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'Incessant personal exertions and comprehensive artistic knowledge': Prince Albert's interest in early Italian art

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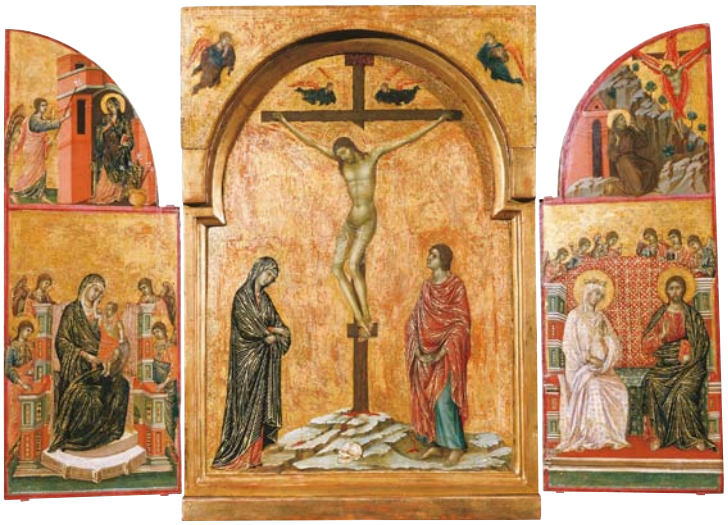
When an honoured guest visited Osborne House on the Isle of Wight he may have found himself invited by Prince Albert (fig. 1) into his private Dressing and Writing Room. This was Albert's inner sanctum, a small room barely 17ft square, tucked away on the first floor of the north-west corner of the original square wing known as the Pavilion. Had the visitor seen this room after the Prince's rearrangement of it in 1847, what a strange but marvellous sight would have greeted his eyes! Quite out of keeping with the taste of every previous English monarch, Albert had adorned this room with some two dozen small, refined early Italian paintings,[1] whose bright colours, gilding and stucco ornamentation would have glinted splendidly in the sharp light coming from the Solent and contrasted elegantly with the mahogany furniture. Although Albert's sanctuary no longer remains intact, we can piece together its appearance from a detailed watercolour by James Roberts of 1851 (fig. 2).[2] In the centre of the left wall the visitor would have seen the painting of *Saints Mamas and James* by Pesellino, surrounded by images of *The Madonna of Humility* attributed to Zanobi Strozzi and *The Virgin enthroned* by the Master of the Misericordia.

Fig. 1
William Kilburn (1818–91), *Prince Albert*, 1848
Hand-coloured daguerreotype, 8.6 × 6.3cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 2932487

Fig. 2
James Roberts (*c.*1800–1867), *Osborne: the Prince's Dressing and Writing Room*, 1851
Watercolour and bodycolour, 24.3 × 36.8cm
Royal Collection, RL 26224



Seeing his guest puzzling over his idiosyncratic display in this room and elsewhere at Osborne, Albert would have been able to enlighten him on the names and dates of his early Italian art, spanning the thirteenth century to Raphael's early work at the turn of the sixteenth. The majority of his Italian pictures were fragments from dismembered altarpieces of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Sienese and Florentine schools, mostly painted in egg tempera. The oldest painting in this part of Albert's collection was an early fourteenth-century triptych by Duccio showing the *Crucifixion and other Scenes* (fig. 3). The early Florentine school was represented by Bernardo Daddi's panel of *The Marriage of the Virgin*, then thought to be by the better-known Agnolo Gaddi (fig. 4). The fifteenth-century Florentine school was represented by the *Madonna of Humility* now attributed to Zanobi Strozzi (fig. 5) and the *Fall of Simon Magus* by Angelico's most gifted assistant, Benozzo Gozzoli (fig. 6).[3] There were also a number of works associated with Raphael, the popular sixteenth-century Umbrian painter and perhaps Albert's favourite artist. These included pictures by Raphael's teacher, followers and imitators, notably a painting of *Saint Jerome* by his putative teacher, Pietro Perugino (fig. 7) and a large altarpiece by Raphael's collaborator Berto di Giovanni (fig. 8).

Fig. 3 (above left)
Duccio di Buoninsegna (*c.*1255–*c.*1319) and assistants, *Triptych: The Crucifixion and other scenes*, *c.*1302–8
Tempera on panel,
central panel 44.9 x 31.4cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 400095

Fig. 4 (above)
Bernardo Daddi (*c.*1280–1348), *The Marriage of the Virgin*, *c.*1339–42
Tempera on panel, 25.5 x 30.7cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 406768

Fig. 5 (left)
Attributed to Zanobi Strozzi (1412–68), *The Madonna of Humility with Angels*, *c.*1440–50
Tempera and tooled gold on panel, 87.4 x 49.5cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 400039

Fig. 6
Benozzo Gozzoli (*c.*1421–97), *Saint Peter and the Fall of Simon Magus*, *c.*1461–2
Tempera on poplar panel, 24.3 x 34.5cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 403372

Fig. 7 (far left)
Pietro Perugino (*d.* 1523),
Saint Jerome in Penitence, c.1480–85
Glue-based medium (?) on fine-weave canvas laid on panel, 79.4 x 58.7cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 403469

Fig. 8
Berto di Giovanni (d. 1529),
Virgin and Child Enthroned, 1506
Oil on poplar, 192.2 x 193.9cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 406204

Apart from the egg-tempera panels and later panels produced using a mixture of oil and egg tempera, Albert's collection included a set of eight frescoes, which, as we will see, became important for him in his work as President of the Fine Arts Commission.

