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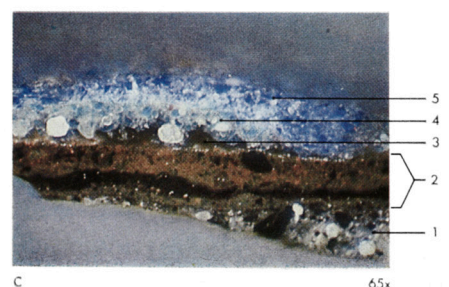
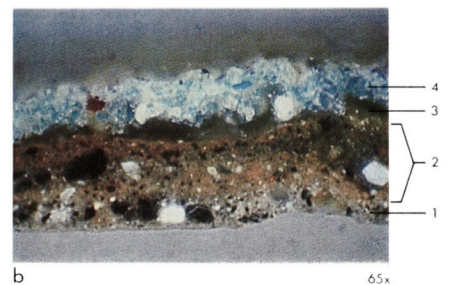
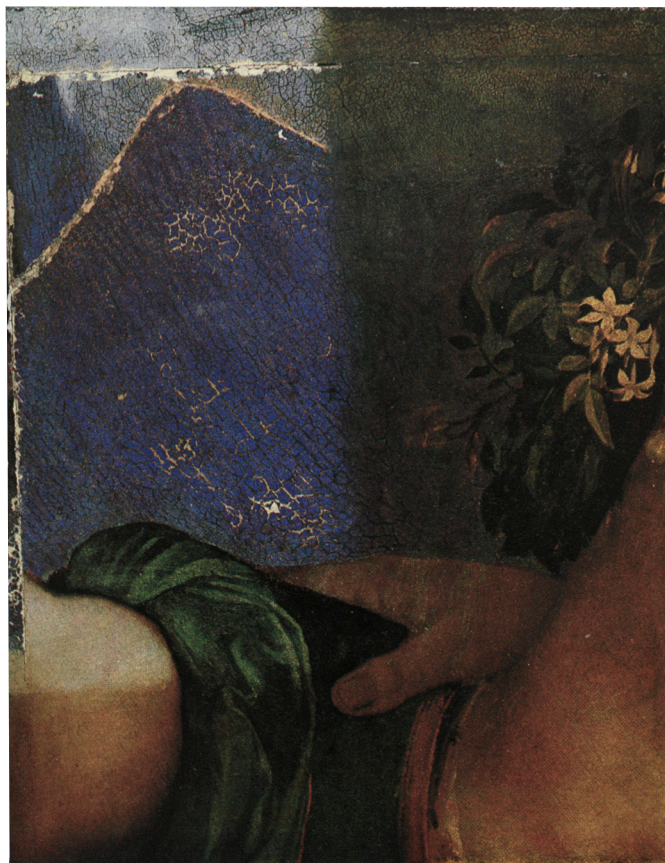
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**Plate 4** Dosso Dossi, *A Man Embracing a Woman* (No.1234). After cleaning and restoration.

**Plate 5** (Right)  
Dosso Dossi, *A Man Embracing a Woman* (No.1234). Full caption on facing page.

**Plate 6**  
(Far right)  
Dosso Dossi, *A Man Embracing a Woman* (No.1234). Photomicrographs of paint cross-sections. Full caption on facing page.





# Fragments of a Ceiling Decoration by Dosso Dossi

Allan Braham and Jill Dunkerton

One of the four paintings by Dosso Dossi in the National Gallery Collection, *A Man Embracing a Woman* (No. 1234; Fig.1 and Plate 4, p.26) has long been amongst the most puzzling of the Gallery's sixteenth century Italian pictures [1]. Bought for the Collection in 1887, it had passed for many years as a painting by Giorgione showing Boccaccio and Fiametta, the mistress who inspired his writing, and it was believed to have come at some time before 1828 from the Borghese collection in Rome. Shortly after its acquisition the picture was reattributed to Dosso Dossi, and given a new title: 'A Muse inspiring a Court Poet' [2]. In 1975 the title was changed again

to the present more cautious, if less attractive, *A Man Embracing a Woman*.

Before the recent cleaning and restoration the peculiarities of its physical structure were just discernible through the extremely thick layers of old brown varnish. The two figures and most of the curved parapet over which they appear could be seen to be painted on a single piece of wood, identified as poplar, approximately 1 in. (25 mm.) thick and with a pronounced diagonal grain (labelled *A* in Fig.2). It is basically rectangular in shape, measuring 20½ in. (520 mm.) × 28⅞ in. (732 mm.), but with a curious curved section missing from the top left edge and a small triangular piece from the bottom right corner. It has, however, been restored to a rectangle by the insertion of suitably-shaped pieces of painted wood, apparently identical to that of the main panel (labelled *B* and *F* in Fig.2). Wedge-shaped fragments of similarly painted wood (labelled *C, D, E, G* and *H* in Fig.2) have then been added to all four sides, enlarging the central panel to its present dimensions of 21¾ in. (550 mm.) × 29¾ in. (755 mm.) and slightly canting the axis of the composition. All these additions are glued and nailed so firmly to the main panel that they have been forced to assume the same slightly twisted convex warp, despite the varying and sometimes contrary alignments of their wood grain. A channel cut diagonally across the back of the support (probably to hold a batten) runs through the extensions to the bottom and right edges and almost certainly dates from after the alterations to the panel (Fig.3). The wood in the areas around the extensions has been coated with a thin layer of gesso and painted pink (later covered with gummed paper), presumably to conceal the joins.

