ANDREW BAIRHUM, GIOVANNI FERRERIO AND THE 'LIGHTER STYLE OF PAINTING'

Michael Bath

The name of Giovanni Ferrerio crops up from time to time in recurrent debates on the question of whether Scotland ever enjoyed a northern Renaissance, most recently by Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson in their discussion, in this journal, of what they call 'the continuing problem of the Scottish Renaissance' (Stevenson and Davidson 2009: 82-3). The Scottish contributions and European connections of this Italian scholar, who migrated several times between Scotland, Paris and his native Piedmont during the 1530s and 1540s, have been well studied in a number of ground-breaking articles by John Durkan, which clearly establish Ferrerio's role in helping to initiate what Durkan calls 'the beginnings of humanism in Scotland' (Durkan 1953, Durkan 1981).

Born near Turin in 1502, Ferrerio always described himself as Piedmontese ('Pedemontanus'), enrolling at the University of Paris in 1525, where he worked on an edition of Ficino's translations of Plato. In Paris he met Robert Reid, abbot-designate of Kinloss, who invited him to Scotland to spend three years at the court of James V, in Edinburgh and in Perth, before taking up his duties, in 1531, as tutor to the monks at Kinloss Abbey, where he instituted a syllabus which included texts by Lefèvre d'Etaples, Melanchthon and Erasmus. In Scotland he developed friendships with such Scots as Reid and Hector Boece, whom he had first met in Paris in 1527 when Boece was engaged in publication of his *Scotorvm historiae a prima gentis origine*, the pioneering history of the Scots for which Ferrerio was eventually to write some additional chapters. Boece (c.1465-1536) had himself studied in Paris in the closing decades of the fifteenth century (c.1485-1497), when he had served as regent of the University, and it was in those years that he had bought the copy of Marsilio Ficino's *De triplici vita* which, Stevenson and Davidson argue, influenced his layout of the buildings of the University of Aberdeen on cosmological principles after he had become the university's first, founding, Principal in the 1490s. Ferrerio's work on Ficino must have fostered this friendship. On returning to Paris, 1537-41, he acted as corrector

Michael Bath, 'Andrew Bairhum, Giovanni Ferrerio and the "Lighter Style of Painting" '. *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* 2.1 (Spring 2010), 1-13. <http://northernrenaissance.org/>.

for university publisher Michel Vascosan, who published several of Ferrerio's own scholarly works, in one of which he comments on the extraordinary liberalisation and expansion of the humanist curriculum that had taken place in the university of Paris in the years since he last studied there (Durkan 1981: 187). Reid was determined to bring Ferrerio back to Scotland, securing him a pension of forty pounds which Ferrerio continued to receive for many years after his return to Kinloss, resuming his duties as tutor from 1541 to 1545, during which time he wrote his *Historia Abbatum de Kynlos*. Ferrerio's correspondence with Conrad Gessner in Geneva in the 1550s is acknowledged for a number of the illustrations which appear in Gessner's monumental *Historia animalium* (1551-60), including several of those which supplied patterns for the present Oxburgh embroideries executed by Mary Queen of Scots.[1]

Although mostly remembered for his role as tutor to the monks of Kinloss abbey and his continuation of Hector Boece's history, the fuller investigation of his circles of friendship and correspondence reveals a picture in which, far from being merely 'a fairly marginal figure at the remote edge of Scottish life', Ferrerio emerges as a potentially important agent for the transmission of leading humanist values and ideas between Scotland and elsewhere in Europe, and may specifically 'have acted as a vehicle for the entry of Italian ideas' (Durkan 1980: 181). It is one such Italian idea that concerns me in this paper, for art historians have occasionally noted something Ferrerio says, in his history of the abbey of Kinloss, about an otherwise unknown painter called Andrew Bairhum who, as early as 1538, redecorated the abbot's lodgings in what he calls 'the lighter style of painting which is now most fashionable throughout Scotland' (*pictura leviore quae nunc est per Scotiam receptissima*, Ferrerio 1839: 50-51). Previous art-historical discussion of Ferrerio's comment has tended to focus on the identity of Andrew Bairhum (e.g. Brydall 1889: 57), but I suggest that it is the expression Ferrerio uses to describe this style of painting that is of the greatest interest. As Duncan Macmillan notes, the expression suggests that 'the fashion for painted interiors that we know from surviving painted ceilings prevailed in Scotland in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was already established in the reign of James V' (Macmillan 1990: 36). My discovery that the same Latin expression (*pictura leviore*) is used on the title-plate of an influential set of Italian ornament prints, produced in Rome at exactly the period Ferrerio was writing, now sheds further light on the exact meaning of this expression, on Ferrerio's role as a channel for the entry of Italian ideas, and on the wider history of the visual arts at this period in Scotland. The title advertises a set of engravings illustrating 'The lighter and – as can be seen – extemporary paintings which are commonly known as grotesques, which the ancient Romans used as decoration in their dining rooms and other