Perhaps the Prince proudly showed some of his visitors the notes about his early Italian pictures from the inventory of the pictures at Osborne. This was part of a larger project, started soon after his marriage, to sort out, re-hang and catalogue the royal collection of paintings, whose neglect was increasingly and publicly noted.[4] The daunting task of systematically recording the pictures was assigned to Richard Redgrave (**fig. 9**),[5] a Royal Academician and Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures from 1858. Beginning in 1857, Redgrave compiled a manuscript catalogue, which was continued after his death in 1888 and comprises over four thousand sheets. Each picture is described fully, with notes on its signature and inscriptions, condition, frame, provenance, purchase price, and location history, and illustrated with a photograph (**fig. 10**). Redgrave was assisted by Doyne Bell, Secretary to the Privy Purse, who was given the job of compiling a separate inventory of the paintings at Osborne, published in 1876. Perhaps Osborne was chosen as the first royal residence to have a catalogue of its collection published on account of Albert's collection of early Italian pictures hanging there, the part of the Royal Collection that Victoria knew lay closest to her husband's heart.

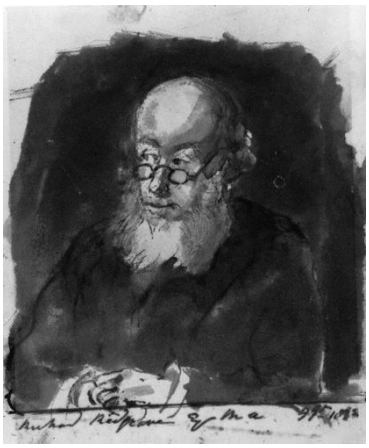


Fig. 9
Sir Francis Grant (1803–78),
Richard Redgrave, 1872
Brown wash, 14.9 x 11.4cm
London, National Portrait Gallery, NPG 4486

Albert's taste was pioneering and certainly unlike that of previous monarchs, whose interest in Italian art lay with the later schools, notably the work of the Bassano family, Titian and Tintoretto. Consequently, only five early Italian works – by Giovanni Bellini, Raphael and their circles – had been acquired previously.[6] The visitor to Osborne may have been curious as to how the Prince's taste had developed in this rather unusual direction, to which Albert would no doubt have replied that it had developed gradually, from various sources. As a child he had had easy access to at least one Renaissance painting, since one such panel showing the Virgin and Child

Image currently unavailable

Fig. 10
Sheet from Richard Redgrave's inventory of Justus of Ghent's Federico da Montefeltro
Royal Collection

had hung over a fireplace in the bedroom of his father, Ernest I, at Ehrenburg Palace. But other than that, Albert's family had not been keen collectors of Renaissance art, nor did art appreciation play any part in his early education. His interest was probably stimulated during visits to various German and other European cities, where a few pioneering collections of early Italian, German and Netherlandish art were on public display. During his visit to Italy in 1839 Albert visited many museums, galleries and studios, writing to his brother William in February 1839 that Florence had 'gathered to herself noble treasures of art. I am often quite intoxicated with delight when I come out of one of the galleries'.[7] While in Rome he encountered some of the German artists associated with the Nazarene school, a movement renowned for its love of early Italian art and its promotion in contemporary painting of sacred themes as well as the fresco technique. The seed of Albert's interest in early Italian art, its subject matter and technique, was presumably well nurtured among these native kindred spirits.

Fig. 11
Pesellino (*c.*1422–57),
Saints Mamas and James, 1455/60
Oil on poplar, 140.5 x 58.5cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 407613

As to the question of precisely when Albert started to acquire examples of early Italian art, it is clear that he and Victoria built up their collection in a piecemeal fashion, usually purchasing no more than a few examples in any given year. The only exception to this was the Prince's acquisition of an entire collection of early Italian paintings in 1847. Surveying his purchases as a whole, it is clear that Albert actively bought examples of early Italian art in two phases, starting in 1845. His major phase of collecting was the first one, between 1845 and 1848. Thus, in 1845 he acquired one of his best purchases, the small triptych by Duccio, the first example of the master's work to enter the country, as well as his pictures by Bernardo Daddi and Zanobi Strozzi. The year 1846 yielded another rich harvest, including *Two Saints* by Pesellino (fig. 11) and a *Virgin and Child* (*The Quaratesi Madonna*; fig. 12) (both long-term loans to the National Gallery) and Benozzo's *Fall of Simon Magus* (the main section of which is again in the National Gallery). The next two years, 1847 and 1848, concluded the first phase of royal purchasing of early Italian art and included a number of other, less important pictures.

Fig. 12
Gentile da Fabriano (*c.*1370–1427),
The Quaratesi Madonna, *c.*1425
Tempera on poplar, 220.5 x 85cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 407614

After that there was a hiatus as the royal couple patronised exclusively living British artists, in line with the wave of patriotic feeling that swept across the country during the lead-up to the Great Exhibition of 1851, an initiative with which the Prince was heavily involved. A second, smaller wave of purchases started in 1853 (the year in which the Prince initiated the Raphael research project), and lasted until the end of the decade. Certainly the Queen's acquisition in 1853 of Justus of Ghent's scene of *Federico da Montefeltro and his Son Guidobaldo hearing a Humanist Lecture*, bought as a Piero della Francesca (fig. 13),[8] would have been of immediate interest to the Prince given that Federico's court was at Urbino, birthplace of Raphael.[9] In 1856 Albert himself bought a copy after Perugino's *Marriage of the Virgin* (fig. 14).

