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown, *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Dürer, Bellini, and Titian* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000).

[3] Martin Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden: An Essay with a Critical Catalogue of Paintings* (London: Phaidon, 1972), 7.

and is now in the Uffizi museum. As evidenced by the ways in which Rogier's style fit within and incorporated the values of the Ferrarese court humanists, his work can clearly be seen as present in and greatly appreciated by the Ferrarese court. The Uffizi *Entombment* is a prime example of a work created by a northern artist that was commissioned by a southern patron. This work operates, in reference to the topic of this thesis, as the quintessential example of what the works that Rogier van der Weyden had made for the d'Este collection in Ferrara might have looked like. Looking more closely at this work might yield insight into the artistic process and technique Rogier would have employed in the lost works of Ferrara. Creating an idea of what Rogier's artistic technique might have been at this time for an Italian patron will allow us to begin to understand what key aspects Italian artists, like Cosmè Tura, would have drawn from his work and enveloped into their own.

Through the context of Rogier van der Weyden's life, style, and reception, a contemporary understanding of concepts on painting within the fifteenth-century court of Ferrara can be gained. By looking at the way in which Cosmè Tura emulates stylistic qualities and techniques of Rogier, which parallel values utilized by key figures within Ferrarese court, a true appreciation and emulation of the Netherlandish tradition can be seen. Placing Rogier van der Weyden's work into the context of the Ferrarese court in conjunction with viewing the re-appropriation of certain stylistic qualities by Cosmè Tura, who follows chronologically, I hope to contribute to modern scholarship through displaying an appreciation of the Northern Renaissance style in Southern Europe.

The second chapter seeks to relay a detailed account of Rogier van der Weyden's life leading up to his probable journey to Italy in 1450. Parting with modern scholars, who briefly acknowledge Rogier's pilgrimage to Rome, I will fully investigate the probability of the artist's travels. After establishing Rogier's journey as fact, we will turn our attention toward what influence his journey or, at the very least his works of art might have had on a particular artist named Cosmè Tura. Chapter Three seeks to provide evidence that sheer presence of Rogier van der Weyden's work in Ferrara affected the work of the young court artist. Through looking at similarities in their emotive style and material techniques, a clear cross-cultural artistic relationship becomes evident. The fourth and final chapter utilizes all the information given in Chapter Two and Three to create a synthesized understanding of the artistic relationship between Rogier van der Weyden and Cosmè Tura, which complicates the traditionally-perceived animus between Northern and Southern Renaissance art.

CHAPTER 2: ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN AND THE COURT OF FERRARA

On Rogier Van Der Weyden and His Presence in Italy

Scholarship pertaining specifically to the life of Rogier van der Weyden is quite limited. Many archival sources on Rogier from Tournai were destroyed during World War II, and the limited information that remains is from partly transcribed documents from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Early notable writings that are devoted to the life and work of Rogier written before de Vos' text were contributions made by Max J. Friedländer, Erwin Panofsky and Otto Pächt.[4] A vast amount of historical, iconographical, typological, stylistic and technical information had been carried forward to the late 1990's, which led Dirk de Vos to create a comprehensive catalogue of Rogier van der Weyden.[5] It is the most widely accepted scholarship surrounding Rogier's life, reception and work. Other recent contributions, such as the previously mentioned texts by Paula Nuttall and Marcia Hall, as well as Michael Baxandall, Stephen Campbell and Maryan Ainsworth, help construct an overall period perception of literature, techniques, materials, and humanistic ideas during the fifteenth century that can aid in developing an understanding of how Rogier van der Weyden and his work may have been valued.

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[4] Max J. Friedländer. *From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Praeger, 1967). Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting.* (Madrid: Cätedra, 1998). Otto Pächt, *Altniederländische Malerei. Von Rogier van der Weyden bis Gerard David* (Munich: Prestel, 1994).

[5] Dirk De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden: The Complete Works,* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000) 8.

Through pushing past certain concerns that have occupied many scholars discussing Rogier van der Weyden, such as lack of evidence of his physical presence in Italy, modern scholarship can be furthered through investigation of the reception of Rogier's work, which traveled throughout Italy and into Italian private collections during the fifteenth century.

Rogier trained for five years within Campin's workshop before obtaining the title of "Master" painter on the 1st of August in 1432. Rogier remained in Tournai for the next four years, during which time some scholars suggest that he may have begun to develop a workshop of his own.[6] Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* **(fig. 1)** is dated through stylistic evaluation and the production of copies to 1435, the year before he moved to Brussels. This work's creation is a primary factor in acquiring for Rogier some wealth and prestige, not only in Northern Europe but in Italy as well.[7] The Prado *Descent from the Cross* has been considered historically as the perfect exemplification of Rogier van der Weyden's style and is one of his most well-known works. It is important to stress that this work could be considered an iconic example of Netherlandish painting, even in its own time, which may explain why scholars seem to focus on the Prado *Descent from the Cross* when discussing Rogier's Northern cross-cultural connection with Italy in general, and in Ferrara and Florence specifically. This paper seeks to diverge from traditional scholarship and look specifically at a less well-known work by Rogier entitled the *Entombment* **(fig. 2)**, which was created in 1463, possibly for Cosimo de Medici's collection and resides to this day in the Uffizi Gallery. However, before

[6] De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 47-52.
[7] Ibid., 21.

looking more closely at the *Entombment*, it is important to look at what little is known about Rogier's life leading up to the *Entombment*'s creation.

Rogier van der Weyden moved to Brussels in 1436, the year after his completion of the Prado *Descent of the Cross*. The post that he took in Brussels had not existed before, nor was it replaced after his term as '*nostre bourgeois et manant,'* which translates to "our citizen and resident."[8] Between the years of 1435 and 1450, Rogier's works consisted principally of civic works, several portraits and primarily religious subjects.[9] His first commission within the city of Brussels was a series of four Scenes of Justice for the Gold Chamber of the Town Hall. After completing this civic series, which was destroyed in the bombardment of Brussels in 1695, Rogier's corpus leading up to 1450 is comprised mostly of sacred, occasionally biblical, imagery. These religious scenes include *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin* (c. 1435 - 1440), *Triptych of the Seven Sacraments* (c. 1445 - 1450), and *Magdalen Reading* (c. 1438), which is a fragment from a lost Sacra Conversazione scene thought to have been completed in 1438.[9] All of these images place biblical themes within spaces that reflect the world of the contemporary fifteenth-century viewer. Rogier achieves his convincingly articulated interior spaces through implementation of similar colors and tones, figures, stylization through outlining, perspective and extensive detailing. *Triptych of the Seven Sacraments* utilizes the

[8] De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 56. Most municipal accounts from Brussels between the 1435 and 1464 have since been lost, and guild records have not survived. However, a document drafted by the town council in 1441 refers to Rogier using these terms. 9 Davies, 13.

[9] Anthony Blunt, et al. "The Materials and Techniques of Five Paintings by Rogier van der Weyden and his Workshop," in *The London National Gallery Bulletin*, vol. 18. (London: National Gallery Publications, 1997), 68. Anthony Blunt investigates the process utilized by Rogier van der Weyden and his workshop through the use of technical research in this article. Through Blunt's research insight is given into the common practices, such as the utilization of underdrawings and preparatory grounds that may not be easily seen to the naked eye.

"swooning Madonna," and emotional women were employed also in the Prado *Descent from the Cross*. The similarity in stylization and compositional construction suggests that Rogier had established a productive workshop within the city of Brussels and had developed a recognizable 'brand' for himself. This 'brand' is one that Rogier van der Weyden constructed for himself, developed, and disseminated throughout Europe from 1440 to the late sixteenth century, long after his death in 1464.[10]

The year 1450 was declared a Holy Year by Pope Nicholas V. The jubilee year was introduced in the Trecento by the papacy as a year of remission or universal pardon from sin, as a political ploy to restore the papal reputation and stimulate piety. During this period, religious pilgrimages were extremely popular; people from throughout Europe would make their way to Rome, stopping at churches with prominent relics while on their journey. The 1450 jubilee is marked by an incident in which over two hundred persons were trampled on the Ponte Sant'Angelo due to the city being overpopulated by people from foreign lands. Nearly two thousand pilgrims occupied Rome regularly through the jubilee year, which aids in understanding the large volume of commerce, trade and religious activity that took place during 1450. For an artist like Rogier, who was rising in popularity at the time, the jubilee year offered an opportunity to visit other strong artistic centers and experience other styles of art, while also promoting his own. The sheer volume of people within Rome would have appealed to an artist seeking out commissions. It also would have given Rogier the possibility of stopping in Ferrara to see

[10] De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 60.

