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Author
Turner, James Grantham

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RAPHAEL, THE FARNESINA, AND THE ANGELS: A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY URBAN LANDSCAPE REDISCOVERED

JAMES GRANTHAM TURNER

An unidentified drawing in the Philadelphia Museum of Art depicts the artist Raphael (1483–1520), seated with camp-table, portfolio, and the drawing pad on which he appears to be capturing the three male figures posed in front of him (fig. 1).[1] It is late afternoon, as the light falls from the west, casting the models into half-darkness and throwing long shadows. Raphael's back is to the River Tiber, and he faces a building half-hidden in trees but recognizable as the Villa Farnesina, a site that was

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Figure 1. Here attributed to Gaspard Dughet, known as Gaspard Poussin, or his workshop, *Raphael Drawing Three Male Figures on the Terrace of the Villa Farnesina (the Three Men Who Appear to Abraham)*, mid- to late seventeenth century. Quill and reed pens with black and brown ink, gray, beige, and blue-black washes, over traces of graphite, and white heightening, 11 × 20 inches (27.9 × 50.8 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Anthony Morris Clark, 1978.

of course most famous for the frescoes that he himself had designed and in part painted. In the left distance can be made out the Ponte Sisto, the buildings of the right bank of the Tiber at the bridgehead, and a panorama of Trastevere with the Alban Hills beyond. The scene is dominated and anchored, however, by an architectural feature that is considerably less familiar: a lofty portico with four open arches and a tiled roof.

What is going on here? This drawing comes with no documentation apart from two handwritten notes on the modern backing-sheet, one reading "Anon. German c. 1800" and the other "Prov.: Shepherd Gall." This is the sole evidence for the drawing's provenance before its last owner left it to the museum in 1978; the proprietor of the Shepherd Gallery in New York informs me that, though he remembers the drawing,

there is no record of it among German or any other works sold by them.[2] It has been published twice by Italian scholars but without discussion and over captions that merely replicate "Anonimo tedesco c. 1800, *Raffaelle disegna nei pressi della Farnesina*."[3] Neglected as it is, however, this drawing has been treasured by some previous owner, laid down and matted in royal style with multiple drawn borders and gold foil. On that mount, in a hand from the eighteenth century or earlier because it still uses the long *s*, it is attributed to "G. Poussin"—meaning the landscape artist Gaspar Dughet (1615–1675), who was usually known by the surname of his brother-in-law Nicolas. Since the idea of an unknown early nineteenth-century German draughtsman has no historical pedigree and has never been supported with written evidence, we should ponder this attribution, as well as identify the subject and setting more accurately.

The Philadelphia curators have added one key word to their title, though without an object file there is no record of what this means or why it was added: Raphael is drawing "the Angels." I argue, specifically, that Raphael is represented preparing the biblical scenes of his Vatican Loggia. He draws the mysterious "three men standing" who appeared to Abraham outside his "tabernacle," assumed to be gods or angels in disguise since he ran out and prostrated himself in front of them, *adoravit in terra* (Genesis 18:2, Vulgate). The resulting fresco in Vault IV of the papal loggia was effectively inaccessible, but it was captured in accurate prints by the early seventeenth century (fig. 2) and disseminated in multiple versions thereafter.[4] This draughtsman, perhaps Dughet himself or a contemporary, follows one such print closely when rendering Abraham's visitors, emphasizing their human solidity, their realistic clothes, and their deep shadows, with no hint of the conventional wings and supernatural light. The flat, friezelike arrangement of this group, which may have prompted some unknown connoisseur to see the drawing as neoclassical rather than seventeenth century, results from its having been transcribed directly from a print.

The ambiguous status of these three men from Genesis leads to an ambiguity in the drawing. Is Raphael posing three *garzoni* as models or



Figure 2. Orazio Borgianni, *Abraham Adoring Three Men Who Appear to Him* (after Raphael School fresco, Vatican Loggia), 1615. Etching, 5 3/4 × 7 1/16 inches (14.6 × 18 cm). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

has he himself been surprised by a celestial vision that he hastens to capture on the page—where he had perhaps been sketching the villa and its gardens? This prompts further speculation about the figure looking intently over his shoulder: Is it a privileged student or La Fornarina, the patron, or another supernatural visitor? Setting this episode in the open air rather than the studio evokes the open space of the original encounter before Abraham's dwelling, though Raphael's "adoration" is expressed not by groveling but by devoting his artistic genius to capturing them. The only change from the three-man group in the fresco and the prints is that one outstretched arm has been lowered and its hand-gesture changed, to point directly at the working artist. Yet Raphael

has chosen to sit facing directly into the afternoon sun, an arrangement that suggests the dazzled Abraham rather than the practical, experienced draughtsman.