Fig. 13
Justus of Ghent (active 1473–5),
Federico and Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, c.1480
Oil on poplar, 130.0 x 211.8cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 406085

Fig. 14
After Pietro Perugino (d. 1523),
The Marriage of the Virgin, c.1855–6
Oil on canvas, 255.8 x 209.2cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 406581

Fig. 15
Giusto de' Menabuoi (c.1320–91),
The Coronation of the Virgin and other Scenes, 1367
Tempera on poplar, central panel 48 x 25cm
London, National Gallery, NG 701

The largest group of early Italian pictures to enter the Royal Collection was acquired almost by default. A German collector, Prince Ludwig Kraft Ernst Oettingen-Wallerstein, had negotiated a private financial loan with his relative Prince Albert in 1847, depositing his collection of German, Netherlandish and Italian pictures in London as surety.[10] When he could not make good his debt, the whole group passed to Prince Albert. Albert attempted to sell the collection but to no avail: no purchasers came forward when it was exhibited in Kensington Palace in 1848 and Albert's attempts to interest the National Gallery in acquiring the collection were equally in vain.[11] It was only in 1863, after the Prince Consort's death and after Queen Victoria had first offered the entire collection to the Gallery (in accordance with Albert's wishes), that the Trustees were happy to accept a selection of 25 pictures as a gift.[12] Among the early Italian pictures are some of notable quality, including a triptych by Giusto de' Menabuoi (fig. 15) and Bernardino Pintoricchio's Virgin and Child (fig. 16).

Fig. 16
Bernardo Pintoricchio (1454–1513),
Virgin and Child, late fifteenth century
Tempera on wood, painted surface including painted framing, 53.5 x 35.5cm
London, National Gallery, NG 703

Given the royal couple's inability to travel abroad at whim to see public and private collections or to bid for pictures at foreign auction, they necessarily had to rely on advisers to help build up their collection. They used both English and foreign agents. In 1846 Prince Albert chose no fewer than seven panel paintings from among those shown him by Warner Ottley, the brother of the deceased English collector William Young Ottley,[13] whose important collection of primitives had been built up during the

1790s in Florence and Rome. The purchases included Benozzo Gozzoli's *Fall of Simon Magus*, the *Saints Mamas and James* fragment by Pesellino and, most impressively, the centrepiece of Gentile da Fabriano's *Quaratesi Altarpiece*.[14]

The second English name that appears in the records is that of painter, author and collector William Blundell Spence.[15] At the height of his career Spence worked for a number of aristocratic patrons, including Lord Darnley, Lady Waldegrave, the Duchess of Hamilton and Lord Linsday, such notable connoisseurs as C.D.E. Fortnum, Gambier Parry and Alexander Barker, and institutions such as the South Kensington Museum[16] and the National Gallery.[17] As early as 1853 Spence wrote to Prince Albert regarding the Lombardi Baldi Collection of early Italian art in which he had been attempting to interest the National Gallery since 1851 (a selection was finally purchased by the Gallery in 1857).[18] Doubtless thinking that the Prince would be sympathetic to the cause, since he had recently acquired the Oettingen-Wallerstein pictures, Spence wrote in flattering terms, suggesting that there was 'no person in England better able to judge the value of the early Italian school'.[19] It appears that Spence used his acquaintance with Albert to present his wares to the royal couple, including a small painting of *Christ Blessing* by Fra Angelico,[20] for which the Queen paid £50 in March 1854 (fig. 17). Spence subsequently offered other paintings to Victoria but she acquired none of them.[21]

Among the royal agents, Wilhelm Heinrich Ludwig Gruner was the most important (fig. 18). Having trained as a scene-painter and engraver at Dresden and subsequently travelling to Spain, France and England, he settled temporarily in Rome in 1837 to work on engravings of Renaissance architecture and decoration. It was perhaps in Rome, during Albert's Grand Tour, that the pair first met.[22] Moving to London in 1841, Gruner served the Prince as his artistic adviser for the next 15 years; he received an official salary from 1845.[23] Gruner supplied the royal couple with early Italian pictures in what appears to have been a specific campaign between 1845 and 1847; he, in turn, was supplied by other dealers working in Italy. Gruner frequently worked with Giovanni Metzger,[24] a dealer of German origin whose business was carried on in Florence by his son, Ludwig, after his death. Regarded as 'one of the best judges of the old Tuscan School'[25] and 'always [with] some fine paintings of the early Italian school for sale',[26] Metzger had a list of English clients including Lord Lindsay and the National Gallery.[27] At least one of the royal couple's acquisitions from Metzger, via Gruner, is recorded in the James Roberts watercolour of the *Madonna of Humility* by Zanobi Strozzi; another was Fra Angelico's *Saint Peter Martyr* (fig. 19).[28] Given that the Metzgers often catered for clients with less specialised tastes, it has been suggested that Prince Albert's requests, which came with rather precise instructions, probably originated with Gruner if not with Albert himself.[29] Gruner also acted on a number of occasions as a go-between for other Italian agents in Florence, including Della Bruna and Cianfanelli, and for agents in Rome.

Fig. 17
Fra Angelico (*c.*1400–1455),
Christ blessing, 1419–35
Tempera on wood, 28.3 x 22.1cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 407616

Fig. 18
Caldesi, Blanford & Co.,
*Ludwig Gruner, c.*1860
Albumen print, 22.8 x 17.5cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 2913512

Fig. 19 (far left)
Fra Angelico (*c.*1400–1455),
Saint Peter Martyr, *c.*1430–50
Oil on panel, 25.5 x 12.2cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 403377

Fig. 20
Bernardino da Parenzo, called Parentino
(*c.*1450–after 1498), *Saint Sebastian*, *c.*1480
Oil on panel, 51.5 x 34.4cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 403487

His collaboration with the Roman artist, restorer and teacher Tommaso Minardi resulted in Albert's acquisition in 1847 of Parentino's *Saint Sebastian* (then thought to be by Mantegna; fig. 20) and also of four panels from an altarpiece by Cima da Conegliano (fig. 21).