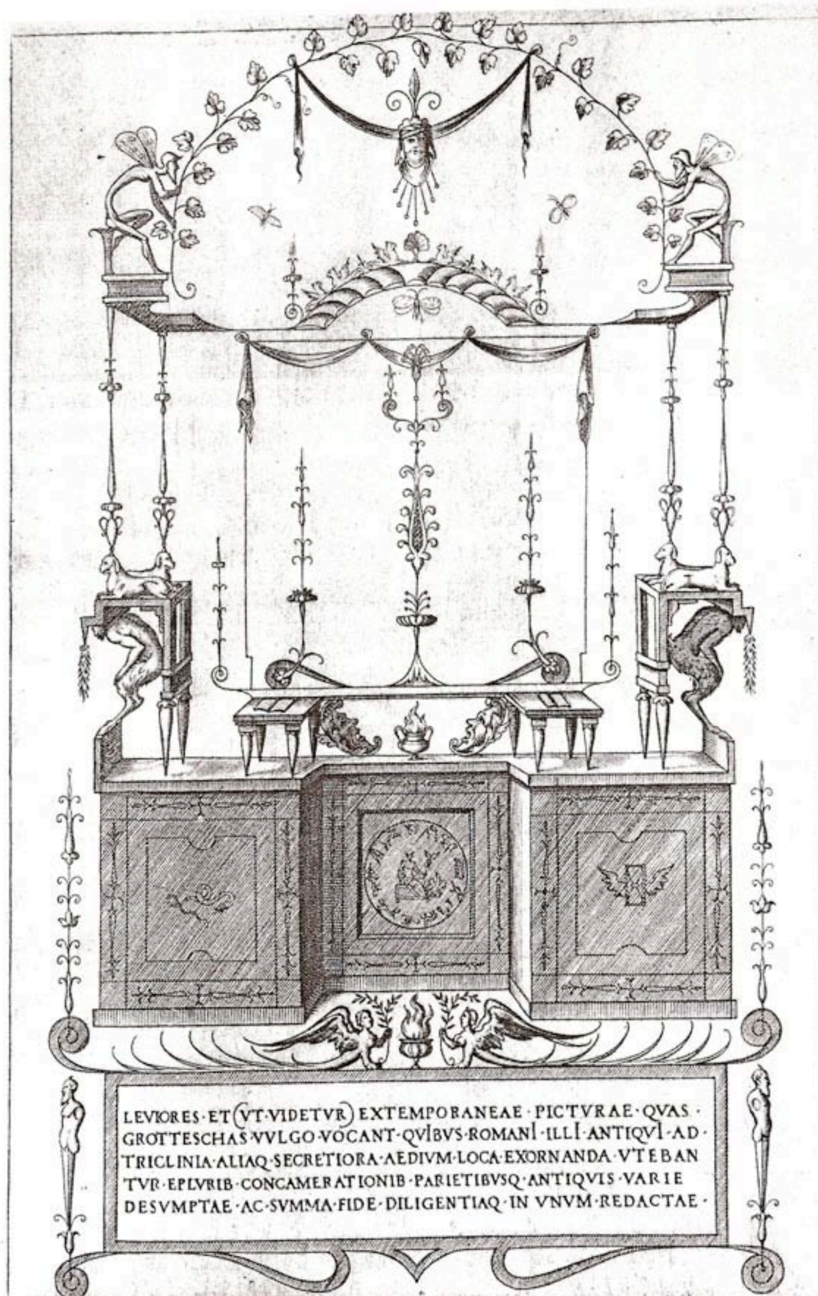

Fig. 1. *Title page for a set of grotesque prints,* Leviores picturae, *undated and unsigned though now thought to have been published in Rome by Antonio Lafrery (1512-77) sometime after 1544. The title page refers to a series of nineteen engravings of grotesques often ascribed to Enea Vico but now thought to be reverse copies of Vico's originals, 1541-42. London: Victoria and Albert Museum.*