Leonello d'Este, whom documents show had already been an active patron of his. Dirk de Vos proposes that it is possible that Rogier may have made the journey by ship from Bruges to Pisa.[11] If Rogier had visited Italy, it would have been likely that he would have gone to Rome first and then possibly traveled through Ferrara before returning to Brussels.[12] Dirk de Vos suggests that this would have enabled him to visit the court in Ferrara briefly between February and June of that year, possibly waiting out the winter so that he would have passed through the Alps more safely.[13]

Italian humanist Bartolomeo Fazio of the court of Naples wrote a book in 1455 entitled *On Famous Men*, in which he identified the greatest modern painters as Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello. Presumably obtaining his knowledge through various reports and correspondences, Fazio's book is a valuable record of not only lost works but the most extensive account of Netherlandish painting written by an Italian during the Fifteenth century. *On Famous* Men documents Jan van Eyck's *Women Bathing* traveling to Genoa, Rogier van der Weyden's *Passion* on view in Naples, and most importantly for this thesis' purposes, a triptych depicting the *Descent* by Rogier in Leonello d'Este's collection in Ferrara.[14] It is important to note at this point that Fazio's document most likely was not referring to Rogier's most famous Prado *Descent from the Cross*, which causes scholars to question to which work might Fazio be referring. Lorne Campbell references two occasions in the d'Este archive that note two separate payments of twenty ducats having been paid to Rogier van der Weyden.

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[11] De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 60-61.
[12] Davies, 20.
[13] De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 61.
[14] Ibid., 61.

Furthermore, Campbell uses both Fazio and Cyriacus of Ancona's writings to reconstruct an idea of what the missing triptych might have looked like. Campbell proposes that the triptych's central panel would have depicted a *Descent from the Cross* scene quite different from the one in the Prado Museum. This scene would have included the Virgin, Magdalen, Joseph of Arimathea and cluster of various other men and women placed within a landscape decorated with porticos and gateways. Drastically different from the Prado *Descent from the Cross*, the triptych's left wing showed an *Expulsion from Eden* scene with fully rendered nude figures of Adam and Eve. The right wing depicted "a certain prince as suppliant" which Campbell suggests might have been an Old Testament Patriarch rather than a depiction of the donor.[15] It is important to note that Lorne Campbell is the only scholar to make an attempt to reconstruct an idea of what Rogier's lost triptych in Ferrara may have looked like, and his reconstruction is heavily dependent upon the writings of Fazio.

Following his book, in 1456 Fazio documents Rogier van der Weyden as an honored guest in Rome and specifically notes him being shown Gentile de Fabriano's frescos in San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome.[16] Fazio describes several paintings by Rogier Van der Weyden, as well as Jan van Eyck in his *De Viris Illustribus*.[17] To these descriptions, Fazio adds stylistic descriptions based on his viewing of Rogier's *Madonna and Saints*[18] and the *Entombment,*[19] *and* expresses a few sentiments on Rogier's Justice

[15] Lorne Campbell, *Tura and Netherlandish Art* (London: National Gallery Catalogues Ltd., 1998), 75.
[16] Nuttall, 34-35.
[17] Bartolomeo Fazio, *De Viris Illustribus* in *Documentary History of Art,* trans. Elizabeth G. Holt (New York: Princeton University Press, 1947), 199.
[18] Within a collection in Frankfurt at the Stadelsches Kunstinsitut.

series, which he would have known only through hearsay. He also comments on two Crucifixion scenes in the collection of the King of Naples and, most importantly to this scholarship, documents a now lost *Descent* triptych by Rogier within the collection of Leonello d'Este, Duke of Ferrara.[20] Through Fazio's documentation, we can see Italian interest in and knowledge of Netherlandish work traveling through their country.

Though there is ample evidence for the presence of Rogier van der Weyden's work in Italy, scholars still debate the plausibility of his own physical presence in Italy. Speculation concerning his presence in Italy first arose in 1920, when Max J. Friedländer falsely identified a portrait by Rogier as depicting Leonello d'Este. (**fig. 6**) Scholars did not question whether or not portrait was by the hand of Rogier, but rather questioned the identification of the sitter as Leonello d'Este. Documentation has been able to place the portrait as having been created around 1460, which brought Ernst Kantorowicz to question Friedländer's identification of the sitter twenty years later. Kantorowicz used the meticulous records on Rogier van der Weyden transcribed by A. V. Wurzbach in *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexikon* to correct Friedländer, identifying the sitter as Francesco d'Este (c. 1430 – after 1475), the illegitimate son of Leonello. Francesco bore a strong resemblance to his father and was sent to be educated and raised at the Burgundian Court in 1444.[21] Kantorowicz's identification is more logical, due to Rogier's close proximity to the Burgundian court from his home in Brussels.

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[19] Within a collection in Florence at the Uffizi Museum.

[20] Theodore H. Feder, "A Reexamination through documents of the First Fifty Years of Roger Van der Weyden's Life," *The Art Bulletin* 48 (1996): [full page range of entire article when first mentioned], esp. 420.

[21] Ernst Kantorowicz, "The Este Portrait by Roger van der Weyden" *The Journal of the Warburg Institute* 3 (1940): 165-180, esp, 165.

Many scholars question whether Rogier van der Weyden actually made the pilgrimage described by Fazio and only briefly discuss it within their writings, due to a lack of archival records about Rogier or any other prominent figure within the court of Ferrara. It is logical to presume that someone who clearly valued the Netherlandish mode—whether Leonello d'Este, Cosmè Tura, or any of Ferrara's humanists or artists—would have explicitly documented the presence of Rogier at the Ferrarese court, had he been there. The lack of documentary evidence is what has caused most scholars, like Kantorowicz and Martin Davies, to doubt the feasibility of Rogier's presence in Italy. It stands to reason, however, that Rogier's physical presence in Italy is not essential for his work to have created an impact within the Florentine and Ferrarese court. One must look beyond the traditional debate surrounding the plausibility of Rogier's physical presence in Ferrara and examine the ways in which his work may have been received. Cosimo de Medici and Leonello d'Este knew Rogier's skill initially through the Prado *Descent from the Cross,* which represented his artistry in the medium of oil and the ability to achieve a superb sense of sincere piety, gracefulness and emotion in his composition, postures and gestures. It is not surprising that these prominent figureheads would seek out commission for their own collections, especially after Rogier's probable journey to both courts.

Rogier van der Weyden's physical presence is superfluous when there is documented proof of his work being present, whether physically or through copies and prints. The Uffizi *Entombment* **(fig. 2)** is widely acknowledged by scholars as being

commissioned by Cosimo de Medici around 1450.[22] It represents Italian interest and appreciation of Rogier's style and the Netherlandish mode. Its subject matter, Christ being presented in the moment before being placed within the tomb, is quite unusual for a Northern work and most likely would have been commissioned during Rogier's pilgrimage during the Holy Year as previously discussed. Dirk de Vos strongly accredits this painting to one that was commissioned by Cosimo de Medici at the end of his life for a chapel in the Villa Careggi. The villa's inventory from 1482 states, "*Nella chapella, 1a. tavola d'altare quando san Cosimo/medica Christo colla picture della resurrection/quando Christo risuscita."* [23] This loosely translates to "In the Chapel, 1a. an Altarpiece of St. Cosimo/medical Christ in a picture of the resurrection/when Christ resurrects." As the inventory suggests, it has long been debated by scholars whether the Uffizi image is an Entombment scene or a Resurrection scene.[25] The image depicts a Netherlandish hillside with Christ, whose wounds are still bleeding, stretched out and supported by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, displayed before the Virgin Mary (to his right) and St. John (to his left), with Mary Magdalene kneeling in total abandonment before the mystical scene. Mary Magdalene mirrors the position of Christ's outstretched arms, symbolically reminding the pious viewer to perform comparable deeds or deeds inspired by Christ's sacrifice. However, is this, as the inventory suggests, a Resurrection scene or is it, as its more commonly used title suggests, an Entombment scene? Many scholars, including de Vos, Friedländer and Panofsky connect this to the painting at the

[22] De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 330.
[23] Ibid., 330. 25
Ibid., 330.

Villa Careggi due to the inclusion of the sepulcher, which does not appear traditionally in the repertoire of Northern painters, but commonly occurs in Italian paintings, specifically in Florence. Furthermore, the inclusion of the sepulcher and the construction of the subject matter suggests Rogier's own likely personal viewing of Italian work during his time. De Vos, Davies, Panofsky and Friedländer all note the similarities between the Uffizi *Entombment* and a section of a predella by Fra Angelico on the high altarpiece of San Marco in Florence.[24] Both images present Christ's dead body with open arms, before an opened rectangular shaped tomb. Rogier seems to imitate the way in which Fra Angelico splayed Christ's garments from his body down to the floor by his feet. This compositional tool draws the viewer's eye to the most important figure in the scene. Both images include the surrounding figures of Joseph of Arimathea and the Virgin Mary mourning on either side of Christ's body within Northern looking landscapes.