From the front an attempt had clearly been made to disguise the extraordinary construction of the panel by filling the gaps with a gesso or chalk and glue putty which had since cracked and in places flaked away — an early photograph of the work [3] suggests that the joins were once considerably less apparent. The putty had then been retouched and, where necessary, the forms of the main panel rather crudely extended over the additions to form a continuous composition. Some repainting was also evident in parts of the sky, added presumably to reduce the disfiguration caused by the wide, crazed drying-cracks characteristic of the entire paint film of the sky and, for example, still clearly visible beneath the paint of the extended arm on the fragment attached to the left-hand edge. The figures themselves, however, seemed to be in remarkably good condition, although greatly obscured in quality by the discoloured varnish.

A study of the X-rays and infra-red photographs

**Plate 5** Dosso Dossi, *A Man Embracing a Woman* (No.1234). Detail during cleaning of the top left corner. An area of discoloured varnish has been removed along with most of the retouchings in the sky and the overpaint covering the putty in the joins between the additions and the main panel. On the wedge-shaped fragment attached to the left edge a small section of the parapet with part of the male figure's shoulder has been uncovered but some of the repaint extending the female figure's arm has yet to be removed.

**Plate 6** Dosso Dossi, *A Man Embracing a Woman* (No.1234). Photomicrographs of paint cross-sections, photographed at 220 × magnification in reflected light; actual magnification on the printed page shown beneath each photomicrograph.

(a) Flesh of woman's arm.

1. Gesso ground.
2. Grey underlayer comprising lead white + carbon black.
3. Flesh paint; lead white + vermilion (trace).

(b) Greenish blue background from edge of wedge-shaped fragment *C* (see Fig.2, p.28).

(Gesso ground missing from sample.)

1. Grey underlayer; as layer 2 in (a).
2. Two or three layers containing a mixture of earth pigments, white and black. A small quantity of red lake pigment is also present in the warmer-coloured layer.
3. Unpigmented translucent layer which exhibits strong UV-fluorescence. This feature of the paint structure might possibly be interpreted as an intermediate varnish applied at some stage of painting; its precise function is not clear.
4. Azurite, lead white + a trace of red lake pigment. A thin scattering of natural ultramarine particles is present at the surface.

(c) Intense blue of background, from the main fragment.

(Gesso ground missing from sample.)

1. Grey underlayer; as layer 2 in (a).
2. As layer(s) 2 in (b), but containing in addition a thin inter-layer of unpigmented material, and at the surface a scattering of warmer-coloured earth pigment.
3. As layer 3 in (b).
4. Azurite + lead white.
5. Bright blue surface paint containing high-quality genuine ultramarine.





Figure 1 Dosso Dossi, *A Man Embracing a Woman* (No.1234), before cleaning.



Figure 2 Diagram showing the construction of the panel. The fragments are labelled A - H.





**Figure 3** Back of the panel. The gummed paper and painted gesso covering the joints have been partially removed to show the construction of the panel.

(Figs.4 and 5) not only confirmed that all the additions had come from the same source as the main panel, but also revealed that beneath the overpaint on three of the wedge-shaped extensions (*C*, *E* and *H*) there were small sections of curved parapet, above which were areas of black paint apparently identical to that of the male figure's garment. It was therefore possible to establish that these pieces had been removed from the right-hand edge of the main panel in the order *C*, *H*, *E*.

As a result of this preliminary examination the actual cleaning of the painting [4] produced few surprises, with the exception of the discovery of part of a hand (not recognizable in the X-ray) in the centre of the piece attached to the bottom edge (Fig.6). Apart from clarifying the construction of the panel and revealing an unsuspected richness of colour and brilliance of handling, cleaning also provided the opportunity for paint samples to be taken and cross-sections made in order to discover more about the materials used in the painting. Even in its technique the work displays some curious and unusual features.

The poplar panel was first prepared with a gesso ground (visible in only some of the cross-sections), like those found on most Italian panel paintings of the period, but in this case the ground is rather thinly applied, allowing the grain of the wood to become a prominent feature of the texture of the paint surface. Over this Dosso seems to have applied a further preparatory layer, consisting of lead white mixed with a black pigment, probably a form of charcoal but also

including some unusually large and glistening particles the source of which has yet to be identified (Plate 6a, p.26). The medium of this layer, like that of all the areas of paint sampled and analysed by gas-chromatography, has a palmitate/stearate ratio corresponding to that of walnut oil. It is reasonable to assume that this dark grey priming extends beneath the entire paint surface since it is present in all the paint samples and could often be seen where the upper layers of paint had flaked away along the edges of the various pieces of panel (Fig.6). Optically it has had most effect on the areas of flesh painting, partly because the paint above has almost certainly become slightly more transparent with age, but also because the large quantity of black pigment present in the priming may have retarded the rate at which it dried and thereby perhaps caused the network of wrinkles and fine drying cracks which disfigures the superimposed flesh paint. This cracking is particularly disturbing around the eyes, nose and upper lip of the female figure.