more private parts of their buildings, which have been variously selected and brought together with great exactitude and care from many vaulted chambers and ancient walls' (*Leviores et (ut videtur) extemporaneae picturae quas grotteschas vulgo vocant quibus Romani illi antiqui ad triclinia aliaque secretiora aedum loca exornanda utebantur e pluribus concamerationibus parietibusque antiquis varie desumptae ac summa fide diligentiaque in unum redactae*). (Fig. 1) It thus identifies 'the lighter style of painting' explicitly with that development in the decorative arts which we call 'grotesque'.

This set of decorative prints and, indeed, this particular title-page with its clear and informed explanation of the historical basis and nature of the grotesque style have often been cited in modern histories of the applied arts at this period in Europe, when the association of *grottesco* both with *all'antica* models of design in the decoration of major buildings and also with the influential development of a distinctive type of ornament prints was particularly close.[2] As Nicole Dacos says, this long and ambitious title-plate makes a clear allusion to the Golden Palace of Nero, in whose excavated grottoes artists in the closing years of the fifteenth century had famously discovered the most authentic models of a classical decorative style (Dacos 2001: 79). From then until at least the nineteenth century these supplied the most authoritative patterns for any designs in the applied arts that aspired towards the antique, which means that if the grotesque style was already becoming widespread in Scotland as early as 1538, then we will have to revise most of our received ideas about Scottish visual culture in the first half of the sixteenth century. Although Ferrerio tells us that 1538 was when Andrew Bairhum was summoned to decorate the Abbot's lodgings in this style, he also says the work occupied Bairhum for three years and the very next sentence, describing Abbot Robert Reid's move to Orkney, begins 'Hoc anno 1544 ...'. Ferrerio was evidently writing his account of Kinloss at, or shortly after, this time (he mentions this date at various other points in his account of the recent history of the abbey, but nothing later than this). We may well wonder, however, whether this Italianate style of authentically 'antique' painting could really have been widespread (*receptissima*) in Scotland at such an early date, or if not what else Giovanni Ferrerio could have meant by the expression 'pictura leviore'. Can we be sure he is using it in the same sense as the Italian engraver? Could he possibly have seen the engravings concerned, or is he using the expression in some looser and more generic sense? For any answer to these questions the dates are crucial, but unfortunately the history of this influential set of prints is exceptionally complex and difficult, and until we can sort that out we are unlikely to be able to answer those questions.

There were, as it happens, at least two different early sets of these prints, one of which evidently copies the other (with variations), and prints scholars have not yet succeeded in deciding which is the earlier. In one of the sets the majority of plates are, indeed, signed and dated 1541 or 1542, carrying the initials both of Enea Vico and also those of Roman engraver and prints publisher Tommaso Barlacchi.

Ever since Adam Bartsch produced his monumental catalogue of engravings in the Imperial collection in Vienna (Bartsch 1803-1821, see 1854-1876 edn., vol. 15: 467-490), it has been normal to ascribe the twenty-three grotesques in this series to the eighteen-year-old Enea Vico, who was apprenticed to Barlacchi at this time. However, a different set, lacking four of Vico's designs, carries no dates or signatures, varying some details and reversing the orientation. In their book on the history of ornament prints, Rudolf Berliner and Gerhart Egger insist that the unsigned and undated versions are the earlier set, and that those carrying Enea Vico's initials must have been copied on the orders of his employer, Barlacchi. This assumption is shared by Michael Snodin and Maurice Howard in their *Ornament: A Social History* (1996: 39-40). However, more recently, Elizabeth Miller has produced a fuller account of the complex publication history of this influential prints series. Her authoritative catalogue of *Sixteenth-Century Italian Ornament Prints in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (1999: 98-101) identifies at least three different issues of the series, only one of which is the signed and dated set of twenty-three unnumbered plates produced in Rome by Vico and Barlacchi in 1541-42. This set has no title page, since the plate corresponding to our *Leviores picturae* title page lacks the inscription. Two further sets consisting of nineteen plates are anonymous, and both of these include the *Leviores picturae* title page, but no signatures. Of these one set is numbered 1-16, with the three extra plates being printed as unnumbered pairs on single sheets: Miller identifies this set with a *Libro de Grottesche* which is identified in the stocklist circulated c. 1573 by Roman prints publisher Antonio Lafrery. The evidence for this ascription is largely circumstantial, though it certainly corresponds to Lafrery's normal publishing habits, which relied heavily on copies: 'Clearly Lafrery's methods of building up his business routinely involved publishing anonymous copies of works by named engravers' (Miller 1999: 100). This numbered set reissues the other, unnumbered, set which Lafrery would, presumably, have printed a few years earlier, but certainly 'no earlier than 1544, when Lafrery was first active' (Miller 1999, 99). This account, therefore, gives priority to the set produced 1541-42 by Vico and Barlacchi, followed by an unnumbered and anonymous set of reverse copies published in Rome after 1544 by Lafrery, who reissued it in a numbered sequence which he advertised around 1573 under the title *Libro de Grottesce*. This reconstruction of the publication history produces a date for the earliest appearance of the *Leviores picturae* title page that is almost certainly too late for it to have been seen by Ferrerio when writing his *History of the Abbey of Kinloss* in Scotland in 1544-45.