We know from various extant account books how much the Prince Consort paid for his early Italian pictures.[30] It seems that these paintings were comparatively cheap. For instance, in 1846 he paid £190 for both Duccio's triptych and the *Madonna of Humility* then attributed to Fra Angelico, and £200 for the Gentile da Fabriano the same year. By contrast, Victoria paid a contemporary British painter, Frederic, Lord Leighton, £630 for a large historical pastiche of *Cimabue* in 1855. This indicates the relative indifference with which early Italian art was still regarded towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, the bills were settled more often by the Queen than by the Prince.[31] For instance, for a group of 'several old Pictures for Albert for his birthday & Xmas' the Queen paid Ottley £270 in 1846.[32] The idea of receiving works of art as gifts may have originated with her, as she had enjoyed receiving paintings from the artist George Hayter on her birthday and at her coronation.[33] In any case, the royal couple's exchange of paintings, or *Bescherung*, was a custom at Christmas and birthdays throughout the 21 years of their marriage.[34] Perhaps not surprisingly, given the esoteric nature of the works in question, most of the gifts of early Italian art were not surprises, but had been chosen in advance by Prince Albert!

Fig. 21
Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano
(1459/60–1517/18), *An Enthroned Bishop between a King and another Bishop*, *c.*1500–10
Brush and ink with white heightening over black chalk on blue paper, 37.7 x 24.5cm
Royal Collection, RL 12807

A concluding enquiry of our curious visitor might have concerned the location of the Italian primitives and why it was that they were nearly all hung at Osborne (**fig. 22**),[35] together with contemporary British and continental pictures and sculpture.[36] It was clearly an appropriate setting for early Italian pictures given that Prince Albert had built the house in the style of an Italian Renaissance palazzo, complete with two belvedere towers, set in formal, Renaissance-style gardens. Apparently even the view over the Solent had an Italianate feel, reminding Albert of the Bay of Naples.

Fig. 22
Jabez Hughes (1819–84),
HRH The Prince Consort's Dressing Room at Osborne House, 1875
Albumen print, 20.8 x 24.4cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 2103669

Yet for the royal couple the true importance of Osborne lay in its intimacy. Within the Pavilion wing the grandeur of the ground floor rooms was set off by the apartments on the first floor which, being intended for private, domestic use, were made as comfortable as possible and less grandiose in appearance. Victoria consistently described this seaside home in her journal and correspondence as cosy, snug and safe. Osborne was less an official palace and more a summer house and rural retreat, far away from the inquisitive public gaze, where Albert felt at liberty to relax and entertain himself with various 'hobbies', including several farming, planting and sewage disposal initiatives. Here he could also enjoy collecting, displaying and studying the most idiosyncratic parts of his art collection. Perhaps Albert also realised that the small scale of his early Italian pictures would mean that they would have been lost in the grand galleries of Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle, and that their comparatively fragile state would be better preserved on the Isle of Wight, where the pure air contrasted with that of the smoke-filled capital.[37] Whereas the Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures was traditionally responsible for deciding the arrangement of paintings in the royal palaces, at Osborne this task was overseen by the royal couple. Some journal entries by members of the royal household confirm Prince Albert's efforts in this direction. Eleanor Stanley, one of Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting, recorded that during a visit in April 1848 she and Lady Canning had been disturbed by the Prince looking for spaces for pictures and had then spent several hours with him, 'running up and down stairs, measuring panels, and discussing the respective merits of the different pictures'.[38]

While enjoying his early Italian pictures at Osborne Albert was keen to share them with a wide public, presumably in the hope of exciting greater interest in them. Consequently, he was a generous lender to some pioneering exhibitions, notably to the 1857 *Arts Treasures Exhibition* at Old Trafford, near Manchester. This exhibition brought together art objects, including Old Masters, on a scale not seen before or since. Among the 52 royal pictures on display were Prince Albert's panels by Duccio and Pintoricchio.[39]

So much for the facts. They serve to answer the basic questions of when and how the Royal Collection acquired its early Italian paintings and how they were displayed, but such information begs the more interesting question of why Albert and Victoria became such avid purchasers of early Italian art in the first place. Their penchant

for such art was widely considered avant-garde, especially in the early 1840s when they made their first purchases, and it was certainly more unusual than their well-documented patronage of contemporary artists or their amassing of collections of enamel portraits or miniatures[40] and sculpture.[41] Given the novelty of their taste for early Italian and early German painting and the quality and quantity of their purchases, their patronage in these areas is arguably their most significant contribution to the history of collecting. Their acquisitions are also the last major addition to the Old Master holdings of the Royal Collection.

It should be reiterated that although both Victoria and Albert were purchasers of early Italian art, Albert was the only real *collector*. Indeed, the main impetus for collecting works of early Italian art appears to have come from him. Certainly no examples entered the Royal Collection before he and Victoria were married in 1840, nor were any acquired after his premature death on 14 December 1861. In this area and in artistic matters more generally, Victoria felt encouraged by Albert's example and often submitted to his knowledge. Without him she felt uncertain and unable to pursue the interest. 'How dreadful', she noted, as a widow in her Journal for 30 June 1863, 'to be always lacking his advice & working in the dark without his unerring eye & great taste, striving to keep to indications of his wishes. For me, who am so ignorant about art … it is most difficult to decide things.'[42] After she was widowed, her collecting tastes became less ambitious and she contented herself mainly with modern commissions to commemorate family events or to perpetuate Albert's memory.[43]

In the absence of any written commentary on the subject (Albert's diary no longer survives), a number of explanations for Albert's deep interest in early Italian art present themselves. Early Italian art was becoming increasingly available after the Napoleonic wars and the sequestration of so much ecclesiastical property, but Albert seems not to have been among those opportunists who were attracted to collecting it as a speculation: for one thing, during the 15 years when he was active as a collector it was not clear that medieval sacred art was a commodity with a rosy financial future; for another, given that Albert never sold on any paintings he had acquired, any perceived market value was of comparatively little interest to him.[44] Neither was religion an important impulse directing his artistic tastes. Indeed, Albert saw no inherent spirituality in early Italian art in the way that an increasing number of devout clerical and lay collectors did, generally of High Church Anglican persuasion, from the late 1830s.[45] Rather, Albert (a Lutheran by upbringing) and Victoria both distrusted all forms of Anglican extremism and believed that the Crown should be above Church affiliations.[46] Believing, too, that the sovereign should not meddle in politics, they seem never to have connected their interest in collecting early Italian art with any political agenda with regard to the emergence of a new united Italy, as did a number of notable contemporary politicians, including Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell, whom the Queen dubbed her 'Old Italian Masters'.[47]

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Thus Prince Albert's interest in early Italian art does not seem to have been financially, theologically or politically motivated. Perhaps we can speculate that he was drawn to Raphael's work because it reflected his personal understanding of the ideal of beauty, where essential truths should be expressed by simplicity. But it is harder to locate the precise origins of his interest in earlier Italian art. In the end, one comes back to an essential aesthetic tendency which is no doubt accounted for by Prince Albert's personal predilections.