The female figure is dressed in a brilliant green robe edged with ribbons of a red and yellow shot fabric and worn over a transparent pale yellow chemise decorated with alternating green and pink patterned stripes. Owing to its excellent condition no samples were taken from the chemise (though the opacity of its folds in the X-ray suggests the use of lead-tin yellow) but a section taken through the shadow of a fold in her green robe shows, as expected, a mixture of verdigris or 'copper resinate' and lead-tin yellow superimposed over some rather darker modelling layers. A relatively undischoloured green glaze is present at the surface. Bright and remarkably well-preserved greens can often be seen in works by Dosso. Although the figure now





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wears a wreath of jasmine over her blond curls the X-ray shows that Dosso originally painted a headdress made of stiff yellow tufts (in fact still just visible beneath the flowers), similar to the tassels decorating the turban of the 'Melissa' in the Borghese Collection. Another small alteration now evident, is in the position of her pearl earring which swings at a strange angle, perhaps an attempt by the artist to suggest movement.

Beside this visionary, or at least somewhat 'theatrical' figure, the man to the right, dressed in black, seems all the more evidently a portrait, and one created with unusual care and affection. It can be seen from the X-ray that Dosso had some difficulty in establishing the spatial relationship between this figure and his companion. Originally he seems to have been bareheaded: by adding the hat and extending it over the completed forehead of the female figure (still without her present floral headdress), Dosso has pushed her head back behind that of the man in a most uncomfortable way, since she is clearly intended to be leaning out over the edge of the parapet. Illogical perspective and problems in foreshortening tend to be characteristic of Dosso's large-scale figure compositions.

The couple are set against an expanse of deep blue sky, relieved on the right by some rather solid-looking clouds. The layer structure of the sky is remarkably complicated but may help to explain the severe drying defects which have greatly altered its appearance. Over the dark grey layer, apparently common to the whole picture, the artist has applied two separate layers of brown paint, both composed of a mixture of coloured particles; the lower one mainly of yellow and orange earth pigments mixed with black and white to give a dull yellowish brown, and the upper of orange and red

**Figure 4** Infra-red photograph taken before cleaning which reveals sections of the parapet and of the male figure's shoulder on three of the wedge-shaped fragments (C, E and H). The overpaint on all the additions and the retouching in the sky are also evident. Dosso's dark grey priming (see Plate 6, p.26) would absorb infra-red radiation so it is not possible to detect any underdrawing that might be present on the gesso beneath.

**Figure 5** X-ray mosaic. The wood grain and several *pentimenti* are clearly visible and it can be seen that irregularly shaped hand-hammered pins and nails have been used to secure the additions.

**Figure 6** The painting after cleaning and before restoration. The old putty has been removed so that the joins are clearly visible and on some of the fragments the dark grey priming can be seen where the paint has flaked away along the cut edges. Apart from the drying defects and a few small losses the paint film is in very good condition.

(including a small quantity of a red lake pigment) with some black, giving the warm red-brown colour left exposed as an underpaint in, for example, the wreath worn by the female figure (Plate 6b, p.26). In some of the samples these brown layers are divided by a thin, almost black layer which seems particularly rich in medium. Above them follows a thin and not always continuous layer of warm golden yellow (not present at all in one of the sections examined) and next, most surprisingly, a very definite unpigmented layer similar in appearance to a natural resin varnish (Plate 6c, p.26) [5].

Only after this unpigmented layer was the blue paint of the sky added. This consists of a further two layers; an underpaint of lead white mixed with azurite, the cheaper of the two main blue pigments used in the early sixteenth century, and, finally, a layer of very high quality and, no doubt, expensive ultramarine, used with varying quantities of white lead, according to the degree of colour saturation





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6



required (see Plate 6c, p.26). In some areas this ultramarine layer does not completely cover the azurite beneath, resulting in the greenish patches visible in the clouds and where the sky has been painted round the outlines of the figures (Plate 4, p.26).

No obvious explanation can be given for the presence of the varnish-like layer beneath the blue pigments. There is no reason to believe that the sky is a later addition by a restorer and in fact there is documentary evidence that ultramarine was used on the painting by the artist himself (see below); while unfortunately the quantity of white lead present in the blue paint of the sky has eliminated any chance of discovering from the X-ray whether the brown layers beneath might be connected with an earlier, possibly architectural setting, with the non-continuous yellow layer perhaps representing some form of decoration. On the other hand similarly complicated paint structures may eventually be found in other works by Dosso and prove to be a not uncommon feature of the painter's technique [6]. Whatever the reasons for its use, the complex layer structure employed in the sky of *A Man Embracing a Woman* is almost certainly the main reason for the wrinkling and cracking affecting the uppermost layers of azurite and ultramarine [7].