Raphael has long been considered a painter not only intellectual but visionary, so this Philadelphia drawing may well contribute to that tradition. A painting of circa 1525 in the Accademia di San Luca, Rome, depicts him actually present as Saint Luke paints the Virgin.[5] Another allusion in the drawing emphasizes Raphael's reputation as a philosophical artist, able to abstract and visualize the Platonic Idea. As John Cunnally observes, "the seated artist replicates the seated philosopher at left in the School of Athens, usually identified as Pythagoras, while the person hovering over Raphael's shoulder with right hand raised is copied from another figure in the School of Athens, a long-haired youth on the Aristotle side, accompanying the mathematician holding the compass."[6] The tome in which the philosopher writes has become a drawing tablet, but the hand is in exactly the same position and creates the same wonderment in the observer.

The setting of this inspirational scene is quite anachronistic, however. Raphael is placed in the Farnesina of the seventeenth or even eighteenth century. The upper belvedere of the villa, visible at the top right, originally open for viewing on three sides, has already been walled in. The formal gardens between the villa and the river have been replaced by a balustraded terrace and an imposing clump of umbrella pines and poplars, already fully grown, which also features in urban landscapes of the 1680s by Gaspar Van Wittel and subsequently in *vedute* engraved by Giuseppe and Mariano Vasi.[7] The great arcaded structure that dominates the middle ground and anchors the whole scene is the riverside pavilion built in the mid-sixteenth century by the Farnese, attributed to Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola. This was located on their own property downstream, decades before they bought the neighboring "Villa Chigi" and combined both gardens into a single park; it was designed to outdo Agostino Chigi's famous *porticus*, or banqueting-house, on the Tiber, which had already fallen into ruin and would be completely eroded

by the mid-seventeenth century. This rival pavilion, captured in early photographs but demolished during Lungotevere construction in the 1880s, is often confused with the original Chigi building.[8]

Though the attribution to Gaspard Dughet is unprovable, this Philadelphia drawing may be the work of one of the landscape artists brought in by the Farnese in the 1650s to decorate their newly remodeled ground floor. Some of these ideal landscapes are still visible in the Loggia di Galatea, currently atributed to Dughet himself or to François Simonot, but (as I show elsewhere) the project was much more extensive and would have required an entire team.[9] The draughtsman started with faint lines in graphite, some ruled, over what appears to be an abandoned architectural plan (visible near the center of the sheet, in the flagstones between the pavilion and the steps). Areas were then roughed out in washes of various hues and dilutions, over which different kinds of pen-line define the vegetation, the built environment, and the human figures. (As in most *modello* drawings by landscape specialists, the people are rendered quite cursorily, Raphael and his admirer looking almost cartoonish.) The lines that define masonry—the Ponte Sisto and the left bank, the terrace and balustrades, the principal buildings—are thinner and more tentative, while the greenery is done with vigorous looping scribbles for the foreground bushes, crinkled outlines for those further away, parallel shallow curves for the foliage of the trees, and long sinuous lines for trunks and branches. The seating at bottom right was clearly improvised later, since the lines of the balustrade show through it, and later still a dark bluish mass was painted onto it, apparently a cloak tossed off by the artist. Additional wash reinforces the chiaroscuro, and touches of white body color distinguish the farthest and nearest elements, the clouds in the background and the figures, and parapets and plant-pots in the foreground. In contrast, the shrubs and trees to the right, which serve as the framing wings or *repoussoirs* typical of landscapes by Claude Lorrain (1604/05?–1682) and Dughet himself, have been heavily reinforced with thick blue-black strokes, using both a clawing pen and a loaded brush. In raking light the darker ink

lines reflect a blue tint, especially in the tight curling flourishes that denote bushes.

The technique is quite multifarious and experimental, then, but can be matched in a number of seventeenth-century topographical drawings by Dughet or formerly attributed to him (fig. 3).[10] Graphemes found in these drawings and the Philadelphia sheet include thick scrolling penstrokes to rough out shrubs (contrasting with fine, tremulous lines for buildings farther away), tight parallel lines for pine-branches, stacks of curving strokes for tree foliage, dark overpainting to reinforce trees at the edge of the composition, and white highlighting applied to distant and foreground features but not to the middle ground.



Figure 3. Details from figure 1 at left juxtaposed to details of drawings attributed to Dughet at right (for sources, see note 10).