Albert put his interest in early Italian art to practical use in two directions in particular: he initiated the first photographic survey of the work of Raphael, and he promoted the fresco revival in England. His pioneering research-based project into Raphael's work, which started in 1853, aimed to bring together a complete body of material on the artist, comprising, in addition to the drawings by Raphael in the Royal Collection, a reproduction of every print and engraving in existence, as well as photographs of all other works associated with Raphael.[48] In this the Prince Consort was assisted by his librarians, Dr Ernst Becker and subsequently Dr Karl Ruland (fig. 23).[49] Although the Prince did not live to see his project completed, the results were published at the command of the Queen in 1876 (the same year as the Osborne paintings catalogue).[50] Albert's imaginative and intellectual undertaking was largely praised by scholars,[51] and it paved the way for related initiatives, especially regarding the use of photography.

Fig. 23
Dr Carl Ruland, *c.*1865
Albumen cart-de-visite by Bambridge
London, National Portrait Gallery,
NPG Ax29969

Albert's fascination with fresco painting presumably stemmed in part from the fact that this technique of painting murals on plaster had evolved in Italy from the late medieval period onwards, reaching its apogee in the Renaissance with the work of Raphael and Michelangelo. He also followed with interest the work that Peter von Cornelius and his Nazarene followers were then undertaking in Munich for Ludwig I, and he became among the first to promote the revival of the fresco technique in England. As President of the Fine Arts Commission, set up in 1841 to resuscitate history painting among British artists, Albert became involved with the scheme to decorate the new Houses of Parliament with fresco scenes from English history. The scheme largely failed, partly because the artists were inexperienced in the technique and partly because Britain's damp climate did not suit the technique. But Albert was determined to prove that fresco painting was possible in England, hence his attempts to have a summer house at Buckingham Palace frescoed (with one room in the style of Raphael's Vatican *Loggia*) by leading Royal Academicians between 1843 and 1845 (fig. 24) – not a lasting success – and his commissioning of William Dyce in 1847 to decorate the staircase at Osborne with a fresco of *Neptune Resigning the Empire of the Seas to Britannia* (**fig. 25**).

Returning full circle to Victoria and Albert's art collection, it is not surprising that it reflected the Prince's intense and expert interest in Raphael and in the fresco technique. For one thing, the couple patronised some modern artists whose work

imitated either Raphael's style or his compositions, such as Dyce's Virgin and Child (fig. 26).[52] In addition to religious scenes, the royal couple purchased a few historical pastiches depicting famous episodes from the lives of early Italian artists as recounted by the fifteenth-century writer Giorgio Vasari, including Johann Michael Wittmer's[53] *Raphael's First Sketch of 'Madonna della Sedia'* (fig. 27).[54] In 1844 Albert bought an image of *Hercules and Omphale* by Joseph Anton von Gegenbaur, as an example of modern fresco technique, and placed in the bathroom at Osborne (see **fig. 28**), while as an 'antique' example of the technique he acquired a series of eight frescoes by Lattanzio Gambara from the Palazzo Pedrocca-Scaglia, Brescia, in 1856 (fig. 29).[55]

Karl Ruland noted of Albert, that his abiding qualities were 'incessant personal exertions and comprehensive artistic knowledge'.[56] Certainly it is broadly true that Albert's importance as a collector of early Italian art lies in the seriousness he afforded his task in terms of what he sought to learn from his collection and how he

Fig. 24 (above left)
Ludwig Gruner (1801–82) and Anna Brownell Jameson (1794–1860), *The Decorations of the Garden Pavilion in the grounds of Buckingham Palace*, London 1845
Coloured engraving on paper, 44. 5 x 35.4cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 708005

Fig. 25 (above)
William Dyce (1806–64),
Neptune Resigning the Empire of the Seas to Britannia, 1847
Fresco
Osborne House

Fig. 26 (left)
William Dyce (1806–64),
The Madonna and Child, 1845
Oil on canvas, 80.2 x 58.7cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 403745

Fig. 27 (far left)
Johann Michael Wittmer (1802–80),
Raphael's First Sketch of 'Madonna della Sedia',
1853
Oil on canvas, 98.3 x 74.6cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 403635

Fig. 28
Joseph Anton von Gegenbaur (1800–1876),
Hercules and Omphale, 1844
Fresco on plaster, 214.0 x 182.5cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 408922

endeavoured to promote it to the outside world. It is unlikely that he ever intended to build up a representative collection of early Italian painting, and certainly this part of the Royal Collection remains less comprehensive in scope than that of the later Italian schools. Having said that, Albert not only collected examples with earnestness and pride, but he was also diligent and pioneering in the way he catalogued his art and displayed it and lent or gave it to public institutions. Thus he promoted certain tastes in art and set standards that were adopted both by an ever-increasing circle of private collectors and by the establishment itself.