No samples were taken from the warm grey paint of the curved stone parapet over which the figures appear; but the X-ray (Fig.5) shows that adjustments had to be made to the inner edge, even though the main curves of the moulding had been carefully incised into the gesso ground before painting. Given this curved base, it seems most likely that the main panel and the fragments attached to its edges originally formed part of a large roundel, painted presumably for a ceiling. The discoveries made during cleaning appear to confirm, and at the same time to amplify, a recent suggestion that the National Gallery picture together with a painting in the Longhi Foundation in Florence (Fig.7) formed part of the same ceiling decoration, which was the one carried out by Dosso for Alfonso d'Este in the early 1520s for the Camera del Pozzuolo (or Poggiolo) in Ferrara Castle [8].

The Longhi Foundation picture shows a smiling boy leaning out over a curved parapet and carrying a straw basket full of flowers, including sprays of jasmine like those worn by the figures in the National Gallery painting. It corresponds closely with the latter in scale, and in style, mood and subject matter. Its physical character, clarified by recent cleaning, is also remarkably similar. Although the fragment, which is very irregular in shape, has been transferred to canvas, the texture of the grain of the wood which once supported it remains impressed in the paint surface and is clearly visible in the X-rays [9]. The moulding of the parapet is marked with incised lines which relate to those on the National Gallery panel, while the paint of the boy's face and of the intense blue of the sky show identical drying defects. Before cleaning, the Florence fragment had also been made up as a complete rectangular picture with inset pieces of canvas, and then extensively repainted [10].

The ceiling *tondo* painted by Dosso



d'Este was one of the main decorations of a suite of five rooms, known as the Fabbrica dei Camerini, built in 1518–1519 on the site of a passage, the Via Coperta, which joined the castle itself and the nearby palace [11]. Leading directly from these rooms towards the castle, and sited over the moat, was the 'Studio di Marmo' and the adjacent 'Camerino d'Alabastro' where the 'Bacchanals' of Bellini and Titian hung. Though altered internally and refaced this whole architectural structure still survives, and the dimensions of the existing rooms correspond with those given in early documents [12]. As painter to the court, Dosso contributed decorations to several of the rooms, principally a large 'Bacchanal' and a painted frieze of scenes from the story of Aeneas for the 'Camerino d'Alabastro', a series of nine diamond shaped paintings (*'mandorle'*) and a frieze of landscapes in the second room of the 'Fabbrica dei Camerini', and the large circular ceiling painting in the adjacent room [13]. This was the third and the central room of the new suite, measuring 13 by 18½ Ferrarese feet, and its occasional designation as 'Camera del Poggiolo', presumably derived from the presence of a (still surviving) balcony which also serves the fourth room of the series.

The ceiling painting is mentioned in documents of the 1520s, in the inventory of the possessions of Cesare d'Este, drawn up in 1598, when Ferrara became a papal possession (and when Cardinal Aldobrandini removed the 'Bacchanals' from the 'Camerino d'Alabastro'), and in letters of 1607–1608 relating to the acquisition of paintings from the Camerini, including the ceiling *tondo*, by Cardinal Scipione Borghese, nephew of Pope Paul V. The *tondo* was one of the Dosso decorations presented in error to Cardinal

**Figure 7** Dosso Dossi, 'A Page with a Basket of Flowers', canvas (transferred from panel), 21⅞ × 19¾ (55 × 50). Florence, Fondazione Roberto Longhi. (Photograph: Gabinetto Fotografico Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici di Firenze.)

Borghese, to whom Cesare d'Este meant to present only the frieze of decorations of the story of Aeneas, and it is described in the letters referring to the transaction as 'a large *tondo* [of] five palmi [in diameter] with five heads which is a most beautiful and rare thing' [14]. In the inventory of 1598, made before the *tondo* was removed from the castle, its setting, presumably the ceiling, is described as gilded 'a Rosoni' with the picture in the centre, which suggests a coffered ceiling decorated with rosettes receding from the central oculus [15].

The documents for the payments to Dosso for the decorations of the Camerini are less easy to follow, but some of the entries refer specifically to the roundel and to the room for which it was destined. On 3 September and 22 December 1524 Dosso received payment for 'a *tondo* in the ceiling of the Camera del Pozzuolo', and on 26 September of the same year the artist was reimbursed for the expense of ultramarine which he had acquired for 'the *tondo* of the new ceiling'. A document of 5 January 1526 refers to a further payment for ultramarine for the *tondo*, and later in the same year Dosso, and his brother Battista and two apprentices, were paid for work on the ceiling of the same room [16]. Large quantities of ultramarine, added at a late stage, are conspicuously present in the sky of the National Gallery picture, and most probably also occur on the Florence fragment.

Many of the acquisitions made by Scipione Borghese remain in the Villa Borghese collection, but others, including the Dossos from Ferrara, were sold at the time of the Napoleonic invasion of Italy [17]. Of the early history of the picture in the Longhi Foundation nothing is known for certain but in the case of the National Gallery painting the well-founded tradition that it was once in the Borghese collection, stated as a fact when the picture was sold for the first time at auction in 1868, constitutes a positive link between the painting and those extracted from Ferrara in 1608 [18]. It is not traceable as a rectangular picture in the Borghese inventories, but a large *tondo* by Dosso is mentioned, together with some of the other paintings by him taken from Ferrara, in Manilli's guide to the Villa Borghese of 1650 [19].