Attempts have been made by Friedrich Winkler in 1913 to connect this piece to a Deposition scene identified in 1449 by Cyriacus of Ancona, a renowned Renaissance merchant and humanist who travelled the world in search of inscriptions and relics of Classical antiquity. Cyriacus documented the time when Leonello d'Este showed him Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent* triptych on July 8, 1449.[25] He remarked that, "after the famous Jan of Bruges [Jan van Eyck], the pride of painting, Rogier of Brussels is considered the most distinguished painter of our time."[26] Cyriacus made this statement

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[24] Nuttall, 35.
[25] Nuttall, 35. Also De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 61.
[26] Michael Baxandall, "Bartholomaeus Facius on Painting: A 15th Century Manuscript of the 'De Viris Illustribus,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institutes* XXVII (1964): 90-109.

before Rogier's hypothesized pilgrimage, suggesting that his works of art and reputation in Italy as a foremost master of oil paint technique rivaling even Jan van Eyck preceded any possible direct voyage there. A trip, in other words, was not necessary to demonstrate Rogier's centrality in Italian collections and the Italian imagination. Rogier's use of the medium of oil, which was at that time a technique in limited use in Italy, could have created a sensation within the Ferrarese court, which may have never seen the medium in use before. Cosmè Tura, Leonardo da Vinci and Piero della Francesca are considered to be the first artists in Italy to use the medium, but not until after 1450.[27] Records from the Ferrara court show Leonello d'Este ordering his agent to pay a sum of twenty gold ducats on August 15, 1450. This sum was payment for pieces to be made by Rogier van der Weyden for Leonello's *studiolo.*[28] Dirk de Vos feels that such a commission would have at the very least warranted a visit or a submission of a small *modello* of work as a sort of application.[29] Leonello died just two months later, and the commission was never completed. Leonello's intention to add works by Rogier into his studiolo speaks to the appreciation he must have had of the Netherlandish style. A prominent duke like Leonello d'Este would have chosen impressive and intellectual work for his studiolo. These works would have been viewed by visitors and would have been the topic of conversation within the domestic setting of the Duke's home. Therefore, Rogier's style must have been seen as representing the humanistic artistic qualities valued by the Ferrarese court, which Leonello would have wanted to showcase to his guests.

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[27] In 1464, Florentine Architect, Filarete, wrote expressing admiration for the Netherlandish technique.
[28] Stephen J. Campbell, *Cosmè Tura: Painting and Design in Renaissance Ferrara* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Publications, 2002), 75.
[29] De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 61. Also Nuttall, 10-11.

For this thesis' purposes, the location of the work within either Florence or Ferrara is of the utmost importance. This piece would have been known to local and aspiring artists and would have been a point of interest due to its medium and the nationality of its creator. At this time, access to Flemish art was fairly limited in the Italian peninsula and would have captured the attention of prominent collectors such as Leonello d'Este and Cosimo de Medici. As we will later see, this piece may have acted as a particular source of reference for Ferrara court artist Cosmè Tura, whose style embodies similar characteristics to that of Rogier van der Weyden.

Re-evaluation of Rogier van der Weyden's style, epitomized in the Uffizi *Entombment,* within the context of the court of Ferrara and in relation to the work by Cosmè Tura creates a new understanding of both artists' styles and the valuing of Netherlandish artistic modes in the south. Rogier's work can clearly be seen as present in and appreciatively received by the Ferrarese court because his style fit within and incorporated the humanist values of the Ferrarese court. His *Entombment* displayed artistic qualities that paralleled the ideals invoked by contemporaries at the court of Ferrara, which can be seen later being emulated and appropriated by its most prominent court artist Cosmè Tura. Tura's work should be considered outside of traditional anachronistic models of classification of the Italian Renaissance, such as the ones established by Giorgio Vasari, who marginalized Tura as quirky or of lesser quality in comparison with classical antiquity. By placing his work within a new context of crosscultural stylistic and material correspondence with Netherlandish art, there are stylistic characteristics that Tura attempts to incorporate into his own style. Aspects of

Tura's work that are considered obscure can be seen, in fact, as embodying aspects that were valued in the Ferrarese court and in the Netherlands.

Position at court in fifteenth-century Italy was not sustained through birth but through strategies of self-representation. The court of Ferrara had a strong community of humanist philologists, pedagogues, orators and poets. It is these humanists and figures of the court that would have been the most prominent patrons and stimuli for the work that Tura, as the court artist, would have produced during the time that the artist held the position. The d'Estes had an irregular salary for the court artist.[30] Even though the largest amount of Cosmè Tura's commission were under d'Este patronage, he had a considerable amount of patrons beyond the court including clergy, urban nobility, middle-class patrons and the Sforza's in Milan. Stephen Campbell's book on Cosmè Tura displays how humanist commentary influenced the visual characteristics of painting in Ferrara during the fifteenth century, which is manifested in the social ambition and artistic practice of Tura. Tura's work differentiates itself from the traditional Italian Renaissance 'norm' as a direct reflection of regional humanistic interests and embodies a local appreciation of the Northern Netherlandish style.[31] Knowing the artistic characteristics these figures valued most in their art theoretical writings, such as emotion, perspective, and decoration that incorporated elements of nature, as well as being able to identify where Tura's and Rogier's styles embody these values and participate within the contemporary art scene, allows us to see certain similarities. Furthermore, through the wide appreciation of Rogier's work within the Ferrarese court and the emotive, stylistic

[30] Eberhard Ruhmer, *Tura: Paintings and Drawings* (London: Phaidon Press, 1958), 3-5.
[31] Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara,* 24-27.

and material qualities Tura reinterprets in his own style, it is evident that Tura's eccentricities can be understood as a blend of Netherlandish style with Italian humanist interests on art.

Much smaller than the main Italian centers of Rome, Florence, or Venice, or even the city of Brussels, Ferrara was home to what could be described as a unique eclectic style that had an appreciation for the Netherlandish tradition. Ferrarese interest in the Netherlands, and specifically Brussels, came originally from an appreciation of their tapestries. By 1450, about eighty-five percent of the city's tapestry artisans were from the Netherlands.[32] Although the tapestries may have stimulated Ferrara's initial Netherlandish interests, as time progressed, these interests and tastes expanded to incorporate paintings, as well. Stephen Campbell references two explicit instances in which Paolo di Poggio, art buyer for Leonello d'Este in Brussels, made another twenty ducat payments to Rogier van der Weyden as a "part of the price of 'several paintings.'"[33] In conjunction to these two payments, the aforementioned painting of Francesco d'Este is also attributed to Rogier van der Weyden. These instances demonstrate an apparent valuing of Netherlandish modes; however, as previously stated, there is not explicit documentation of any Netherlandish artist's physical presence in Ferrara.

Lorne Campbell notes Cosmè Tura's close relationship to Angelo Maccagnino with whom Tura worked at the studiolo of Belfiore. What is known about Maccagnino comes from the writings of Cyriacus of Ancona. In 1449 he wrote that Maccagnino was

[32] Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara,* 75.
[33] Ibid., 75.

"the distinguished imitator of the renowned art of Rogier and of the extraordinary genius of northern artists."[34] From this connection, it is apparent that Tura had access to the Netherlandish works of art and perhaps would have gained knowledge of techniques they employed from Angelo Maccagnino and through intensive study of Rogier's works that were available in Ferrara. These paintings by Rogier for Ferrara have been lost to the ages, so the only logical way to understand what they may have looked like is to look at something of similar subject matter painted by Rogier for a patron in Italy around the time the lost paintings were made. Therefore, it is important to consider further how Cosmè Tura interpreted and attempted to replicate the methods utilized by Rogier in his *Entombment* for Cosimo de Medici. I seek to stress that the experimental nature of Tura's replication of the Netherlandish mode in his own works directly points to his inevitable artistic interactions with his coworker Angelo Maccagnino and intense study of Rogier's accessible work in Ferrara. I will demonstrate that Tura was able to achieve similarity to Netherlandish work through interactions with other artists at the court, contemporary writings, and his own experimentation with the oil medium.

[34] Ibid., 85.