It is interesting to speculate as to whether Albert's status as the Queen's consort played any part in encouraging an interest in collecting early Italian art among the upper classes. Hitherto, with the notable exception of Lord Lindsay, they had eschewed it. However, from the 1860s the English aristocracy took a greater interest in collecting early Italian art, and during the 1860s Charles Somers even had part of Eastnor Castle, Herefordshire, decorated in an early Italian style.[57] Albert's taste, proudly proclaimed from the mid-1840s, was officially validated and vindicated a decade later by his friend, Sir Charles Eastlake, who, as the first Director of the National Gallery from 1855, started to purchase the prime examples of early Italian art which adorn the Gallery today.[58] Of course Eastlake ensured that he had the time and resources to allow him to travel abroad each year to acquire specimens for the nation. Prince Albert had none of those advantages, making his achievements – both in collecting and in helping to shape official policy for the arts – all the more remarkable.

Fig. 29
Lattanzio Gambara (c.1530–74), *The Wedding of Pirithöus and Hippodamia*, c.1560
Fresco transferred to canvas, 277 x 191cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 401215

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Notes

1. See Shearman 1983; Steegman 1950; Ames 1967.

2. James Roberts, *The Prince Consort's Dressing Room, Osborne, 1851* (RL 26224), reproduced in Morton 1991, cat. 16, p. 44. The pictures remained *in situ* during Victoria's widowhood and were only removed to London after her death, when Osborne was given to the nation. Since the Second World War most of the early Italian pictures have been displayed at Hampton Court (see Charlton 1969, p. 906). From the date of Roberts's dated painting (1851) Frank Davies is wrong to assert that: 'In this very detailed catalogue [Osborne catalogue of 1876], his private rooms are represented as hung with 26 paintings which can all be described as early pictures. It seems likely that these were all, or nearly all, arranged there after his death but the fact that they were so arranged proves that Victoria knew they were near his heart' (Davies 1963, p. 22). Jonathan Marsden states that the Prince's Dressing and Writing Room was 'hung in the spring of 1847 with two dozen early Italian paintings' (in Marsden 2010, p. 24).

3. The panel was once attached to an altarpiece of the *Virgin and Child enthroned with Angels and Saints* now in the National Gallery, London (NG 283).

4. Mrs Anna Jameson, for instance, was bold enough to publicise deficiencies in the management of the Royal Collection as early as 1842, which she pronounced to be 'a state of affairs worthy of the most Gothic ignorance and barbarism' (see Jameson 1842).

5. For Richard Redgrave, see Redgrave 1891.

6. Charles I acquired the *Portrait of a Woman* by a follower of Giovanni Bellini; Charles II was presented with a painting by the workshop of Giovanni Bellini. The most important works were acquired during George III's reign, namely, Giovanni Bellini's *Portrait of a Man*, acquired from Consul Smith, and Raphael's *Self Portrait* presented to the King in 1781 by the 3rd Earl Cowper. *The Holy Family in a Landscape* after Raphael was probably also acquired by George III.

7. Quoted in Jagow 1938, pp. 19–20.

8. The painting was acquired at the Samuel Woodburn sale.

9. The three-volume *Memoirs of the Dukes* of Urbino by James Dennistoun was published in 1851, with engravings and woodcuts produced by the printing establishment of Ludwig Gruner.

10. See Ames 1967, pp. 135–6; and Robertson 1978, pp. 124ff.

11. The collection was first offered to the Trustees of the National Gallery through the Chevalier Karl Bunsen in February 1844. The Trustees declined it, explaining that they were 'not in the habit of recommending to Parliament the purchase of entire Collections of Pictures' (see National Gallery Archive, NG1/1 Board Minutes [1828–47], 5 February 1844, p. 230; NG6/1/325, letter to The Chevalier Bunsen, dated 6 February 1844). A further series of attempts by Henry Mogford, on the Prince's behalf, to interest the Gallery in the collection failed in August 1851 (National Gallery Archive, NG5/88/3: letter from H. Mogford, dated 8 August 1851) and in March 1852 (National Gallery Archive, NG5/89/9: letter from H. Mogford, dated 31 March 1852 and NG6/2/56: reply to Mogford, dated 6 April 1852; and NG1/2 Board Minutes [1848–54], 5 April 1852, p. 157).

12. National Gallery Archive, NG1/4 Board Minutes (1855–71), 9 February 1863, p. 300; 6 July 1863, p. 306; see also correspondence, NG5/142/10 and 12, NG5/143/6, NG5/152/2 and 5. The Gallery also experienced difficulty when attempting to hang them in the limited space available; see NG1/4 Board Minutes (1855–71), 23 November 1863, p. 313.

13. See Waterhouse 1962, pp. 272ff; Shearman 1983, p. xv; Waagen 1838, vol. 2, pp. 121–31.

14. Other pictures from the Ottley Collection are: workshop of Jacopo di Cione, *Triptych: Coronation of the Virgin*; Master of the Misericordia, *Calvary*, *c.*1369–80. See Waterhouse 1962, p. 275. Hardly any early Italian art had been included in the sales of William Young Ottley's effects (Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* was the only one to appear in the sale at Christie's, 3 March 1837, for instance), and consequently they passed into the possession of his brother. Even after Warner Ottley's death in 1847 the 38 early Italian pictures auctioned on 30 June found very few buyers, and likewise the 25 lots of early Italian pictures put up for auction on 24 June 1850 were nearly all were bought in. After 1899 some of Ottley's early pictures were sold privately.

15. For Spence see Fleming 1979.

16. See Fleming 1979, pp. 572–3, nn. 33–46.

17. See Fleming 1979, pp. 576–7, nn. 57–67, 78–9.

18. Having drawn attention to the collection in his *Lions of Florence* book of 1847, and having written to Lord Palmerston about it in 1851, in July 1853 Spence was invited to attend a meeting of the National Gallery's Trustees in London to give an opinion on the value of the collection.

19. Letter dated 30 October; see Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, PP.2/3/4194.

20. Spence had sent a picture of that description to England in 1851, which he then brought to the notice of Prince Albert in October 1853 (the date of the letter).