Cutting up the ceiling painting into saleable portions — assuming that this is indeed what happened at the start of the nineteenth century [20] — was carried out with a distinct, if unappealing, skill. Nevertheless it is possible to produce a plausible reconstruction of the *tondo* and to establish with reasonable accuracy the original locations of the surviving fragments (Fig.8). Enough geometrical guidelines are present on the National Gallery fragments for the rest of the architecture of the oculus to be projected. The bottom left corner of the main piece of wood is slightly rounded and probably marks the outer circumference of the painted parapet, giving the *tondo* a diameter of approximately 55 in. (1.40 m) which corresponds closely to the dimension of five *palmi* given in the letter of 29 March 1608 about the transfer of the *tondo* to Rome [21].

By piecing together the painted forms and matching up the curves of the architecture with the alignment of

the wood grain all the fragments can be restored to their original positions. The wedge-shaped pieces *D, E, H* and *C* were clearly removed in that order from the right edge of the main National Gallery panel, while the curved fragment *B*, now inserted in the top left corner, must have been cut from the area showing clouds just above them. The identification of its position is confirmed by the presence of a small section of the edge of the parapet. The piece *G* at present attached to the bottom of the panel, can be placed to the left of the female figure, the hand clearly having belonged to her strongly foreshortened arm. The small triangular piece *F* which now makes up the bottom right corner of the National Gallery panel has two probable, though rather approximate, sources on opposite sides of the circle, that to the right of the male figure being the more likely.

Exactly the same criteria can be used to establish that the only possible position for the fragment belonging to the Longhi Foundation is that abutting almost directly the top of the National Gallery panel (as indicated in Fig.8). The curved piece missing from its top left corner allows for the removal of the National Gallery fragment *B*, while the jagged outline of the right edge suggests that one of the two missing figures was immediately to the boy's left. The curved incision along the top left edge of the National Gallery panel could then be explained as the outline of the head and shoulders of the fifth figure. The care with which the saw has apparently traced the outlines of the missing figures seems to indicate that they too were preserved, probably together, as a saleable fragment which may yet emerge from present obscurity. The rather cramped space left for these figures suggests that one may have been standing slightly back from the edge of the parapet, behind his or her companion, like some of the figures in the surviving '*mandorle*' from the same suite of rooms in Ferrara Castle [22]. As the fragment would be very irregular in shape it may, like the Florence picture, have been transferred to canvas, and it would probably have been heavily repainted to disguise its fragmentary state [23].

The complete *tondo* is unusual in showing no trace on the surviving fragments of any joins between the several planks of wood which would normally make up a panel of this size; the work seems to have been painted on a single, very — but not impossibly — wide [24] plank cut from an enormous tree. Its design is also unusual in appearing to be heavily weighted to one side. However the gap on the parapet between the two male figures may have been filled with still-life elements (some form of floral decoration being most appropriate), again like those in the '*mandorle*', and perhaps preserved as further saleable fragments. The dense white clouds to the left of the male figure in the National Gallery picture would also have helped to balance the composition. The lighting in the two main surviving fragments appears to follow no clearly recognizable programme, other than that each figure is illuminated from their own left side, and offers no clue to the possible orientation of the *tondo* in relation to the window in the room.

As a separate, rectangular, entity the National



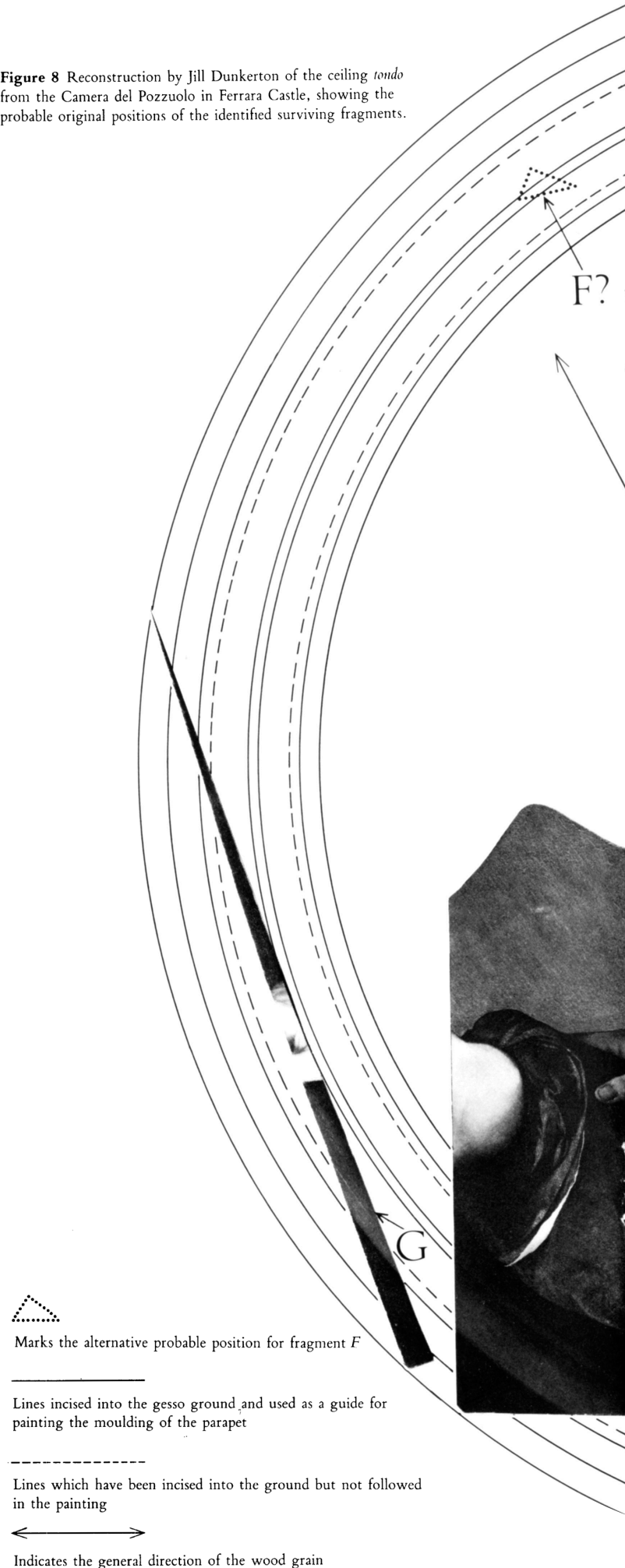
Gallery painting may well have seemed obscure not only in structure but also in its significance, but as a fragment of a ceiling roundel, both the structure and the general idiom of the scene represented are far more intelligible. Originating with Mantegna, the tradition of ingenious ceiling decorations, unserious in tone and frequently including portraits of household familiars, had spread by the 1520s to many of the court cities of northern Italy, and in Ferrara itself the painter Garofalo had already shown a surprising aptitude for tasks of this kind [25]. The humour, both visual and psychological, common to most such decorations is not for certain identifiable in the National Gallery painting, but in juxtaposition with the Longhi Foundation picture its ambiguous tone is considerably clarified, and the emphasis upon jasmine in its subject matter is seen to form part of a light-hearted floral theme that appears more prominently elsewhere in the *tondo*. This would appear to be an invention of the artist, incorporating the amusing conceit whereby flowers are about to tumble into the room from the hands of the boy smiling in the ceiling aperture.