There is only one piece of evidence that might still raise questions over Elizabeth Miller's otherwise persuasive reconstruction of this publication history, for in a recent article on these engravings, Nicole Dacos – pioneer of modern scholars of the grotesque – notes that Enea Vico, in the signed 1541-42 series, makes all the human figures left-handed.[3] This is of little consequence when the figures are engaged in their fantastic activities or erotic games, but it is highly

problematic and unconventional to find a god steering his chariot or an archer drawing his bow left-handed.[4] This would suggest that the left-handed versions are the later copies, and that the anonymous and undated *leviores picturae* series are the earlier originals, which could well therefore have been published in the 1530s, early enough to have been seen by Ferrerio. If the jury is still out on the dating and priority of these different sets of prints then Giovanni Ferrerio's use of the same expression might itself offer some support for this priority. The engravings certainly had a long posterity and wide influence, being copied by Jacques Androuet Ducerceau in 1550, and influencing successors such as Jan Vredeman de Vries in 1565. Their use as patterns has been traced in the painted decoration of various buildings ranging from the Prior's lodgings in Assisi, in the Palazzo Farnese at Caprarole, in the Château de Chareil in Auvergne.[5] Can we really believe, however, that there were enough high-status buildings for this cutting-edge European Renaissance style of internal decoration to have become widespread in Scotland as early as 1540? If so, it would be telling evidence for the revisionist histories of Scottish architecture in this period that have been advanced by such scholars as Deborah Howard, Aonghus MacKechnie and, above all, Charles McKean.

We might certainly recall the sheer number of buildings recorded on the maps of Timothy Pont. As McKean puts it, 'if there were indeed buildings approximately where Pont placed them in the late sixteenth century ... Scotland was well provided with country seats, many of considerable splendour'. Moreover, as he argues, the period *c.* 1500-1542, which he characterises as Early Renaissance, was when a large number of these houses appear to have been constructed. This was followed by thirty years of French-educated transformation under Mary of Guise and her daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, when, as Bishop John Leslie recalls in his retrospective *History of Scotland*:

> Here is to be remembered that their was mony new ingynis and devysis, asweill of bigging of paleceis, abilyementis, as of banqueting and of menis behaviour first begun and used in Scotland at this time, after the fassione quilk thay had sene in France. Although it seemed to be varray comelie and beautifull, yit it was more superfluous and voluptuous than the realm of Scotland might bear or sustain. (Leslie 1830: 8, cited McKean 2001: 18)

The idea that any civilised ideas only entered the design of Scottish buildings with the Reformation in 1560 or, more radically, once the Scots had absorbed more enlightened English tastes following the 1603 Union of Crowns, is now wholly untenable, and a good case can be made for the development of the country seat in Scotland occurring 'midway through the Marian period – the time when Scotland was under the influence of Mary of Guise and her daughter Mary Queen of Scots' (McKean 2001: 8). The sheer number of surviving examples of decorative painting

on walls and ceilings that I was able to document in my book *Renaissance Decorative Painting in Scotland* makes the likelihood that such painting 'in the lighter style' was already widespread as early as 1540 by no means improbable.