21. See Fleming 1979, p. 503, n. 67, for a list, compiled by Spence in July 1858, of pictures sold to Gambier Parry which included the following note: 'All these pictures came over from Tuscany late last year. The cassone and the two Masaccios were sent to Windsor for Her Majesty's private inspection.'

22. See Weintraub 1997, pp. 68–9: 'On 10 March he and Stockmar left for Rome, where they expected to remain for three weeks and then go on to Naples until the heat of the late spring would drive them back towards the Alps, and home. From the cultural standpoint he enlarged his view beyond German, Dutch and Flemish painting and Romanticism in general, thanks largely to young Ludwig Gruner, brought along by Stockmar, who knew little about such things. Gruner was especially drawn to the accomplishments of the early Renaissance, then little appreciated in England.' However, Jonathan Marsden notes that: 'The Prince's guide to the city was Dr Emil August Braun (1809–56) … a native of Gotha whose father and uncle had both been in ducal service … his uncle, Wilhelm Ernst Braun, as keeper of the Ducal collections to Prince Albert's grandfather, Duke Augustus' (Marsden 2010, pp. 17–18).

23. He was paid with a salary drawn from a Special Reserve Fund from the Queen's Privy Purse; see D. Millar 2000, p. 60.

24. Otherwise known as Johann Baptist Metzger. On the Metzgers, see Fleming 1979, p. 497.

25. Waagen 1854, vol. 2, p. 126.

26. Spence 1852, p. 46.

27. Interestingly, the Italian dealer Francesco Lombardi, well known for the collection of early Italian pictures he formed with his business partner Ugo Baldi, named Metzger as his executor. This was the channel by which the British aristocrat Lord Lindsay bought several early Italian pictures from the Lombardi-Baldi Collection from the mid-1860s (the National Gallery having previously, in 1857, acquired a large number but not through Metzger). Several other important English collectors bought from Metzger's stock of Italian primitives, notably Lord Crawford and Alexander Barker. Furthermore, in 1858 Charles Eastlake bought, via Metzger, Fra Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation*, which he kept for himself when the Trustees refused to pay the asking price; he later donated it to the institution.

28. Two other pictures which Gruner acquired for Prince Albert, via Metzger, were Duccio's *Triptych: Crucifixion and other Scenes* (fig. 3) and Bernardo Daddi's *Marriage of the Virgin* (fig. 4).

29. Shearman 1983, p. xv.

30. All their early Italian purchases are recorded in three main sources: Lord Chamberlain's Office, volume of acquisitions up to 1875; the Osborne Inventory of 1873; and the Osborne Catalogue of 1876.

31. Later on, two gifts of Italian pictures were made: a bequest in 1857 from Princess Mary, Duchess of Gloucester, to Prince Albert of the *Madonna del Sacco* after Andrea del Sarto; and the gift of J. Morris Moore, to mark the Queen's Jubilee, of a North Italian *Christ carrying the Cross*.

32. W.R.A., Vic. Add. MSS., T. 231, fol. 117. The only exception appears to be Francesco and Bernardino(?) Zaganelli's *Christ at the Column*, which Albert gave to Victoria on his own birthday, 26 August 1846. This gift was hung in the *Prince's* Dressing and Writing Room at Osborne!

33. Hayter strove to retain Victoria's favour by making a practice of giving her a present on her birthday, while on the eve of her accession he gave her his copy of the portrait of a rabbi by Rembrandt; see O. Millar 1992, p. xiv.

34. The royal couple also exchanged gifts on their wedding anniversaries, although on those days early Italian art did not feature among the presents.

35. As the Queen recorded in her Journal: 'We have also brought many of our pictures, some beautiful ones to hang up here … Our little Drawing room downstairs looks so pretty now, with all the pictures, furniture, china & other ornaments, all our very own, which makes it so doubly nice' (19 and 20 June 1845). Giovanni Bellini's *Portrait of a Young Man,* bought by George III, was hung in the Queen's Gallery between 1839 and 1845, and later in the King's Audience Chamber. Other palaces were adorned with just one or two examples of early Italian art, e.g. at Buckingham Palace, in the Organ Room a P*ortrait of Evangelista Scappi* after Francia; in the Billiard Room a copy after Perugino's *Marriage of the Virgin*; and in an unspecified location, the *Madonna del Sacco* after Andrea del Sarto and Berto di Giovanni's *Virgin and Child and Saints*; and in the Queen's bedroom at Hampton Court, Francesco Francia's *Baptism*.

36. Others of Prince Albert's pictures were displayed in unofficial locations at Buckingham Palace, including paintings by Winterhalter and Landseer in his Dressing Room, while at Windsor in the Writing Room or Blue Room were a number of contemporary continental pictures and views by Hering, Stanfield and Roberts. While the majority of his Italian 'primitives' were displayed in the Prince's Writing and Dressing Room, other examples also were hung elsewhere: Gentile da Fabriano's *Virgin and Child* in the Pages' Waiting Room in the Household Wing (surrounded by early northern pictures) and a *Holy Family* attributed to Sebastiano Mainardi in the Governess's Bedroom.

37. The Prince had wanted to remove the National Gallery and its collection from the pollution of Trafalgar Square to the purer air of South Kensington; see Hobhouse 1983, pp. 76–7.