CHAPTER 3: CONNECTING ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN AND COSMÈ TURA

Cosmè Tura As Court Artist

Cosmè Tura was appointed court artist in 1450, at the same time Borso d'Este was appointed the new Duke of Ferrara by Pope Paul II and quite possibly, Rogier van der Weyden could have been present at the court as well.[35] Borso was a very different ruler than his brother Leonello. He centered his court on the "so-called" Ferrarese school of painting, of which Cosmè Tura is considered one of the leaders. Borso was, like Leonello, interested in the arts, but had a different preference in style. Though less educated, he was very aware of art's ability to operate as a tool of propaganda and favored work that promoted his political image through articulating his personal magnificence.[36] He was known for his love of elaborate and rich works of art. His personal decorated Bible is considered one of the most magnificent illuminated manuscripts of Renaissance Italy. Borso's taste for works of art that displayed power and luxury gives insight as to why he would have prized the work of Cosmè Tura, which was otherwise considered obscure.[37] Italian art handbooks give us an understanding of artistic

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[35] Guido Guerzoni, "Between Rome and Ferrara: The Courtiers of the Este Cardinals in the Cinquecento," in *Art and Identity in Early Modern Rome,* eds. Jill Burke and Michael Bury (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 59-81, esp. 63.

[36] Lubomyra Lesychyn, "The Magnificence of Borso and Ercole d'Este: Princes of Ferrara (1450-1505)," PhD. diss. (McMaster University, Sept. 1981), 57.

[37] Joseph Manca, *Cosmè Tura: The Life and Art of a Painter in Estense Ferrara* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 47.

ideals and common artistic practice during the Quattrocento. Michael Baxandall has shown in modern scholarship how the Ferrara court humanist Angelo Decembrio's (c. 1415-1567) *De Politia Litteraria* (1540) urged the artist to create original works of art that reflected the qualities of nature through both color and design.[38] Decembrio encouraged the use of perspective and carefully articulated details such as reflections of light and expression within the faces of figures to create works that accurately reflected the world in which the viewer resided.[39] Luidovico Carbone (c. 1430 - 1485), another key humanist in the court of Ferrara during the fifteenth century, wrote his text *Oratio pro nipote Galeotti Assassini* in 1460.[40] His comments on *pictura* encourage artists to consider painting as a form of poetry, as the ancient scholars of antiquity had done. To Carbone, painting was able to express "princely magnificence" through the inclusion of lavish decoration and rich materials.

Cosmè Tura's corpus as a court artist covers a range of genres including mythological Muses, portraiture and secular works.[41] However, his early utilization of oil paint as compared with other leading Italian artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea Mantegna, has always perplexed art historians. As previously discussed, the reason for this early implementation of the oil medium may have come from interactions with his co-worker Angelo Maccagnino, who moved from Siena to Ferrara in 1439.[42]

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[38] Baxandall, "A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d'Este: Angelo Decembrio's De Politia Litteraria Pars LXVIII," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institutes*, 26.3 (1963): 304-326.
[39] Ibid., 304.
[40] Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara*, 10-11.
[41] Ibid., 3.
[42] Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495*, 85.

Both Maccagnino and Tura worked closely while painting the studiolo of Belfiore, during which time they may have discovered a shared interest in the Netherlandish mode. The one thing that is known for certain about Maccagnino is his stylistic imitation of Rogier van der Weyden's work. Lorne Campbell notes that in the same year that Maccagnino moved to Ferrara, so did a tapestry weaver originally from Brussels. This tapestry weaver, Boteram, had also previously been living in Siena and could be the source of Maccagnino's interest in imitating Rogier van der Weyden's style. It is conceivable that Boteram would have known enough about northern oil painting techniques to instruct Maccagnino who, as Campbell references, was painting figures in oil in the studiolo of Belfiore in 1448. Rather than seen as a possible source for Maccagnino's actual oil technique, it is more likely that Boteram, as a tapestry weaver, would have shared with painters a common knowledge and familiarity with cartoons from which tapestry weavers made their work. Cartoons were almost always designed by a painter and then used by the weaver to produce the design. Boteram could have brought with him that same kind of collective taste in the luxurious and decorative, highly detailed northern aesthetic, which Decembrio talked about, and which both tapestries and oil painting shared to some extent. It is evident that Boteram, Maccagnino and Decembrio favored aesthetic and preference for detail and ornament, rather than knowledge of a technique or actual artistic practice. This connection is crucial to understanding and embracing how Tura was turning away from traditional Italian painting methods in order to mimic Netherlandish techniques and aesthetics.

Cosmè Tura's work clearly does not fit within the traditionally told history of painting mediums during the Italian Renaissance. In order to be able to differentiate the techniques Tura was utilizing, we must first establish a rudimentary understanding of traditional painting mediums being employed in Italy at that time. During the Quattrocento in Italy, the most commonly used mediums within the field of painting were the traditional technique of fresco and egg tempera on panel. Tempera paint was the preferred medium in Italy during the Quattrocento for panel paintings. Tempera uses egg as a binding medium, which causes the paint to dry quickly and have a viscous nature. Due to tempera's inability to be blended, artists utilizing tempera paint would have had to work within an aesthetic that relied upon calculated decisions regarding color placement before the actual physical application. Artists worked in an aesthetic that emphasized delineated color fields and contour lines when producing their work, which lent itself to the use of tempera paint. Tempera as a medium requires an artist to quickly place areas of flat color and use small brushes to create hatchings and cross-hatchings to produce darks and lights. The attributes of tempera paint and its laborious process caused panel paintings during the early Italian Renaissance to be moderate in size and identifiable by clear, pure, flat color and fine details.

The interest in materials and their capabilities developed as the Quattrocento progressed. The artist Cennino Cennini's records of Giotto's practices in the *Libro dell' Arte* from 1390 give a broad understanding of the way materials were handled in Italy, predating the introduction of oil paint as a medium. Focusing heavily on vigilant preparation and good technique, Cennini clearly describes the preparation of the wood

panel, the gesso ground and pigments for the creation of an altarpiece.[43] Placing importance on the preparation of the material led Cennini to a greater investigation of the capabilities of oil and tempera paints. Cennini later devised a catalogue that defined a color system applicable to the tempera medium, as noted in Hall's *Color and Meaning*. He presented a color system that is most basically described as a method of up-modeling colors through the addition of lead white. It placed an importance on a pure pigment as the most intense hue and allowed for only white to be added to extend the color palette. Lead white is the most opaque pigment within a palette, and produces higher values when mixed with other pigments. However Marcia Hall states in *Color and Meaning*, its incorporation prevents the penetration of light and renders surfaces opaque and matte. Cennini's method of modeling is directly reflected in the nontransparent, high value colors of early Quattrocento Italian work. Cennini's catalogue, identified in his The Craftsman's Handbook, also stresses the use of techniques such as *cangiantismo* isochromatism and decoration such as gilded surfaces. Conversely, Northern artists, as well as Cosmè Tura, strove to paint in a manner that simulated gilding rather than utilizing the real thing. Several methods developed after Cennini's writings that

[43] Cennino d'Andrea Cennini. Cennini, Cennino d'Andrea. *The Craftsman's Handbook: The Italian "Il Libro dell'Arte"*. trans. D.V. Thompson, Jr. Dover (New York: Yale University Press, 1933), 57. Cennini writes in his technical manual, *Libro dell'arte*, from 1400, "I want to teach you to work with oil on wall or panel, as the Germans are much given to do." These sentiments, Paula Nuttall notes on page 34 of her book *From Flanders to Florence*, were reiterated by Filarete, who stated, "In Germany they work well in this method, especially Master Giovanni of Bruges [Jan van Eyck] and Master Rogier [van der Weyden], who employed these oil colors excellently." Antonio Averlino Filarete, *Trattato d'architettura*, ed A.M. Finoli and L. Grassi, 2 vols, Milan, 1972, 668.

encompassed his system and pushed further in pursuit of a more realistic palette, with Leon Battista Alberti's writings being a forerunner.

Alberti's *De Pictura* from 1435 acknowledges Cennini's concepts on color optics and develops these concepts further. Agreeing with the necessity for up-modeling in lead white to extend the palette, Alberti argued that upon viewing an object, darks as well as lights can be observed. Based upon this observation, he created a system that encompasses the up-modeling in white and introduces down-modeling through the addition of black to a pure color. Alberti instructed the artist to make a clear distinction between actively placed dark hues opposite to the light hues within an object and to let pure color act as a midtone.[44] This technique of up- and down-modeling worked in conjunction with Alberti's theory on surface decoration, in which he felt that artists should strive to use the medium to render objects "to look like gold," in contrast to the importance of gilding that was a center of Cennini's focus. The addition of black in tandem with white to the color palette expanded the value system and created a relief technique that allowed for a closer approximation to nature, something that Cennini's technique did not do.[45] This interest in a closer approximation or imitation of nature was driven by society's interest in humanism that also was developing during the late Quattrocento. Alberti's concepts may very well be an attempt to understand how Flemish painters to the north, such as Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden, were able to

[44] Leon Battista Alberti and Cecil Grayson. *On Painting and On Sculpture. The Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua* (London: Phaidon, 1972). On the use of gilding, see p. 65; on the importance of using good colors, see p. 60.
[45] Hall, *Color and Meaning*, 47-91.

achieve higher values and translucency in the medium of oil. However, Alberti's technique of up- and down-modeling was not the way that Northern artists operated. Instead of adding black or white to their colors, Northern artists laid layer after layer of transparent glazes to build up rich deep hues. Artists in Italy had been primarily using tempera and fresco up to this point in time, while Flemish artists to the north were working within a technique of painting comprised of oil, often linseed oil, and ground pigments. The visual effects and possibilities with using oil paint were vastly different from that of tempera or fresco.

