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MINUTE PARTICULARS

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Bo Ossian Lindberg recently suggested in his review of Robert N. Essick's *William Blake Printmaker* that "Blake scholars should cite Tambroni," in the 1821 edition, when the topic is William Blake's awareness of *Il Libro dell'Arte* or *The Craftsman's Handbook* by Cennino Cennini.¹ Lindberg's advice continues the discussion of a minor but unresolved problem in Blake scholarship regarding the sources and nature of Blake's ideas about artistic material and techniques of painting.² Under discussion here are Blake's so-called "Fresco Pictures," fresco being the name with which Blake himself in 1809 described his pictures made with watercolor on a kind of plaster ground: "The Art has been lost: I have recovered it."³ Blake is silent about his tempering agent and ground for the fresco technique, but J.T. Smith, a long time friend, wrote in 1828 that Blake tempered his pigments with "glue-water" made from "carpenter's glue" and used the same material in his ground.⁴ In 1862, John Linnell wrote to the wife of Blake's biographer, Alexander Gilchrist, that he gave Blake a copy of Cennino's book: "I believe that the first copy of Cennino Cennini seen in England was the copy I obtained from Italy & gave to Blake who soon made it out & was gratified to find that he had been using the same materials & methods as Cennini describes—particularly the Carpenters glue."⁵

In this note I would like to explore the "Cennino connection." As of now Essick and Lindberg follow Linnell's account that Blake was first aware of this primary source for Trecento painting material and techniques only in 1821, and that earlier he had adopted traditional methods from recipe books. Cennino's writings were available earlier, however. A copy of his lost holograph had entered the Medici Grand Duke's collection and by 1681 the location in Florence had been published: this little known manuscript was also discussed in at least three other books of 1739, 1759 and 1778 as a valuable curiosity full of ancient secrets which should be brought to light.⁶ More important, George Cumberland, Blake's close friend, knew of this manuscript and said that the Medici Grand Duke loaned it to him "for some days."⁷ I suggest that it is highly probable that Blake was aware of some of the directions for the painting of frescoes from

Cennino some twenty-five years before the published edition through the agency of Cumberland.⁸

Cumberland was on the Continent, principally in Italy, between 1785 and 1790.⁹ He mentioned "*Andrea Cennini de Colle di Valdessa*" and the manuscript in his 1796 *Thoughts on Outline* where he wrote that the "manuscript is very valuable, on account of the exact directions which it gives for the painting in fresco of those times."¹⁰ By 1794 Blake had begun engraving plates for *Thoughts on Outline*, and he offered Cumberland technical advice for his own efforts at engraving, as attested by an affectionate letter which survives.¹¹ Blake began to use experimental media and techniques for printing and painting on paper about 1795, and his biblical paintings on gesso supported by canvas or copper for Thomas Butts were begun about 1799.¹² In his new enterprises information supplied by Cumberland could have been the chief motivation for his experiments.

In the eighteenth century there were few specific references to the content of Cennino's manuscript. It was first mentioned by Giorgio Vasari in *Le Vite*, the *Lives of the Italian Painters*, in 1568, and Filippo Baldinucci in 1681 referred to its location in the Laurentian Library in Florence.¹³ Cumberland's actual references to Cennino's manuscript in *Thoughts on Outline* go beyond information which was available in Vasari's *Le Vite*, which he owned, or in Baldinucci.¹⁴ From *Le Vite*, which was well known in the second Italian edition or in two subsequent editions, anyone could learn in the "Vita d'Agnolo Gaddi" that "Cennino di Drea Cennini da Colle di Valdelsa . . . scrisse in un libro di sua mano i modi del lavorarre a fresco, a tempera, a colla ed a gomma . . . Tratto . . . del macinare i colori a olio . . ." ¹⁵ Vasari went into no details about *how* to work in fresco, tempera, glue and gum or how to mix colors in oil, but he did establish beyond doubt that Cennino was a pupil of Agnolo whose father in turn learned directly from the early Trecento painter Giotto.

