MOLLY FARIES

A woodcut of the *Flood* re-attributed to Jan van Scorel*

It was most likely in the summer of 1520 that Jan van Scorel returned to Venice from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The young Dutchman then visited several other Italian cities, as Carel van Mander tells us, before travelling on to Rome where he became curator of the Belvedere collection under Adrian VI. To Van Mander and subsequent art historians, Scorel's contact with Italian art during the early 1520s was of fundamental importance, for it established the painter as the major proponent of Italianate style in the north-Netherlands after his return to Utrecht in 1524. Italian influence is an often-considered topic in Scorel literature: although outright copies of Italian works are infrequent in Scorel's career, the artist clearly knew Venetian and Roman works, especially Raphael’s *loggie*, and compositions by Giulio Romano and Peruzzi.\(^1\) Additions to Scorel's *oeuvre* have been made steadily since the monographic studies early in this century,\(^2\) but it is not surprising that some of Jan van Scorel's compositions should have remained unrecognized, especially if long mistaken as Italian. The *Flood* (fig. 1) has usually been considered Venetian, perhaps executed by one of Titian's woodblock cutters, Nicolò Boldrini.\(^3\) It is here re-attributed to Jan van Scorel. The *Flood* is a large woodcut in two sheets. Copies in reverse and in the original direction also exist, some bearing the monogram of the later 16th century Italian publisher and printer, Andrea Andreani. Although the two versions of the print differ slightly in size, the borders are original, even if retouched as they were in the examples I was able to study. The Metropolitan's example of the original has also been tinted in imitation of a chiaroscuro woodcut, but the print was certainly planned without any additions in color.\(^4\) The Andreani copy undoubtedly contributed to the basic categorization of the woodcut as Italian, yet the problematic nature of its style was conceded when it was included in the 1976/77 exhibition, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*. The attribution of the design to either Titian or Palma Vecchio (perhaps because of his bathing scenes) has never been fully accepted. The catalogue entry, in addition, alludes to the print's northern aspects: it evokes 'a different world, that of Dürer.'\(^5\)

The scene depicted is the deluge described in Genesis 8:6. Couples and nude figures cling to a narrow tongue of land in the foreground while across the water tiny figures clamber up a distant shore to try to reach the top of a pyramid standing before other ancient ruins. Throughout the composition many of the distraught and frightened turn to glance or gesture towards the ark floating on the water which will eventually inundate the entire setting. The rising water has already claimed a number of victims, including a dog and a horse, and it stretches upward on a diagonal to a wide expanse near the horizon. The *Flood* has often been interpreted as the symbolic parallel for the Baptism of Christ, and the ark seen as a prefiguration of *Ecclesia*; but Scorel's vision recalls
the eschatological sense of the verses of Matthew 24:37-39: ‘...and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.’ Like another slightly earlier northern European interpretation of the Flood, Hans Baldung Grien’s painting of 1516 (fig. 2), Scorel’s composition stresses the unrelenting obliteration of earthly life over any hope of salvation. In the interesting subject of Mankind Before the Flood that develops slightly later in the Netherlands in the 16th century, the warning of impending doom continues to be the basic theme. Rather than the combination of the events of the deluge and the recession of the water which sometimes occurs in Italian versions, the subject of Scorel’s Flood seems to be the moment when the damned recognize that the ark will forever be inaccessible to them. A painting in the Prado of the same subject has in fact been attributed to Jan van Scorel (fig. 3). The large panel has never been accepted as an autograph work, but perhaps it should now be regarded as the work of a follower, reflecting Jan van Scorel’s concern with this subject. A number of motifs in the woodcut of the Flood recur, however, in other paintings which are more secure attributions. The hand-on-the-head gesture is seen again in Jan van Scorel’s Bathsheba in the Rijksmuseum. The antique-inspired ark is similar to any number of ships in Scorel’s versions of the Martyrdom of St. Ursula. Moreover, the combination of the pyramid of Caius Sextus with an obelisk, gate, and columns like those from the temple of Saturn is repeated almost exactly in two paintings in Jan van Scorel’s circle. Compositionally, in the figure types and groupings, and in the handling of the