The whole programme may be not unconnected with the presence of the balcony that no doubt gave the room the designation 'del Poggiolo', while its more usual name, 'del Pozzuolo', would clearly have suited the well-like effect of the *tondo* appearing in the centre of the ceiling. However this may be, the room presumably had a less serious function than the adjacent rooms towards the castle, and the *tondo* does not seem to be easily related in subject matter to the paintings and sculptures in the other Camerini, beginning with the nine 'mandorle' that decorated the adjacent chamber.

The more exact significance of the *tondo* seems to have become obscure less than a century after its execution, as the letters about its acquisition by Scipione Borghese suggest. The only apparent lead to its possible source of inspiration occurs in Manilli's 1650 guide to the Villa Borghese, where a distant echo of what may have been a reliable tradition is mentioned in passing. Writing of the *tondo*, which was then displayed together with four of the 'mandorle' in the second room of the first floor of the Villa, Manilli says, 'The round painting with a twelve-sided frame, within which are five heads, is by the Dossi. Seen in this picture is the portrait of il Gonnella, who is an old man, beside a tall personage [26].'

Il Gonnella was the most celebrated of the many dwarves employed at the Este court, and though he himself lived in the fourteenth century, such was his fame that the name Gonnella was applied almost indiscriminately to court dwarves during the Renaissance. The general idea that the male figure in the National Gallery painting could represent a court dwarf has much to recommend it. There was in fact at the Este court in the early sixteenth century a dwarf called 'Santino', a native of Medicina, who affected the dress of a doctor [27]. A doctor's uniform was ordered for him in 1512, and the beret of a doctor in 1516. In 1519 he was sent to the Gonzaga Court at Mantua, though not presumably losing all contact with Ferrara. Such a figure would well conform with the character portrayed in the National Gallery picture.

**Figure 8** Reconstruction by Jill Dunkerton of the ceiling *tondo* from the Camera del Pozzuolo in Ferrara Castle, showing the probable original positions of the identified surviving fragments.







Being the least mutilated fragment of the ceiling, the figures it shows may always have been regarded as the most interesting, even the most accomplished, of the five figures in the *tondo*, and indeed the quality of the fragment, and in particular of the male portrait, is clear enough now that the picture has been cleaned. If the portrait was of a dwarf, and a contemporary of the artist, this would be in accordance with the kind of subject frequently chosen for ceiling decorations, and it would at the same time suggest, within the burlesque context of the ceiling, why the two figures are discrepant in scale and in character. A figure wreathed in jasmine might additionally illustrate the theme of purity and innocence, and though the significance of her gesture is now lost, it is possibly with a well-deserved moral exhortation that the male figure, with jasmine placed behind his ear, is being so emphatically addressed.