Very little is known about how, when and where oil painting as a technique was transferred to Italy. Marcia Hall notes that oil was by no means a new medium introduced, as commonly thought, by Jan van Eyck during the early Quattrocento in the Netherlands.[46] Oil has been found being implicated in various parts of Europe during the Middle Ages. Laboratories have discovered evidence of oil being utilized as a binding medium for green pigments in some Italian painting from the Trecento. Oil paint as a medium had been used in Italy from the 1460's until the 1480's in conjunction with other mediums such as tempera, but not as the primary material. However, the precise moment in which oil was first implemented as the sole primary medium remains a mystery to scholars.

This history speaks to the uniqueness of Cosmè Tura's work, which is painted primarily in oil from 1450 onward. Oil paint was so dissimilar from tempera paint that it

[46] Ibid., 47.

took many years of experimentation for artists to truly understand all of its abilities. In contrast to tempera paint, oil paint dries slowly. This aspect of oil painting allowed the artist to have softer transitions through blending, instead of the sharply delineated color fields of tempera paint. The oil within oil paint has stronger refractive qualities than the egg used in tempera paint and allowed the artist to have multiple layers of glazing. This quality of translucent, refracting glazing is extremely important. Artists could apply multiple layers of a color in their work, and in doing so they could control the value by varying their thickness and transparency. In other words, the thicker the layers, the deeper the color; this eradicated the murkiness that resulted in using tempera paint mixed with black. Furthermore, artists were able to layer glazes of contrasting colors without them mixing together and thus causing the hue to diminish. This layering capability of the oil paint medium further expanded the palette and allowed for an infinite number of shades within a singular color and enhanced the ability to render forms reflective of the natural world. Oil paint possessed a number of advantages over tempera, especially in terms of naturalism; this caused a switch in the medium in the northern and southern traditions. However, this was a gradual process through many years of experimentation amongst various artists.[47]

[47] Hall, *Color and Meaning*, 47-91.

Cosmè Tura's Re-Appropriation of Rogier Van Der Weyden's Netherlandish Oil Painting Techniques

In order to develop an understanding of how Cosmè Tura utilized these attributes of oil in the manner of the Netherlandish technique, we must first take a deeper look at the *Entombment* (c. 1463-4) painting by Rogier van der Weyden (**fig.1**) which, as previously stated, is the closest example of something similar to the paintings he would have made for the d'Este collection in Ferrara. The painting depicts a Lamentation scene set within a rocky hillside. Christ's body is displayed in the center of the panel, drawing the focus of the viewer and centering their contemplation, devotion and meditation on the Passion of Christ. Christ's body is supported by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus with the Virgin and St. John supporting either arm. Mary Magdalen kneels before the body looking up at the mystical image. All of the surrounding figures direct their gaze at the *Corpus Christi*, except for Nicodemus who stares directly out at us with realistic tears streaming down his face. It is important to note all of the figures' sizes in comparison with the tomb and decorated landscape behind them. They are larger than they should be if, for instance, Christ's body was to be placed inside the tomb. This proportional discrepancy is revealed through the slab of stone upon which St. John stands. This stone projects out into the viewer's space, and it is apparent that Rogier is playing with the rules of perspective, something he may have seen and studied whilst visiting Italy, especially Florence.

Technical analysis of this image yields a few notable points. First, Rogier utilized a thin preparatory layer through which the grain of wood can be seen.[48] Upon this preparatory layer he executed a highly detailed underdrawing in brush, which reveals much about the painting's construction. Dirk de Vos notes Rogier's use of fluid long strokes with precise detailing and the utilization of parallel hatching on obliques, lengthwise and curves. There is fluidity to Rogier's underdrawing that suggests confidence with no hesitations or repeats. The underdrawing is extremely elaborate and includes complex details, such as each of the faces of his figures and agrostology of the landscape. This could point to the images being copied from a cartoon or study drawings that have since been lost.[49] The utilization of highly detailed underdrawings is a notable characteristic of the Netherlandish mode. During the second stage of painting, it is apparent that modifications to the head of the Virgin and to virtually all the hands and feet of the figures were made. These changes include the Virgin's head, which was originally more bowed and downcast; Christ's head, which was originally positioned lower; and the stone slab upon which St. John stands, which was not originally planned and was inserted during the final stage. Of all these modifications, the most intriguing is the last-minute inclusion of the stone slab, which seems to suggest a certain importance to the artist. Christ's bleeding feet rest upon the stone and an ointment pot rests to the right. On the other side of Mary Magdalen sits Joseph of Arimathea's hat amongst the greenery, which balances out the scene. De Vos suggests that the stone slab acts as a direct parallel to the altar that the painting was intended to rest above. Furthermore, de Vos shows

[48] De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 330.
[49] Ibid., 330.

similarities between this image and a predella painted by Fra Angelico that adorned the high altar of San Marco in Florence (c. 1438-1440) (**fig. 2**).[50] There is no stylistic link, but there is a sense that Rogier may have borrowed motifs from Fra Angelico's predella, specifically the rectangular opening of the tomb, the way in which St. John bows inward towards the body of Christ, and the way Christ's draperies create a highlighting carpet to and from his body.[51]

Looking at this image, there are key aspects to highlight that will later be used to demonstrate the similarities of Cosmè Tura's work to that of Rogier. First, note the intensely articulated and detailed style Rogier employs. Consider how he carefully renders the small village in the distance accessible through winding roads on either side. Rogier took the time to paint each tiny window into each of the buildings and even places folds in the drapery of the two women walking up the path to the left. Another aspect to consider is, as previously mentioned, the proportion and articulation of the figures. The figures in the foreground quite clearly are larger than what could feasibly fit within the tomb behind them. Rogier uses this proportion as a tool to influence his viewer into the proper mindset or meditation that was appropriate for the immediate setting and function of the painting as the high altar of a church. His execution of large figures within believable spaces evoked emotional responses that impressed his Italian audience. Rogier's process, as seen through technical analysis, his utilization of underdrawings, preparatory layers and washes, is not a technique that would have been visible to the

[50] De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden*, 330.
[51] Ibid., 330.

naked eye of the contemporary viewer.[52] Furthermore, Rogier van der Weyden is using oil paint, which allows him to layer glazes of pigments suspended in oil, creating deep and rich modulations between dark and light hues. In fact, not one color is repeated within the composition of the six elaborately detailed figures within the scene. Later, these techniques made possible with oil paint will be seen being used by Cosmè Tura in some of his more important works in Ferrara.

To see the similarities of Cosmè Tura's work to that of Rogier van der Weyden, this thesis focuses on three of Tura's images, *Calliope*, from a cycle of *The Muses* (c. 1447-1457) (**fig. 7**), *The Roverella Altarpiece* (c. mid-1470s) (**fig. 8**) and *Saint Jerome* (c. 1470) (**fig. 9**), and considers them in relation to Rogier's style and techniques to display similarities, both compositionally and materially. The attention to detail, interaction amongst figures, line quality, the depiction of space and 'princely magnificence' described by Decembrio and Carbone can be seen in both Rogier's and Tura's styles.[53] Furthermore, through the use of the technical analysis of Tura's work by conservator, Jill Dunkerton, the clear material and technical links between both artists become apparent.

Cosmè Tura's painted allegorical figure, usually identified as one of the *Muses* (likely *Calliope*), is considered to be one of the earliest works painted by the artist during his professional career. The panel, which now resides with the London National

[52] Jill Dunkerton, *Cosmè Tura's Painting Technique*, 122-123. Dunkerton also notes areas of forceful hatching in Tura's work which are also scene in Netherlandish painting. Furthermore, she notes that the she sees similarities in the breadth and fluidity of the outlines of Rogier's and Tura's work.