The surrounding cityscape including Trastevere and the bridgehead is rendered quite believably, and small details suggest that the artist has made sketches in situ. The pointed spire atop the campanile of San Grisogono dominates the view of Trastevere as it does today. On the skyline to the left of the Ponte Sisto can be seen the clock of the Ospizio dei Mendicanti, added to the top of that building probably in the 1640s, while the bridge itself still begins with the steep upward slope recorded in sixteenth-century views but smoothed out by the time Van Wittel drew and painted it around 1680.[11] Nearer the viewer's eye, at the upper right, the chimney appears in its correct assymmetrical position, above the farther wall of the villa's belvedere. The square Roman tower of the Aurelian Wall, incorporated into the rear of the Farnese pavilion, is visible just above the crest of its roof. But the estate itself is transformed into a *capriccio*. The eye-catching change of level in the riverside terrace is pure fiction, and the house now looms much closer to the Tiber-terrace and the pavilion, which has been brought forward by some hundred meters. The pitched roof of that Farnese building extends to the right beyond its actual four-bay structure. Behind this phantom extension of the pavilion roof, through the trunks of the pine trees, appears a duplicate villa, a second Farnesina drawn as seen from the Via della Lungara with the wings of the entry facade in receding perspective.

Though the evidence reviewed here points to the seventeenth century and an association with Dughet or his studio, I should acknowledge one objection: Cunnally finds the late eighteenth-century date plausible because the chaise longue in the right foreground seems to belong in the world of Louis XVI or later. This might, however, point to an interest in reviving the antique *klinē*, shared alike by Raphael's circle and neoclassical designers. Compare, for example, the reclining couches with scroll-shaped armrests in Raphael's designs for the nuptials of Roxana and in Giulio Romano's *The Lovers* (ca. 1525).[12]

This intriguing and somewhat surreal meta-drawing, a drawing of a drawing scene, exemplifies the afterlife of the Farnesina, a site of

restless change, invention, and reconfiguration even when it was preserved as a shrine to the timeless genius of Raphael.

NOTES

1. Philadelphia Museum no. 1978-70-486; my thanks to Em Dombrovskaya, Allison Freemond and Emily Friedman for access, photography, and information.
2. Robert Kashey, Shepherd/W&K Gallery (New York), private communications, 2024–25.
3. Francesca Cappelletti, "La storia di Psiche, il mito di Raffaello: In margine alla storia dei restauri antiche," in *Raffaello: La loggia di Amore e Psiche alla Farnesina*, ed. Rosalia Varoli-Piazza (Silvana Editoriale, 2002), 41–53, at 42, fig. 2; Alessandro Cremona, *Felices procerum villulæ: il giardino della Farnesina dai Chigi all'Accademia dei Lincei* (Scienze e lettere, 2010), 634, fig. 68.
4. Rijksmuseum no. RP-P-OB-35.432; an earlier version was etched (in reverse) by Giovanni Lanfranco, published 1607. For the fresco itself, designed by Raphael but executed by G. F. Penni, see Nicole Dacos, *The Loggia of Raphael: A Vatican Art Treasure*, trans. Josephine Bacon (Abbeville Press, 2008), 139, 146, 153 plate 113, 218 plate 156, 227 plate 163, and for representations of that Genesis episode with conventional winged angels, see 200, 202, figs. 65–66, 334n49, and British Museum no. 1950.0211-228. Recent Hebrew scholars suggest that they are a god and two angels on their way to destroy Sodom, but the text calls them strictly "men"; see Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1, *The Five Books of Moses: Torah* (Norton, 2019), 56–57.
5. I owe this point to an anonymous reader of an earlier draft of this article, who cites Christian K. Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 100, on the Saint Luke painting, which is currently displayed (alongside Anteveduto Grammatico's full-sized copy) in the fourth-floor gallery of the Accademia di S. Luca; the label reads "Raffaelle Sanzio (tradizionalmente attribuito a)."
6. Personal communication, 2025. The borrowing seems to be directly from the fresco rather than via Giorgio Ghisi's engraving, where the youth has curly hair and the philosopher's writing hand is slightly higher on the page.
7. See James Grantham Turner, *The Villa Farnesina: Palace of Venus in Renaissance Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 237–39, 306–23; for Van