Little can now be done to reconstitute the *tondo* of the Camera del Pozzuolo and it was decided not to dismantle the National Gallery's assemblage of fragments. The pieces C,H,E and D could, with some difficulty, have been returned to their original positions on the right edge of the main panel, but this would not have solved the problem of exhibiting the piece with the disconnected section of the female figure's hand. Since the appearance of even the main panel is greatly distorted by its fragmentary nature and because it can no longer be seen from the viewpoint for which it was designed, it seems reasonable to leave the whole extraordinary construction as it is — an extreme example of the type of mutilation sometimes suffered by paintings in the past. The old putty was extracted from the joins and the broken and damaged edges of each fragment tidied up by refilling and retouching where necessary, leaving the gaps between the pieces clearly visible. Apart from this, the retouching was restricted to the few small losses and worm-holes on the figures, and to reducing the disturbing effect of the drying cracks on their faces and in the sky (Fig.6 and Plate 5, p.26) [28]. The painting is now on show in a plain shadow box — the interesting and not unattractive remains of a datable and documented painting, a major and formerly much admired example of Dosso's work as painter to the court of Ferrara.

#### Notes and references

1. GOULD, C., *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth-Century Italian Schools* (London 1975), pp.81–2.
2. *Catalogue of the Pictures in the National Gallery* (London 1889), p.123.
3. No.137 of the Hanfstaengl Collection of photographs printed in Munich, probably in the late nineteenth century. (Copy in the Witt Library, Courtauld Institute of Art.)
4. The discoloured varnish and most of the overpaint were removed with either propan-2-ol or propan-2-one, the latter being more effective on the repainted areas. On the figures and parapet the less soluble retouchings, along with residual varnish and grime, were cleaned off with a dilute solution of a potassium

oleate soap, while a few hard and insoluble retouchings in the sky had to be scraped away with a scalpel. A rather half-hearted attempt had been made to fill the worst of the drying-cracks with a white putty (Plate 5, p.26): this was removed, as were those other fillings which had encroached upon undamaged original paint.

5. The fluorescence of the 'varnish' layer under ultraviolet illumination is characteristic of a natural resin but the quantity present was too small, relative to the size of the whole sample, to be identified on the gas-chromatograph, which, as with all the samples analysed, simply recorded the walnut oil used as the basic paint medium.

6. To our knowledge no other cross-sections or scientific studies of Dosso's techniques have been published. However X-ray details of the 'S. Jerome' in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna and of a 'Holy Family' in the Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts, reproduced in GIBBONS, F., *Dosso and Battista Dossi, Court Painters of Ferrara* (Princeton 1968), plates 43,44,53 and 54, show that on at least two occasions Dosso re-used a support, superimposing his composition over an earlier image.

7. It should be pointed out that ultramarine often dries unsatisfactorily when used alone in an oil medium, for example as on the robe of the Virgin in Perugino's 'Virgin and Child with SS. Raphael and Michael' (No.288). See BOMFORD, D., BROUGH, J. and ROY, A., 'Three Panels from Perugino's Certosa di Pavia Altarpiece', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 4 (1980), pp.12, 16–18, 26–7 and 31.

8. GALLI, G., 'Una Proposta di risarcimento per due dipinti di Dosso Dossi (ed una scheda di restauro)', *Musei Ferraresi Bollettino Annuale*, 7 (1977), pp.54–9. See also the catalogue entry in *La Fondazione Roberto Longhi a Firenze* (Milan 1980), pp.262–3 and plates 76 and 77. We would like to thank Dr Maria Letizia Strocchi and Isabella Lapi Ballerini at the Fondazione Roberto Longhi for arranging for the painting to be inspected and for allowing us to read the catalogue entry mentioned above before its publication, and Dr Silvia Meloni Trkulja from the Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici in Florence for supplying the photograph used in Figs.7 and 8.

9. An X-ray detail is reproduced in GALLI, *op. cit.*, p.58.

10. The best illustration showing the painting before cleaning is in MEZZETTI, A., *Il Dosso e Battista Ferraresi* (Milan 1965), plate 30a. It is also reproduced in GIBBONS, *op. cit.*, plate 25 and GALLI, *op. cit.*, p.57. Galli suggests that the fragment may have had to be transferred because the original wood had deteriorated in some way, perhaps because of water damage or through the activities of woodworm. See GALLI, *op. cit.*, p.56. However the excellent condition of the wood of the National Gallery fragments, and of the paint and ground of the Florence piece, makes this seem rather unlikely unless severe deterioration had set in very soon after the cutting up of the painting (again unlikely — see Note 20); and it seems more probable that the 'restorer' responsible for the dismemberment of the *tondo*, when faced with such an irregular



fragment, decided that it would be less trouble to transfer it on to a rectangular canvas than to build it up with shaped pieces of wood as has been done with the basically less mutilated National Gallery panel.

11. See the very thorough account of this part of the castle and its earlier decorations by GOODGAL, D. 'The camerino of Alfonso I d'Este', *Art History*, 2 (1978), pp.162–90.

12. GOODGAL, *op. cit.*, pp.169–70.

13. For Dosso's decorations, and the documents relating to them see VENTURI, A., *Archivio storico d'arte*, 5 (1892), pp.440–3; and 6 (1893), pp.48–62, 130–5, and 219–24; MEZZETTI, *op. cit.*, pp.60–2, and '“Le storia di Enea”' del Dosso nel "camerino d'alabastro" di Alfonso I d'Este', *Paragone*, 189 (1965), pp.71–84; and GIBBONS, *op. cit.*, pp.275–91 (*passim*). A plan of the rooms is given by GOODGAL, *op. cit.*, p.164, and an illustration of the façade, showing the balcony, as fig.18.