[53] Jill Dunkerton, "Cosmè Tura as Painter and Draughtsman: The Cleaning and Examination of His 'Saint Jerome,'" *London National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 15 (1994): 42-53, esp, 43.

Gallery's Collection, was one of nine panels created for a studiolo in the d'Este castle of Belfiore outside of the city of Ferrara. The series of *Muses,* though primarily painted by the hand of Cosmè Tura, was started in 1447 by Angelo da Siena. Da Siena managed to complete two panels, as well as begin a number of others before his death. In 1456, the young Cosmè Tura, who had recently become the favored court artist to the d'Este family, took up the task of completing the series that Angelo da Siena had begun.

The Muse in question, widely accepted as Calliope, the chief of all Muses, presents a strong, imposing figure (**fig. 7**). She is opulent and sits enthroned within a structure composed of golden dolphins with sharp teeth and jewel inlayed eyes and a shell canopy. Calliope presided over eloquence and epic poetry due to the ecstatic harmony of her voice. Her drapery is most impressive, painted in rich deep-layered glazes of red and green in oil. The background is constructed similarly in layers of expensive ultramarine blue. Conservators from the London National Gallery suggest that this painting was created to be positioned high above normal human height within the studiolo. This position of looking up at the panel not only accounts of the figure's gaze downward, but also heightens the richness of the colors used in the draperies and the background.[54] Even the dolphins become more fantastical and frightening; their sharp teeth becoming intensified from the viewers' upward perspective.

Technical research through infrared and x-radiology reveals that beneath the image is a fully developed underdrawing that is placed on top of an image painted in

[54] Jill Dunkerton, "The Unmasking of Tura's 'Allegorical Figure': A Painting and its Concealed Image," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 11, London (1987), esp, 5.

tempera by Angelo da Siena. The incredibly detailed underdrawing speaks to Tura's extraordinary draftsmanship skills, which Dunkerton considers him, in voice recording the National Gallery website, to be "one of the greatest draftsmen of all time."[55] When looking closely at the red drapery of the Muse's dress, there are areas of degradation, in which the cross-hatching of the underdrawing can be seen.[56] This detailed underdrawing of hatching and cross-hatching tells us that Tura knew oil's ability to achieve deep rich tones. When viewing paint samples in conjunction to the radiology previously mentioned, Dunkerton was able to assess how the uppermost painted layer—that is, the layer painted primarily in oil—was executed. Dunkerton found that the color areas are systematically undermodeled with opaque pigment mixtures and then completed with applications of transparent and semi-transparent glazes. This was essentially the technique being used by early Netherlandish artists. The level of great skill and sophistication that Tura utilized in this panel shows that he had a full understanding of the Netherlandish mode. As previously mentioned, at the very least works by Rogier van der Weyden were present in Ferrara during Tura's time. Stylistic similarities to Rogier's style, such as the Muse's brocaded sleeves, the shape of the figure's face and the method of depicting clouds, can clearly be seen. However, possibly the strongest and most important connection that is seen in this early work is that of the novel technique in which the London National Gallery's *Muse* was painted.[57]

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[55] Jill Dunkerton, "Art in the Making: A Muse (Calliope?)." London National Gallery Website.
[56] Dunkerton, "The Unmasking," 8-9.
[57] Dunkerton, "The Unmasking," 31.

When looking at the *Roverella Altarpiece* (**fig. 8**) by Cosmè Tura, the aspects of detail, poetics, 'princely magnificence,' color and design as valued by Decembrio, Alberti, Carbone, Borso and Leonello can be seen within the work of Rogier van der Weyden. The crowning semicircular pediment (**fig. 8a),** central (**fig. 8b**) and right hand side panels (**fig. 8c**) are accessible to the modern viewer and should be looked at together.

It is important first to look at the section of Tura's altarpiece that bears the most resemblance to Rogier's work, the surmounting semicircular pediment. This piece entitled *The Lamentation of the Dead Christ* **(Fig. 8a)** displays the moment in which Christ had been taken from the cross and placed in the Virgin Mary's arms. Although Tura took artistic liberty and places his figures into a nonspecific architectural setting, there are many similarities between his treatment of the Lamentation scene and Rogier's *Entombment*. Both artists paint their figures large within the given space of the panel. This technique impresses a dominating and emotive feeling on the viewer. Both artists choose to contrast the nakedness of Christ's body through dressing the other figures in rich elaborate draperies. It is also evident that both artists share an interest in relaying emotion through gesture. Just as St. John bows forward and the Magdalen spreads her hands as she kneels to invoke emotion in Rogier's *Entombment*, Tura's characters look as though they are captured in a fleeting moment in time.[58]

The central panel (**fig. 8b**) depicts the Virgin and Child enthroned within a marble niche that is posed upon an architecturally implausible stone block tier. Together, the pair is surrounded by horned tablets inscribed with Hebrew scripture, cherubs with

[58] Campbell, *Cosmè Tura*, 219.

golden vines and dangling red and white grapes indigenous to the Northern Italian countryside. A gigantic seashell that is incorporated into the dome of the niche supports a cornice decorated with the four creatures of Ezekiel's vision in the Jewish bible. Four musical Angels in contemporary dress flank the ornate niche-throne. Each musical angel is dressed in alternating high-toned pink and green garments, a color scheme that is repeated in the architectural temple-like structure that comprises the heavenly court.[59] At the base of the blocks directly in the foreground, two figures, whom most scholars consider to be "wingless angels," press the keys to operate a contemporary organ with pipes organized in a *chiocciola*.[60] This peculiarly shaped object has been identified by scholars as possibly documenting the design of an organ that was made for Leonello d'Este and noted by Cyriacus of Ancona during his visit in 1449.[61] Cyriacus is the same humanist scholar previously mentioned to have noted seeing Rogier's now lost *Descent* triptych in the collection of Leonello d'Este. The instrument would have had a twittering sound known very well to the ears of the contemporary viewer and would have brought an auditory dimension to the stridency of color in the heavenly realm. Both artists incorporate lavish details throughout their work. The decorative element of putti and floral designs are painted in the Netherlandish mode to look as though they are made of copper or brass. The highly decorative and detailed nature of this work is very similar to the level of detail we have previously seen in Rogier van der Weyden's *Entombment*.

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[59] Ibid., 123.
[60] Ibid., 101. Campbell defines *a chiocciola* as an organ whose pipes are arranged in a spiral form as if fashioned to look like a spiral seashell.
[61] Ibid., 101.

However, when looking from the circular pediment's dark tonality to the pastel nature of the central Madonna and Child panel, a striking difference is apparent. In the central panel, there is an interesting combination of the traditional opaque coloring found in the early Italian style being used in conjunction with the lavish detail that is traditionally found in Northern works. This combination contrasts with the dark and deep hues that Tura employs in the overall composition of the semicircular pediment. There is little to no continuity between the two panels stylistically and it leads one to think that Tura may have been experimenting with different painting techniques. Tura painted the central and most important panel using a traditional Italian palette that would have been both inherent to his training and familiar to his patron. The semicircular pediment would have been placed above the central panel, closer to the natural light that may have come through clerestory windows. Tura may have considered that natural light and known that it would enrich and brighten the deep pigmented glazes he utilized. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that when looking at the *Roverella Altarpiece,* we see a moment in which Tura is experimenting with different oil painting modes and their visual effects. There is an apparent transition from the traditional opaque painting method he utilized in the central panel to the multitude of glazed layers he uses in the crowning pediment.

Returning to the central panel and visual focus, Mary cradles the sleeping child with one arm, which Tura artfully and exaggeratedly dangles with an effortless weightiness that is reminiscent of the 'swooning Madonna' prototype constructed by Rogier van der Weyden in his figures from *The Entombment* scene that was examined

earlier.[62] Tura's Virgin has a youthfulness that is evoked through the doughy softness of her skin, which the artist is able to achieve through the use of oil. The fleshy tactile quality of all of Tura's figures portrays a realism that directly contrasts with the overly opulent extravagance of details and comprehensively patterned color scheme. The physicality of the figures and the thoroughly implemented color scheme are attributes that are also embodied by Rogier's style. Tura's Virgin lowers her eyes, which have a glassy sadness to them, as she gazes down to her right. The way in which she holds her limp sleeping child seems to foreshadow Rogier's Crucifixion scene. Tura's attempt to portray to his viewers an emotive quality can be seen through the way in which he renders sadness in the Virgin's expression. The musicality of the angels with their aural dimensionality and the physically detailed nature of the saints with the patron in right side panel all contribute to poetic majesty and lavishness that was extoled by Cordone in his *Oratio pro nipote Galeotti Assassini*. The carefully considered composition that has been established displays the incorporation of humanistic theory within art during the fifteenth century. Furthermore, the inclusion of the specific *chiocciola* shaped organ is a direct reference to the Duke of the Ferrarese court whom was recently deceased. The foregrounding of the instrument cannot be coincidental and pays respect to the court in which Tura held the position as leading artist.

