'Het leven van Ioseph den Patriarch',
the final work of Anthonis Blocklandt

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A painting depicting the *Joseph's brothers showing his bloodstained coat to Jacob* (fig. 1) in the Diözesanmuseum in Freising has until now been considered to be the work of an anonymous Flemish follower of Frans Floris. From the draughtsmanship of figural types, the lighting, the brushwork and the composition it can be recognised quite clearly to be the work of Anthonis Blocklandt. It is almost certainly part of a set of paintings on the life of Joseph the Patriarch, said by Van Mander to have been the final work left unfinished by this artist. A smaller painting also on canvas, *Joseph Interpreting Pharao's Dreams* (fig. 2) in Utrecht, has been associated with the set mentioned by Van Mander. The removal of later overpainting from its edges has revealed that it has been cut down from an originally larger size. Both paintings are in fact unfinished and a red ground underneath the paint is plainly visible in certain areas. The Freising picture offers an idea of the original format of the Utrecht work, a factor which is of added importance since the edges of the composition became a more decisive element in Blocklandt's later work. Although the amount of surviving early work on which an opinion can be based is very small, Blocklandt's influence and historical significance appear to rest on these works of the last decade of his life. Van Mander says that the Blocklandt-oeuvre was decimated during the Iconoclasm. In a monograph on the artist and in two supplementary articles, Ingrid Jost was able to identify only two of the many altarpieces described by Van Mander and find only eight paintings which she could accept as the work of Blocklandt. Documentation of the painter's life is equally scarce. Almost nothing is known of his career beyond the few details given by Van Mander. After an apprenticeship with his uncle Henrick Assuersz. in Delft and two years in Antwerp with Frans Floris, he settled in Delft from 1552 to 1572. He then made a visit of a few months to Italy, returning apparently in the same year to Montfoort and then Utrecht, where he lived until his death in 1583 at the age of 49 or 50. He spent his final years with the Knights of St. John in St. Catherine's monastery in Utrecht and he also was buried there, so that he may be supposed to have remained a Catholic. The many lost altarpieces which he painted further support such an assumption. Accounts of the history of painting in the Netherlands during the later sixteenth century have traditionally presented Blocklandt as a less significant participant in the development toward an art more representative of the Northern Provinces, commonly seen as emerging fully in the oeuvres of Hendrick Goltzius and his contemporaries. Nevertheless
Blocklandt’s influence in the decade following his death has always been recognised. However, much of his early oeuvre was destroyed by the Iconoclast’s ‘blind fervour and senseless frenzy’ (‘blinden ijer en onverstandighe raserije’)\(^8\), so that, with so few works surviving from the 1570s, his influence can never be determined as clearly as the more decisive effect of Bartholomeus Spranger. While Spranger’s work reached the artists of Haarlem in 1583 through engravings and drawings, a number of large and impressive paintings of Blocklandt were still to be seen in Holland and Utrecht, and for some time thereafter Spranger and Blocklandt appear to have exerted rival influences on Hendrick Goltzius.\(^9\)

Despite the difference in their ages, Blocklandt and Spranger both encountered Italian art in a situation that was similar in its general characteristics. Artists of Vasari’s time had preferred harder forms and sought to reconcile ‘disegno interno’ with ‘disegno esterno’, as Zuccaro was later to codify these terms.\(^10\) Many of the younger artists took up the grace and the more ethereal forms of the ‘manner of Parmigianino’ in different ways – Jacopo Bertoja in Parma and Rome, Maso da San Friano in Florence and Francesco Primaticcio at Fontainebleau.\(^11\) Van Mander stressed the almost unique position of Blocklandt in the Netherlands as working in the ‘manner of Parmigianino’\(^12\), so that his paintings must have been seen in this light at that time.