In *Thoughts on Outline* we find evidence to indicate that Cumberland read part of the manuscript. He refers in the same order as Cennino does to technical points raised in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of *Il Libro*, and compresses them in a single sentence: "I found, that the venerable author of this treatise, states, that in his time, the Artists used to draw on a smooth piece of fig-tree, and also on parchment, which had been powdered with calcined bone, and with a fine silver style, in order to attain the justest Outline possible."¹⁶ Thompson translates these instructions for learning to draw as "you begin with drawing on a panel of wood . . . For that purpose, a little panel of fig wood is good."¹⁷ The panel is prepared for drawing by spreading ground bones mixed with saliva on the smoothed wood. Old bone from the second joints and wings of fowl are good, says Cennino: "Just as you find them under the dining-table, put them in the fire

... "Cumberland omitted the matter-of-fact reference to the source of the bones and he elevated the process for which Cennino used the word *chotto* or baking by using the more scientific term calcination. Cennino then recommends using a style of silver. The leisurely narrative chapters of Cennino are succinctly summarized by Cumberland as he presses his main point about the quality of outline.

I propose that Cumberland could and would have been interested in reading the entire manuscript. In the Laurentian manuscript a glossator had written headings for short chapters, making it easy to find out the general contents.¹⁸ The manuscript copy itself, which Cumberland said he had for some days, is written in an archaic form of Italian with expressions from the Paduan dialect,¹⁹ which is not difficult to read. In a reproduction of folio 1^r (illus. 1) it is easy to see in the last eight lines *dipignere, fantasia, hoperazione di mano, sotto ombra, naturale, fermarle*, in a passage in which Cennino describes himself as pursuing "an occupation known as *painting*, which calls for *imagination*, and *skill of hand*, in order to discover things not seen, hiding themselves *under the shadow* of *natural* objects, and to *give them shape* with the hand, presenting to plain sight what does not actually exist."²⁰ Cumberland's motivation for perusing the manuscript—his curiosity about the art of the Greeks and the Romans, his avid pursuit of old prints, antique gems and ancient artifacts, and his interest in learning details about craft techniques—is easily documented.²¹ However, unless his untraced manuscripts made during his Italian travels turn up, we cannot know exactly the extent or nature of any notes he may have taken.²² The paragraph in *Thoughts on Outline* is our clue that he saw, read and later referred accurately to information learned from the copy of Cennino's valuable early manuscript. However, we should be aware, as Thompson cautions, that there are many ambiguities in the manuscript,²³ and these may have influenced Cumberland's understanding and transmission of information.

Because Blake did experiment with painting in a variety of media in the second half of the 1790s, naming them fresco pictures, it is likely that he was acting on the "exact directions," accurate or not, which Cumberland brought back from Florence. Of course, interest in reviving ancient practices was high in the second half of the eighteenth century, and antiquarians, craftsmen and artists consulted many sources for information.²⁴ The use of a variety of materials, including plaster or whiting grounds and glues derived from animal skin, was widespread in England.²⁵ Exactly what Blake's media were is not yet known, and will not be until chemical analyses are available.²⁶ Martin Butlin may be acknowledging this reality when he calls "Blake's own changing formula" which he used from about 1795 into the 1820s by the inclusive term of "tempera."²⁷ The exact directions for painting in fresco to

which Cumberland had access include those for painting in true fresco, in which pigments suspended or dissolved only in water are painted directly on wet plaster, or gesso, and to painting on dry gesso panels with pigment tempered either with gum, glue or egg.²⁸