Utilizing late twentieth- and early twenty-first century technology, technical analysis of art today has been able to yield greater information about the studio techniques of artists from the past. Joseph Manca in his catalogue on Tura looks to

[62] Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of Mary*, 67.

extensive technical analysis of Tura's work and cites aspects of the Netherlandish tradition within Tura's techniques.[63] Manca's scholarship was elaborated upon by the London National Gallery through their technical analysis of another panel by Tura, *Saint Jerome,* (c. 1470) (**fig. 8**). This geographically detailed, mountainous setting is one that seems reminiscent of German Renaissance landscapes, and expresses a moment from Saint Jerome's life captured and frozen in time. Saint Jerome's face expresses sincere emotion via Tura's descriptive articulation of light, shadow and detailed wrinkles. As Saint Jerome raises a rock with his right hand, blood trickles down his chest, signifying that he is in the act of self-flagellation. Each drop of blood is articulated believably through detailed highlights within each individual drop. The blood droplets seem almost directly re-appropriated from the realistic tears that are associated with Rogier van der Weyden's scenes of intense emotion and piety. Tura's *Saint Jerome*, as well as the *Roverella Altarpiece,* utilizes drapery and excessive decorative elements that embody an International Gothic character, which are elements that are also present within Rogier's compositions. It is clear that Tura had, at the very minimum, access to Rogier's work and found value in emulating techniques such as underdrawings, washes, minute detailing, structured sweeping draperies and Netherlandish compositions and exaggerated gestures within his work.[64]

Cosmè Tura's utilization of the red lake and brown *imprimatura* extends the earthy color scheme in his *Saint Jerome*. The panel displays the artist's technical and

[63] Manca, *Cosmè Tura,* 61.
[64] Dunkerton, "Cosmè Tura as Painter and Draughtsman," 53. 70

stylistic practices well, most notably his use of underdrawings, oil and distemper, realistic detailing and the compositional formulae of northern art represented in Rogier's religious scenes.[65] This artistic mode was not uncommon in northern Italy during this time, and many artists, including Mantegna, Piero della Francesca, Jacopo Bellini and Pisanello, can all be seen embodying some of these aspects of the northern tradition. Manca, however, notes that of all of the artists in the region Tura was the only artist utilizing the Netherlandish practice of extensive underdrawings together with the oil medium to achieve his compositions, as seen through the *Roverella Altarpiece*.

Dunkerton also has identified Tura's use of brownish and red-brown washed layers over the preparatory ground and underdrawings in his work of *St. Jerome* (**fig. 9**).[66] Similarly, to Rogier and Van Eyck, Tura's underdrawings were elaborate. All three artists would carefully lay out in great detail their compositions, even going as far as to use areas of hatching and cross-hatching to delineate lights and darks. After the underdrawing was completed, Tura would then lay down a wash layer of red lake and brown. This wash, often referred to as *imprimatura*, is the initial thin layer of stain placed upon the preparatory ground when a painting is first commenced. The *imprimatura* is not directly visible to the eye of the viewer, though it does affect the tones, value and light of the final product. Tura would not have been able to recognize the implementation of this technique when viewing Rogier's work with his naked eye. Through toning the stark whiteness of the preparatory ground, the *imprimatura* fractures

[65] Ibid., 43.
[66] Ibid., 43.

the light that penetrates the layers of oil glazes as it reflects back into the eyes of the viewer. The use of monochrome underdrawings and washes to define volume and lighting is a technique that has been traditionally associated, when referencing Italy specifically, with Leonardo da Vinci after 1480. Scholars have noted Piero della Francesca utilizing brown washes to model the flesh of his figure; however, no artist used it as extensively as Cosmè Tura did.[67] This technique of using complex washes, Dunkerton notes, is seen more commonly in Netherlandish works, more specifically the work of Rogier and his workshop.[68] The very presence of the brownish pigments indicates that Tura was not adhering to the models prescribed by Cennini and Alberti. It also explains why Tura's finished works look vastly different relative to finished works of other Italian artists who used the oil medium. It is more likely that knowledge of this technique might have come, as previously mentioned, from Tura's peer Angelo Maccagnino.

To summarize, there are two key attributes in Cosmè Tura's work that point through technical analysis to similarities to Netherlandish paintings techniques, especially those of Rogier van der Weyden. The first is the most basic; the fact that Tura is using the oil medium at all. Although other artists, specifically in the Veneto, such as Antonello da Messina and Andrea Mantegna, were using oil, Tura is the only artist known to use the medium in Ferrara. Tura's style is close to the Netherlandish mode in that he is utilizing the same medium in the same manner. Tura layered pure pigment

[67] Manca, *Cosmè Tura,* 61.
[68] Dunkerton, "Cosmè Tura as Painter and Draughtsman," 46-48.

glazes to achieve dark, deep hues as seen in the construction of the *Muse* and the semicircular pediment of the *Roverella Altarpiece*. Tura likely learned through his peer Angelo Maccagnino and by directly observing Rogier's work the Netherlandish oil method of layering translucent oil glazes to achieve rich and deep hues. No matter how hard an artist using tempera tries, he or she will never be able to achieve the visual effects that oil has. The second attribute that technical analysis of Tura's works reveals is the extensive use of underdrawings and the application of red lakes as a base wash. These are attributes most clearly seen in Tura's *Saint Jerome* and are two major techniques employed in work by Rogier van der Weyden. Dunkerton considers Tura to be a tremendous draughtsman, emphasizing Tura's strong dependence on drawings and, more specifically, underdrawings within his artistic practice.

Tura's use of oil in the techniques he employed from the peripheral court of Ferrara has perplexed scholars and caused them to seek out connections to northern artists. Though we might never be able to determine exactly how Tura gained knowledge of these techniques, it is apparent that he knew more about Netherlandish artistic techniques than has traditionally been acknowledged. Through looking at Tura's work stylistically and materially in comparison to Rogier van der Weyden's in conjunction with the information that technical analysis gives us, we are able to clearly identify Tura as an important outlier in comparison with other Renaissance artists at this time, and certainly with Vasari's characterization of him as peripheral and unworthy of inclusion in his narrative of Italian Renaissance art. His reliance on underdrawings and layering of multiple glazes to achieve deep rich hues align his artistic process more closely to the

Netherlandish mode than to traditional Italian artistic practices. Tura, who has been traditionally viewed as idiosyncratic in comparison with his artistic peers, is an early, albeit perhaps quirky, example of an artist who was able successfully to incorporate Netherlandish painting techniques into his already established Italian style and training.

CHAPTER 4: ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN AND COSMÈ TURA - THE BIGGER PICTURE

> Vittoria Colonna: I much wish to know, since we are on the subject, what Flemish painting may be, and whom it pleases, for it seems to me more devout than that in the Italian manner.
>
> Michelangelo: Flemish painting…. will, generally speaking…. please the devout better than any painting of Italy, which will never cause him to shed a tear, whereas that of Flanders will cause him to shed many; and that not through the vigor and goodness of the devout person. It will appeal to women, especially to the very old and the very young, and also to monks and nuns and to certain noblemen who have no sense of true harmony. In Flanders they paint, with a view to deceiving the eye, such things may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill, as for example saints and prophets. They paint draperies and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes, with many figures on this side and many on that. And all this, though it pleases some persons, is done without reason or art…[69]

This quotation was taken originally from Roman Dialogues, which was a text written by the Portuguese painter Francisco de Hollanda and claims to contain conversations between the Marchesa Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo at the S. Silvestro al Quirinale in 1538. It is important to note that this text cannot be understood as a recording Michelangelo's views specifically and should be seen more clearly as an anecdote concocted by Hollanda better to reflect his own views, or his own interpretation of what Michelangelo's views should be on the matter. Despite the mythologizing aspect of Hollanda's fictive portrayal of Michelangelo's views on Netherlandish art, this document has long set the tone for the way in which Netherlandish art has been viewed in

[69] Cited in Nuttall, 1.

relation to Italy. This quotation is the perfect example of why scholars have traditionally portrayed animus in the relationship between Italian and Netherlandish Renaissance art. Although Hollanda's Michelangelo is critical of the emotional and fussy nature of Netherlandish art and its appeal to women, monks and the elderly, he acknowledges the North's exploitation of optical illusions to create very believable, expressive images.[70] Hollanda's text is crucial in understanding why cross-cultural artistic interactions throughout history need to be re-evaluated. It is evident that misconceptions such as this, coupled with the monocular force of Vasari's lens of Italian Renaissance art, have determined how the history of art has traditionally been taught.