38. Erskine 1916, p. 166.

39. Prince Albert's loans of early Italian pictures to the Manchester exhibition, according to the catalogue were: 11. Duccio. *Untitled* [pencilled annotation: triptych] (p. 13); 42. Niccolo Alunno, *Virgin and Child, surrounded by a vesica glory and heads of cherubim* (p. 16); 55. Sano di Pietro, *Virgin and Child surrounded by Angels and Saints* (p. 17); 79. Pinturicchio, *Virgin and Child* (p. 19); 117. Angelo Bronzino, *Portrait of Cosimo I., Grand Duke of Tuscany* (p. 21); 288. Justus da Padua, *A Triptych in numerous compartments, containing in the centre 'The Coronation of the Virgin'* (p. 32); 299. Lattanzio Gambara of Brescia, *Frescoes from the Palazzo Sacchetti* (p. 33). The royal couple also loaned other paintings to such exhibitions as those hosted at the British Institution, the Royal Academy

of Arts (from 1838) and the Royal Society of Arts (from 1851). By contrast, none of the Prince's primitives were included among the paintings and sculptures from the Royal Collection chosen for reproduction in the pages of the *Art Journal* between 1855 and 1861. This omission presumably had more to do with the dictates of the journal's editor, S.C. Hall, and his feeling that there was other art within the Royal Collection which would more readily appeal to his readership. Every month between January 1855 and December 1861 the *Art Journal* reproduced two paintings and one sculpture from the collections at Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace and Osborne House; the works were later published in a set of four volumes, as *The Royal Gallery of Art*. The only Italian Old Masters represented were Canaletto, Annibale Caracci, Guido Reni, Carlo Dolci and Carlo Maratta.

40. On Victoria and Albert's enamel portraits and miniatures see Hobhouse 1983, pp. 73–4.

41. Victoria and Albert bought very few antique marbles, perhaps the most notable example being a fountain group by Pietro Francavilla acquired and placed in the Royal Horticultural Society in 1861 (now Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut); see Ames 1967, p. 134.

42. Despite the perception of some of her friends that she seemed not to care 'for pictures and she abominate[d] a gallery or an Exhibition', Victoria's Journal reveals that she did continue to visit exhibitions, country houses and artists' studios until the last decade of her life.

43. If decisions on artistic matters had to be made, Victoria was generally guided by what the Prince Consort had done in the past. Even her trip to Florence in 1888 was undertaken largely to fulfil a desire to follow in Albert's footsteps, and to see the place intimately associated with his interests in the work of Raphael and the fresco technique.

44. Perhaps the relatively low asking prices were an attraction to Albert because his financial means were limited. However, given that after 1843, when he first put the Royal Household on a budget, he had a small pot of money, and that it was Victoria who paid for the most costly of the early Italian pictures, affordability or investment issues, were presumably not the main criteria for his interest.

45. See Avery-Quash 2011.

46. Chadwick 1970, pp. 158–66.

47. Fleming 1973, p. 5. In the case of the British Minister in Turin, Sir James Hudson was probably regarded as an unsuitable artistic adviser or agent because of his former connection with the court of William IV and his consistent aid to Camillo Cavour, Prime Minister of Piedmont which made him distrusted by the Tories. As an Italophile devoted to the *Risorgimento* (unification of Italy), Hudson was distasteful to Queen Victoria who found his dispatches from Turin so 'disgusting' that she 'could not bring herself to read them'. Nor was Hudson's friend Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817–94), who by 1862 was Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, used as an agent, despite his well-known interest in early Italian art. By contrast, William Spence, a mutual friend of Hudson and Layard, who played no part in politics and took no interest in the great events of the *Risorgimento*, communicated with Prince Albert on a number of occasions over matters related to early Italian art.

48. Marsden 2010, p. 31, notes: 'Correspondence concerning the eventual transfer of the [Raphael] cartoons to London (which only took place in 1865, four years after Prince Albert's death) suggests that the Prince envisaged a gathering together, perhaps in the National Gallery, of all of Raphael's works in England'.

49. See Passavant 1839.

50. See Ruland 1876. The primary documents are preserved in the British Museum. Gruner collaborated with Nicola Consoni to produce a book with 40 lithographs of *Scripture Prints from the Frescoes of Raphael in the Vatican* (1866).

51. The Prince was attacked by at least one owner, Morris Moore, who alleged that he was prejudiced against a Raphael in his collection, and complained that through the machinations of the Prince and his agents he had been denied access to foreign collections to prove the authenticity of his picture; see pamphlet by J. Morris Moore, *HRH Prince Albert and the Apollo and Marsyas by Raphael* (Paris 1859); on this incident more generally, see Robertson 1978, pp. 158–61.

52. The Prince did not patronise Holman Hunt or the English Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

53. Two other works by Wittmer – his *Aesop and Ossian* – are recorded at Osborne House.

54. Albert secured the historical pastiche by Leighton – Cimabue's *Celebrated Madonna is carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence* (1853–5; on loan from the Royal Collection to the National Gallery, L275) after the Royal Academy exhibition in 1855 for the sum of £630, a far higher price than he paid for any of his early Italian pictures.

55. Redgrave noted in his manuscript catalogue that the Gambara frecoes had been specifically purchased 'as specimens of fresco painting, likely to be of use as practical examples when the question of the revival of fresco painting was raised, in reference to the decoration of the New Houses of Parliament'. See also J.C. Robinson, manuscript inventory of Holyrood, 1884, pp. 57–64, where he notes: 'Having served their purpose they were deposited in store at Kensington Palace, where they remained for many years in a neglected condition. From thence they were removed to Holyrood in 1881.'

56. Ruland 1876, p. vii. By contrast, see Ames 1867, p. 132, who judges Albert 'too just and too deliberate in decision to be a brilliant collector but he was an acquisitive Coburg'; Levey 1971, p. 198, states that it is a fallacy to suggest that Prince Albert's taste was 'intellectually-based rather than naturally aesthetic or visual'.

57. On these aristocratic collectors supplied by Spence, see Fleming 1979, p. 570, nn. 19–20 and p. 571, n. 28.

58. Eastlake had been Secretary of the Fine Arts Commission from 1841 and elected President of the Royal Academy in 1850. His association with the National Gallery began in 1843 when he was appointed Keeper, a post he retained until 1847, when he resigned. He became an ex-officio Trustee in 1850. For information about Sir Charles Eastlake, especially his role as first Director of the National Gallery, see Avery-Quash and Sheldon 2011.

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