14. MEZZETTI, *op. cit.*, Dosso (1965), pp.135 and 137; and GOODGAL, *op. cit.*, pp.168ff. (the dispersal of the decorations of the 'camerini').

15. See GOODGAL, *op. cit.*, p.170.

16. MEZZETTI, *op. cit.*, Dosso (1965), pp.60–2; and GIBBONS, *op. cit.*, pp.281–2. An earlier payment (20 September 1522) is also recorded 'per havere facto cosire la tela del tondo del Camerino dorato del S. n. ro.'; see MEZZETTI, *op. cit.*, p.60; and GIBBONS, *op. cit.*, p.279. The word 'tela' (canvas) was presumably used by mistake and the document probably refers to the construction of the panel for the *tondo*.

17. On the history of the collection, see DELLA PERGOLA, P., *Galleria Borghese* (Rome 1955), 1, pp.6ff.; and *Critica d'arte*, 20 (1957), p.135, for a group of paintings sold in 1801 to Durand.

18. Sale of the collection of Bulkeley Owen, of Tedsmore Hall, near Shrewsbury, 30 April 1863, lot 198, as from the Borghese Palace, and bought from a Mr King in 1828.

19. MANILLI, J., *Villa Borghese Fuori di Porta Pinciana* (Rome 1650), p.100 (see further Note 26 below). The collection was divided in 1682 between the two sons of Paolo Borghese and Olimpia Aldobrandini, and many of the pictures from the Villa were removed to the Palazzo Borghese (inventory of 1693, published by DELLA PERGOLA in *Arte antica e moderna*, 26 (1964), pp.219ff.; 28 (1964), pp.451ff.; and 30 (1965), pp.202ff.), many of them returning in the later nineteenth century. Dosso's *tondo* and some at least of the 'mandorle', now at Modena, remained at the Villa, and are mentioned in the guide by MONTELATI (1700), p.302.

20. Guglielmo Galli and Benito Podio, who relined the Longhi fragment, agreed that the transfer had probably been carried out in around 1820–30, see GALLI, *op. cit.*, p.56; a date that matches the hypothesis that the *tondo* was only broken up after being sold from the Borghese Collection at the beginning of the century. Hand-hammered nails and tacks like those used to attach the additions (see Fig.4) were in use well into the nineteenth century and the relative ease with which the overpaint could be removed from the National Gallery panel (see Note 4)

suggests that it was unlikely to have been applied much before then, although the work might have been cleaned and the overpaint replaced at some point between being cut from the *tondo* and its acquisition by the National Gallery in 1887.

21. In central Italy a *palmo* was the equivalent of between 25 cm. and 26 cm. but in Rome of only 22 cm. (GALLI, *op. cit.*, p.56; and MEZZETTI, Dosso, p.53, note 58). As the letter giving the diameter of the *tondo* comes from the Ferrarese side of the correspondence it seems reasonable to use the larger measurement to calculate the modern equivalent of the probable dimensions of the work.

22. The surviving 'mandorle' are now divided between the Pinacoteca Estense, Modena; the Cini Collection, Venice; and the Stephen Dobo Museum in Eger (Hungary). They are illustrated in MEZZETTI, Dosso, *op. cit.*, plates 32–5; and GIBBONS, *op. cit.*, plates 24 and 89–94.

23. If the fragment has survived as one piece and has been made up to a rectangle, it could be expected to measure between about 18–23 in. (458–584 mm.) by 23–28 in. (584–711 mm.); while the heads of the figures (minus any hats or headdresses) ought to be approximately 9 in. (230 mm.) long. A picture in the Jacquemart-André Museum, Abbaye de Châalis, has been mentioned as being possibly related to 'A Man Embracing a Woman' but judging from a recently obtained photograph there seems to be no connection even in style between the two.

24. For example no join can be found on the panel of 'The Entombment' (No.790) by Michelangelo which is 59 in. (1.49 m) wide. See LEVEY, M., GOULD, C., PLESTERS, J. and RUHEMANN, H., *Michelangelo's Entombment of Christ* (London 1970), p.21.

25. NEPPI, A., *Il Garofalo* (Milan 1965), pp.15–6; and plates IV and VII.

26. 'Il quadro tondo, con la cornice à dodici facce, dentro cinque teste, è de i Dossi. Si vede in questo quadro il ritratto del Gonnella, che è vn Vecchio, vicino ad vn Personaggio Grande.' (See Note 19.)

27. The fullest account of the Mantua dwarves is that by BERTONI, G., in *Rivista d'Italia*, 6, 1 (1903), pp.501ff., who deals with Il Gonnella and gives details about 'Santino' (pp.503–504). Another portrait attributed to Dosso, and said to represent Il Gonnella (at Modena) is illustrated by GIBBONS, *op. cit.*, plate 23 (catalogue no.23). A portrait (?) sometimes ascribed to Breughel at Vienna has also been said to represent him (see PÄCHT and KREIDL in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, January (1981), pp.1–8; with further references).

28. The retouching was done throughout with dry pigments ground in Paraloid B-72 and the painting varnished with Ketone-N in white spirit.