In addition to calling into question this common misconception of rancor between Northern and Southern Renaissance art, this thesis has displayed the cross-cultural exchange, or at least shared practices, between Rogier van der Weyden and Cosmè Tura through a look at other valuable art historical models defined by the approach of Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg with centers versus peripheries.[71] Brussels, the home of Rogier van der Weyden, was an active artistic center during the fifteenth century. It was a large, established city that was a bustling center for trade, and Rogier's extensive workshop enabled his style to be disseminated widely through numerous trained followers and other imitators of his appealing manner. His Descent from the Cross is the

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[70] Ibid. Nuttall goes on to display that Michelangelo had works in his corpus that emulated the Netherlandish mode. She cites Michelangelo's copy of Martin Schongauer's *Temptation of Saint Anthony* engraving and the similarities between Michelangelo's youthful *Entombment* and Rogier van der Weyden's *Lamentation.*

[71] Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, "Centre and Periphery," in *History of Italian Art*, eds. Ellen Bianchini and Claire Dorey (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), [page #s needed}

quintessential embodiment of the Netherlandish style and displays the emotive qualities of which Michelangelo was apparently critical, according to Hollanda. Due to the city's strong interest in artistic commerce and its cultural pride, Rogier's Descent from the Cross became a canonic image that was copied and circulated throughout Europe.[72] The almost immediate fame and dissemination of image presented in the Descent from the Cross gained Rogier prestige throughout Europe, catching the attention particularly of Italian patrons of arts, such as Borso and Leonello d'Este, as well as Cosmo de Medici. In today's terms, Rogier was an artistic superstar in comparison to Cosmè Tura, who was not as famous but whose art had achieved a localized appreciation, in no small part due to his emulation of Rogier's own style.

Through moving from the flourishing cosmopolitan city of Brussels to looking at the style of Cosmè Tura in the peripheral court of Ferrara, this thesis demonstrates the appreciation and incorporation of Netherlandish style and techniques not so cherished in the Italian centers of Florence or Rome. Tura's localized style has conventionally been considered obscure, unorthodox and at some points distasteful within Italian Renaissance scholarship, for not abiding by the contemporary preferences established by artist such as Alberti and later Vasari. His style blended art theoretical ideals encouraged in the humanist key figures of the court of Ferrara with a re-appropriation of characteristics taken from Netherlandish oil painting. The similarities in process and design between Rogier van der Weyden and Cosmè Tura point directly to localized reasons for Italian

[72] Amy Powell, "The Errant Image: Rogier van der Weyden's Deposition from the Cross and Its Copies," *Art History* 29.4 (2006): 540-562.

appreciation and positive reception of the Northern Netherlandish process. Through this re-evaluation of Tura's work we gain a better and more historically accurate understanding of a range of Italian Renaissance practices, as well as a greater knowledge of the stylistic and technical values embodied in the work of Rogier van der Weyden.

Considering Rogier van der Weyden's style within the context of contemporary texts of the Ferrarese court invites further investigation regarding how Tura may have learned of such techniques, if not from observing Rogier himself at work. A juxtaposition of these two artists' careers creates a clearer understanding of Tura's idiosyncratic style. This thesis nuances modern scholarship on Rogier van der Weyden and Cosmè Tura through investigating what the relationship between the two artists might have been, despite the uncertainty of Rogier's physical presence in the Ferrarese court. Most scholarship deals briefly with aspects of this possibility, but does not extend further to probe the value given to northern work through Rogier and Cosmè's other mediated connections. Northern and Southern Renaissance connections have been investigated through other artists, such as Jan van Eyck and Albrecht Dürer. The attention given to Rogier van der Weyden in this paper shows yet another instance in which the Italians emulated and valued the northern tradition, seized upon certain desirable qualities of the oil painting techniques, and emulated the highly detailed surfaces and emotive gestures that were more attributable to Rogier. The result is that we find a much more complex dialogue between artists and patrons on both sides of the Alps—materially, compositionally and technically—notably seen through the works of Rogier van der Weyden and Cosmè Tura.

FIGURES

Fig. 1 Rogier van der Weyden, *Descent From the Cross*, oil on oak panel, 1435.

Fig. 2 Rogier van der Weyden, *Entombment: Lamentation of Christ's Body*, oil on panel, 1463-4.

Fig. 3 Fra Angelico, *Entombment*, tempera on panel, 1463-4.

Fig. 4 Rogier van der Weyden, *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin*, oil on panel, 1435- 1440.

Fig. 5 Rogier van der Weyden, *Triptych of the Seven Sacraments*, oil on panel, 1445-1450.

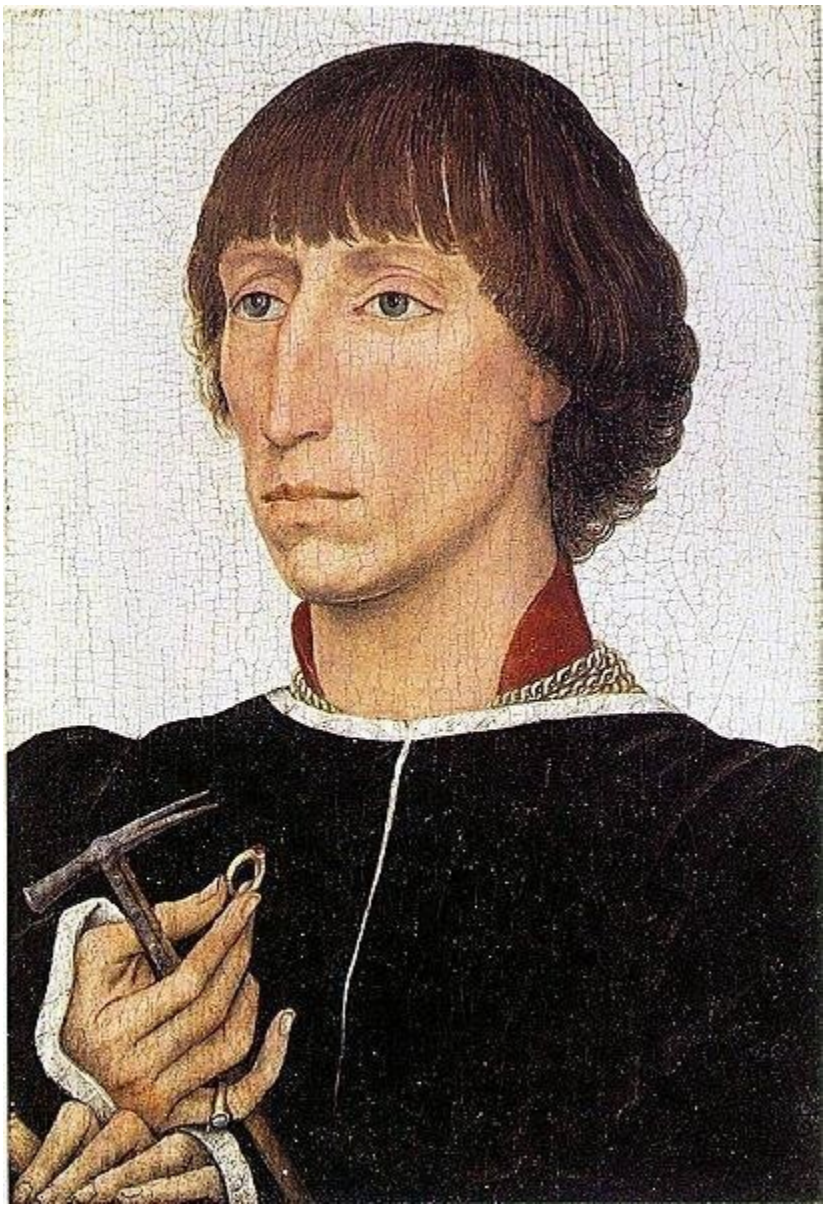

Fig. 6 Rogier van der Weyden, Portrait of Francesco d'Este, oil on panel, 1460.

Fig. 7 Cosmè Tura, *An Allegorical Figure (Muse?)(Calliope?)*, oil and tempera on panel, 1447-1457.

8.a)

8.b)

8.c)

Fig. 8. a) Cosmè Tura, *The Lamentation of Christ's Body* a part of The *Roverella Altarpiece*, oil on panel, mid-1470s, **b)** *The Roverella Altarpiece*, oil on panel, mid-1470s, and **c)** Side Panel of the *Roverella Altarpiece*, oil on panel, mid-1470s.

Fig. 9 Cosmè Tura, *Saint Jerome*, oil on panel, 1470.

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