On the basis of Smith's 1828 account that Blake's methods involved the use of "carpenter's glue," a practice of the earliest fresco painters, and of Linnell's letter to Mrs. Gilchrist, Blake's formula has been connected with Cennino's glue called *colla di spichi*. Essick noted that W.M. Rossetti cited the specific reference to Cennino in 1863.²⁹ Cennino in several chapters mentions a glue made from parts of goats, *colla di spichi*, or leaf glue.³⁰ As Lindberg points out, he gives very precise directions for making it in Chapter 109:³¹ "And there is a glue which is known as leaf glue; this is made out of clippings of goats' muzzles, feet, sinews, and many clippings of skins . . . And it is a good glue for wood . . . it may be used for . . . gessos, for tempering colors . . . fastening pieces of wood . . . tempering gessos."³² In Chapters 16 to 22, Cennino gives all the instructions for grinding colors on a porphyry slab, tempering them with the glue purchased at the apothecary, and tinting parchment or paper. A close reading of Cennino's entire book shows that the glue which can be purchased at the apothecary is the same as leaf glue, *colla di spichi*, which is also given the name of goat's glue.³³ This is the glue to which Rossetti referred in Chapter 19. But it was easier for Rossetti, as it is for us, to understand and study instructions in a printed edition.

Linnell's report in 1862 (quoted above) that he gave the 1821 edition to Blake has influenced thinking about the artist and his painting techniques.³⁴ Essick proposed that Blake would have found in Tambroni's edition of Cennino "evidence that his own method of using wood-working glue as a fixative had been used by the Italian Renaissance masters he so much admired."³⁵ Butlin dates Blake's later paintings, in which his technique "consists of a much thinner paint film, akin to water colour, on a gesso ground laid on paper or panel" to about 1821,³⁶ perhaps also thinking of the availability of Cennino's instructions. In his review of Butlin's book, Essick in fact suggests that Blake's reading of Cennino's book perhaps caused him "to alter his practice slightly."³⁷ Indeed, the change itself may well be one of the strongest pieces of evidence that Blake did see the detailed instructions in Tambroni's edition, which, in spite of its omissions and inaccuracies, would have provided information which could be considered carefully.

However, the credit for being the first to bring information from Cennino's "very old treatise on painting" to Blake's attention should go, I propose, to George

Cennino, *Il libro dell'arte*, Florence, Laurentian Library, Ms. laur. Plut. 78.23, fol 1^r (after Thompson, *Il Libro*, frontispiece).

Cumberland, his long time friend and fellow searcher for knowledge about the lost art of the ancients. Blake defended the right to paint from the imagination, he valued a skilled execution and a just outline. These beliefs and values were extraordinarily like those of Cennino, who also pursued that demanding profession of painting which called for *fantasia e hoperazione di mano*.

¹ Bo Ossian Lindberg, review of Robert N. Essick, *William Blake Printmaker* in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, 15 (Winter 1981-82), 148, n. 22. Essick, *William Blake Printmaker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 122-23. [Cennino Cennini], *Di Cennino Cennini trattato della pittura, messo in luce la prima volta con annotazioni*, ed. Giuseppe Tambroni (Rome, 1821). For Cennino, I have relied on the American edition and its translation: [Cennino Cennini], *Il Libro dell'Arte*, Vol. I, and *The Craftsman's Handbook*, Vol. II, ed. and trans. Daniel V. Thompson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932-33). Lindberg, in the review of Essick, p. 148, n. 22, summarizes the editions of Cennino's *Il Libro*. The most recent Italian edition, *Il libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura*, ed. Fernando Tempesti (Milan: Longanesi & Co., 1975) is based on the 1859 Milanese edition and includes recent scholarship and bibliography on Cennino.

² In addition to Lindberg and Essick as above, see Lindberg, *William Blake's Illustrations to the Book of Job* (Abo: Abo Academy, 1973), pp. 178-79; David Bindman, *Blake as an Artist* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977), pp. 89-90, 117-18, 128-29; Lindberg, review of Jack Lindsay, *William Blake: His Life and Work*, in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, 14 (Winter 1980-81), 173, n. 41; Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, Vol. I, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), xii, 132, 156, 317-18, 472, 483, 549; and Robert N. Essick, review of Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, 16 (Summer 1982), 60.

³ Geoffrey Keynes, *Blake Complete Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 560-66, esp. 561.

⁴ For a convenient citation of the entire text, originally in J.T. Smith, *Nollekens and his Times*, 1828, see G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 472. John Linnell and Frederick Tatham also say that Blake used carpenter's glue, but their acquaintance with Blake begins after 1818 (Bentley, *Blake Records*, pp. 3, 33).