Wittel's upstream views of the Ponte Sisto, see 275, fig. 4.51, and Pinacoteca Capitolina, Rome, inv. no. PC 82, tempera on parchment, both developed from a drawing of ca. 1680 published in *Gaspar van Wittel: I disegni*, ed. Margherita Maria Breccia Fratadocchi (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, 2013), 121. Among the clearest images of the long-vanished Farnese riverside pavilion, apart from the drawing discussed here, are *La Galleria Pallavicini in Roma: Catalogo dei dipinti*, ed. Federico Zeri (Sansoni, 1959), 26, cat. no. 4 (drawing by Paolo Anesi), Mariano Vasi, *Veduta di Ponte Sisto*, Rome, 1786, plate 89, engraving (Turner, *Villa Farnesina*, fig. 4.88), Lady Maria Callcott, view of the Ponte Sisto and the Farnese pavilion, black stick medium with wash on blue paper, 1819, British Museum, London, all from the same downstream viewpoint as figure 1, and the 1878 Fratelli d'Alessandri photograph reproduced in *I Farnese: architettura, arte, potere*, ed. Simone Verde (Electa, 2022), 240, fig. 2, taken from the Ponte Sisto.

8. See Elsa Gerlini, *La Villa Farnesina in Roma* (La Libreria dello Stato, 1949), 44, fig. 3 (and in all subsequent reissues through 2006); and Virginia Lapenta and Alessandro Vicenzi, eds., *The Villa Farnesina in Rome* (Franco Cosimo Panini, 2020), 11.
9. Turner, *Villa Farnesina*, 36–41, fig. 1.12; Turner, "*Farnesina Rediviva*: Memories and Recreations of Agostino Chigi's Roman Villa," *Studiolo: Revue de l'Histoire de l'Art, Académie de France à Rome-Villa Médicis* 19 (2023–24): 49–51, figs. 30–31. In addition to the landscape that I discovered and published in these two venues, another portion was found in 2024, as reported in the *New York Times* ("Hidden Above a Trap Door, 17th-Century Frescoes Come to Light," April 21, 2025) but in my view wrongly attributed to Carlo Maratti and studio in the 1690s rather than the mid-century landscapists. The later date and attribution to Simonot (1660–1731) derives from Giulia Daniele, "Nuove ipotesi per i paesaggi secenteschi della Loggia di Galatea in Villa Farnesina alla Lungara," in *Natura e artificio nell'Europa del Seicento e Settecento*, ed. Michela di Macco (Olschki, 2023), 23–43.
10. For comparison, I selected all pen-and-wash drawings (and some chalks) catalogued as by Dughet or attributed to him now or formerly, in the British Museum, London; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Louvre, Paris. The details on the right side of figure 3, in descending order, come from BM 1963,1214.9, Louvre INV 3051, and BM 1946,0713.1124, dark-blue wash thickly brushed over a *repoussoir* tree near the margin is notable in BM Ff,2.165, white body color in the foreground and distance especially in Louvre INV 3046 and 3949. The thick, looping designation of shrubbery is also

common in drawings by Giovan Francesco Grimaldi, e.g., Istituto Centrale per la Grafica, Rome, inv. nos. D-FC125300-1 and D-FC125327-8.

11. This building, later renamed the Collegio Ecclesiastico (built 1586, demolished 1879), appears with a simple cornice in late sixteenth-century views including Cesare Nebbia's fresco in the Salone Sistino, Vatican Library, where the steep end of the Ponte Sisto is also prominent. The gentler slope of the Ponte Sisto is depicted in all views by Van Wittel and Vasi, which also show wheeled traffic crossing the bridge; this could be merely a graphic convention, but photographs taken before the demolition of the Ospizio prove that it was actually carried out; see, for example, Carlo Pietrangeli, *Regola*, part 3, Guide rionali di Roma 19 (Palumbi, 1979), 81. The clock is not unmistakably depicted or described before 1680 but was presumably added as part of the "sistemazione" of the facade by Giacomo Mola in 1642–44; Luigi Spezzaferro, "Ospedale dei Mendicanti," in *Via Giulia: Un'utopia urbanistica del '500*, ed. Luigi Salerno, Luigi Spezzaferro, and Manfredo Tafuri (Staderini, 1973), 515, infers that Mola created "l'aspetto poi documentato, fra l'altro, nella stampa del Vasi." My thanks to the editors of *Source* for suggesting a closer look at the urban topography and to Roberto Piperno for detailed advice.
12. See Carel van Tuyll van Serooskerken, *The Italian Drawings of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries in the Teyler Museum* (Davaco, 2000), cat. no. 234. The bed in Giulio's *The Lovers* (Hermitage no. ГЭ-223) relates to a sarcophagus with reclining figures later acquired by the Torlonia but known in Raphael's workshop; see Arnold Nesselrath, ed., *Das Fossombroner Skizzenbuch* (Publications of the Warburg Institute 41), fol. 21v.