⁵ G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 684-85.

⁶ Although Vasari (see n. 13 below) first mentions Cennino, the location in the Laurentian Library in Florence seems to be published first by [Filippo Baldinucci], *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue . . .*, ed. Fernando Ranalli (Florence: V. Batelli & Co., 1845), p. 312. My thanks to Dr. Lindberg for pointing out the Baldinucci reference to me. I derive the following account of the manuscript from Thompson, *Il Libro*, I, ix-xii. Three manuscript copies of Cennino's lost original written after 1396 are known. The two earliest recensions upon which Thompson relies are the Quattrocento MS in the Laurentian Library, 78.P.23, finished by 1437, and the Cinquecento MS in the Riccardian Library, 2190, not mentioned until 1810. The third is an eighteenth century copy of the Laurentian MS, the Vatican Ottobonian 2914, dated 1737, which is the one upon which Tambroni's edition is based. The Laurentian Library MS was examined and mentioned by Bernard de Montfaucon, *Bibliotheca Bibliothecarum nova* (Paris: 1739), I, 395C, and was included in A. M. Bandini, *Catalogus codicum italicorum bibliothecae medicae laurentianae . . .* (Florence: 1778), V, 307. An allusion to "L'opera del Cennini nato in Valdelsa si ritrova nella libreria Medicea di S. Lorenzo al banco 78 cod. 24" is contained in the 1759 Bottari edition of Vasari's *Le Vite*, I, 21, as cited in Barocchi, *Le Vite*, II, 638 (see n. 13 below).

⁷ For their friendship, see Bentley, *Blake Records*, pp. 17, 19, and Bindman, *Artist*, p. 26. George Cumberland, *Thoughts on Outline, Sculpture, and the System that guided the ancient artists in composing their figures and groupes* (London, 1796), p. 27.

⁸ Blake and Cumberland were also exploring solutions to the problem of making plates for printing their own works as early as 1784-85, and may also have shared information at that time (Bentley, *Blake Records*, p. 32; Bindman, *Artist*, pp. 42-43).

⁹ For Cumberland's travels, see G.E. Bentley, Jr., *George Cumberland Bibliography, 1754-1848* (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1975), pp. xviii, xix, 96, 125-26. For the dates between which Cumberland traveled to and remained in Italy, see Clementina Black, ed., *The Cumberland Letters, Being the Correspondences of Richard Dennison Cumberland and George Cumberland Between the Years 1771 and 1784* (London: Secker, 1912), p. 338, and Geoffrey Keynes, "Some Uncollected Authors XLIV: George Cumberland 1754-1848," *Book Collector*, 19 (1970), 35-36.

¹⁰ Cumberland, *Thoughts*, p. 27.

¹¹ Keynes, *Writings*, p. 790.

¹² Butlin, *Paintings*, pp. 156, 317-18.

¹³ For Vasari I rely on [Giorgio Vasari], *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini, Vol. II, Text, and Paola Barocchi, comm., Vol. II, Pt. 1, Commentary (Florence: Sansoni, 1966-), "Vita d'Agnolo Gaddi," 248-49. For Baldinucci, see Ranalli, *Notizie*, p. 312.

¹⁴ The 1568 edition of Vasari was listed as Item 22 of A *Catalogue of the Collection of Books on Art, Antique Bronzes, Terra Cottas, and Coins, the Property of George Cumberland, Esq. . . .*, sold by auction at Christie & Manson, 6 May 1835.

¹⁵ For the two subsequent eighteenth-century editions before 1785, see Barocchi, *Le Vite*, II, 1, vii. Bettarini, *Le Vite*, II, 248-49.

¹⁶ Cumberland, *Thoughts*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁷ Thompson, *Handbook*, Chapters 5, 6, 7, for all the quotations in this paragraph.

¹⁸ Thompson, *Il Libro*, I, xv.

¹⁹ See Thompson, *Il Libro*, xvi, for the archaic form, and Tempesti, *Il libro*, p. 11, where he cites the Milanese identification of Cennino's Paduanisms.

²⁰ Thompson, *Il Libro* and *Handbook*, Chapter 1.

²¹ Cumberland's interests are recorded, especially in Black, *Letters*, pp. 83, 138, 267; Keynes, "Uncollected," p. 35; Bentley, *Bibliography*, *passim*; and all of Cumberland's writings, including especially references to his days in Italy in the Preface of *Outlines from the Ancients* (London, 1829).

²² For the untraced manuscripts, see Bentley, *Bibliography*, pp. viii, 123-27.

²³ Thompson, *Il Libro*, xiv.

²⁴ The most recent treatment of a phase of this revival of interest in ancient practices that I know of is the fascinating unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of Danielle Rice, "The Fire of the Ancients: The Encaustic Painting Revival, 1755-1812," Yale University, 1979. Rice's work provides a detailed description of the international nature of these explorations of early manuscripts for techniques and the interest in technical matters and shared experimental results in the second half of the eighteenth century.

²⁵ Rice points out that experiments and interest in encaustic painting peaked in England in the 1760s, and she mentions many variations in the process of wall painting (Chapters 4 and 5, especially pp. 196 and 201).

²⁶ Lindberg refers to such chemical analysis of an Essick colorprint in his review of Essick's book. His talk in Toronto, February 1983, on "The Chariot of Genius: Blake's Binders and Pigments" (which is in the future at the time of this writing) may address this problem.

²⁷ Butlin, *Paintings*, p. xii.

²⁸ For a clear description of terms, see Thompson, *Handbook*,

pp. xv-xvii, and Chapters 67, 109, 113-17 especially. The Italian terms *colla*, *gesso grosso*, *gesso sottile*, *tempera* and *calcina*, as Thompson both points out and clarifies, are difficult to translate. Words used by English, American and other translators have subtle differences of meaning. Thompson's merit is that he explains what he means by his terms.

²⁹ Essick, *Printmaker*, p. 122-23.

³⁰ Thompson, *Handbook*, Chapters 16-22, 25, 109, 113-17.

³¹ Lindberg, *Job*, pp. 178-79.

³² Thompson, *Handbook*, Chapter 109.

³³ In Chapter 25, Cennino says, "Then get some fish glue and some leaf glue, which the druggists sell," and in Chapter 16 he directs, "get a leaf of druggists' glue, not fish glue."

³⁴ Aside from the problem about when Blake learned Italian (see Bentley, *Blake Records*, pp. 349-50, 475), another minor problem is connected with this claim. In January of 1838, Linnell wrote to his son-in-law, Samuel Palmer, in Italy, "quoting Cennino Cennini's *Il Libro dell'Arte*, which he had seen at Callcott's" (as cited in Edward Malins, *Samuel Palmer's Italian Honeymoon* [London: Oxford University Press, 1968], p. 88.) Malins had access to the Ivimy MSS, the Linnell family papers. I raise the question of why Linnell would have mentioned Cennino's book to Palmer as though he had seen it for the first time at the Kensington home of his neighbor, Sir Augustus Callcott, if he indeed had the first copy in England and gave it to Blake.

Also contributing to the idea that Blake saw the Tambroni edition are two artifacts mentioned by E.J. Ellis and Geoffrey Keynes, which however cannot be traced. E.J. Ellis, in *The Real Blake*, 1907, p. 420, first mentioned a sentence by Blake in the "Linnell" copy of Cennino, as noted by Geoffrey Keynes in *A Bibliography of William Blake* (New York: Grolier Club of New York, 1921), pp. 53-54. For references to this artifact see David V. Erdman, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 659, 803, and also see Bentley, *Blake Books*, pp. 684-85. Erdman and Bentley both cast doubt on Ellis's reliability and accuracy. Keynes, in *A Bibliography*, p. 53, also describes as an eyewitness an extract from Cennino's work in Blake's hand in a sketchbook belonging to George Richmond sold at Sotheby's on 28 July 1920. For other references see Bentley, *Blake Books*, pp. 684-85, Butlin, *Drawings*, p. 548, and Essick, review of Butlin, p. 60.

³⁵ Essick, *Printmaker*, p. 123. Cennino's manuscript deals with Trecento practices, not those of the Cinquecento, as one might infer from Essick's use of the word Renaissance.

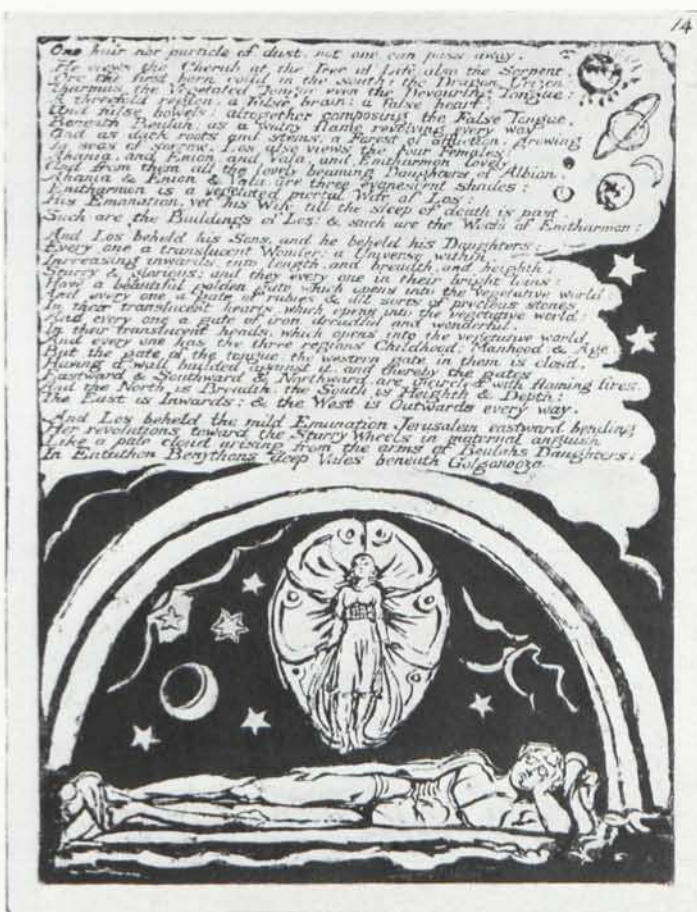
³⁶ Butlin, *Paintings*, p. 549.

³⁷ Essick, review of Butlin, p. 60.

Iris & Morpheus: Investigating Visual Sources for *Jerusalem* 14

Judith Ott

The design on plate 14 of *Jerusalem* (illus. 1) consists of a winged Jerusalem descending from a rainbow through a starry sky to awaken Albion from his deathlike sleep of mortality beside watery shores where he is attended by



1. William Blake. *Jerusalem*: 14. By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

two angels.¹ Although this design has been variously identified, the specific iconographic sources have not yet come to light. Attention paid to the particulars of the scene clearly shows that the illumination on plate 14 is, among other things, a parallel visual interpretation of the Greek myth of Iris and Morpheus.²

Iris was the Greek goddess who personified the rainbow on which she descended to earth as a messenger of the gods.³ Juno sent Iris to release the soul of Dido by rousing the sleeping Morpheus, the god of dreams.⁴ The Kingdom of Hypnos was described by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 11:589-632) as a cave in a hollow mountainside below which ran the River Lethe and next to which Blake shows Albion asleep. Lethe is the River of Forgetfulness, one of the five rivers surrounding Hades—an appropriate resting place for the god of dreams (and for Albion at this stage of *Jerusalem*).⁵ Iris is most often represented with her rainbow, as in this emblem from Boudard's *Iconologie* of 1766 (illus. 2), or descending on bright wings from a rainbow to rouse the sleeping god.⁶ Perhaps the lines around Albion's shoulder in plate 14 are meant to indicate wings at rest.⁷