But do we have any evidence for the circulation of European pattern books and ornament prints in Scotland at such an early date? The sheer number of print sources that I was able to identify as the patterns used by Scottish house owners in the later-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century is surely suggestive (Bath 2003). Among the earliest surviving artefacts in Scotland that have been shown to copy European engravings are two of the statues of classical gods – Jupiter and Venus – among the extraordinarily ambitious and diverse statuary which enriches three of the external elevations of James V's new palace at Stirling, whose building coincides almost exactly, 1538-42, with Andrew Bairhum's work at Kinloss and with Ferrerio's writing. Those two statues have long been known to copy prints from Hans Burgkmair's *Seven Planets* series.[6] The earliest surviving examples of decorative painting to be found in Scotland are in a wing of the house at Kinneil, Bo'ness which James Hamilton, 2nd Earl of Arran, cousin to Mary Queen of Scots and heir to the throne, enriched and redecorated at public expense during the years 1542-54, when he was Regent of Scotland. The surviving painting of this period at Kinneil probably dates from 1553-55, and is of a richness and sophistication which can only have been the product of a well-established national tradition.

Fig. 2. *Kinneil House, Bo'ness (West Lothian), detail of mural painting in Parable Room, executed for James Hamilton, Earl of Arran, c. 1553-56. Photo author.*

Fig. 3. *Kinneil House, Bo'ness, coffered oak ceiling executed for Regent Arran, c. 1542-56, the pattern copies a design from Serlio. Photo author.*

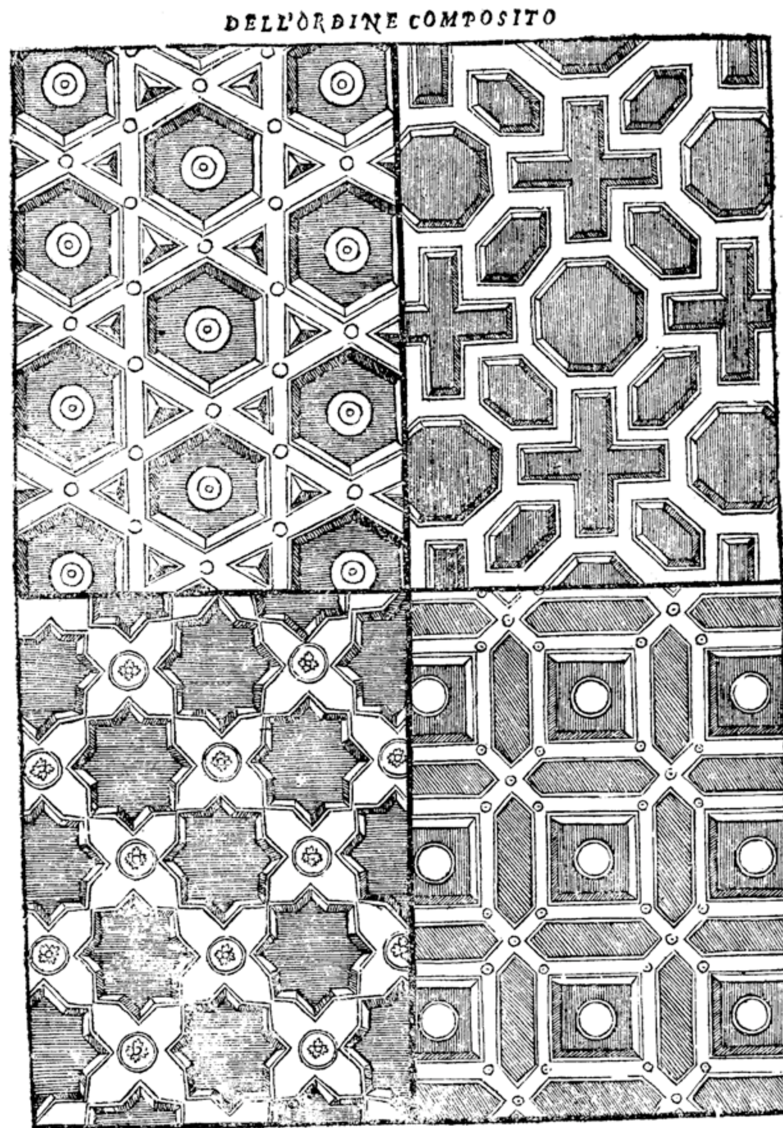

Fig. 4. *Patterns for classically-inspired Renaissance ceilings, woodcut,* Regole generali di architettura*, 1537, book IV of Sebastiano Serlio's architectural treatise. Glasgow University Library, Department of Special Collections.*

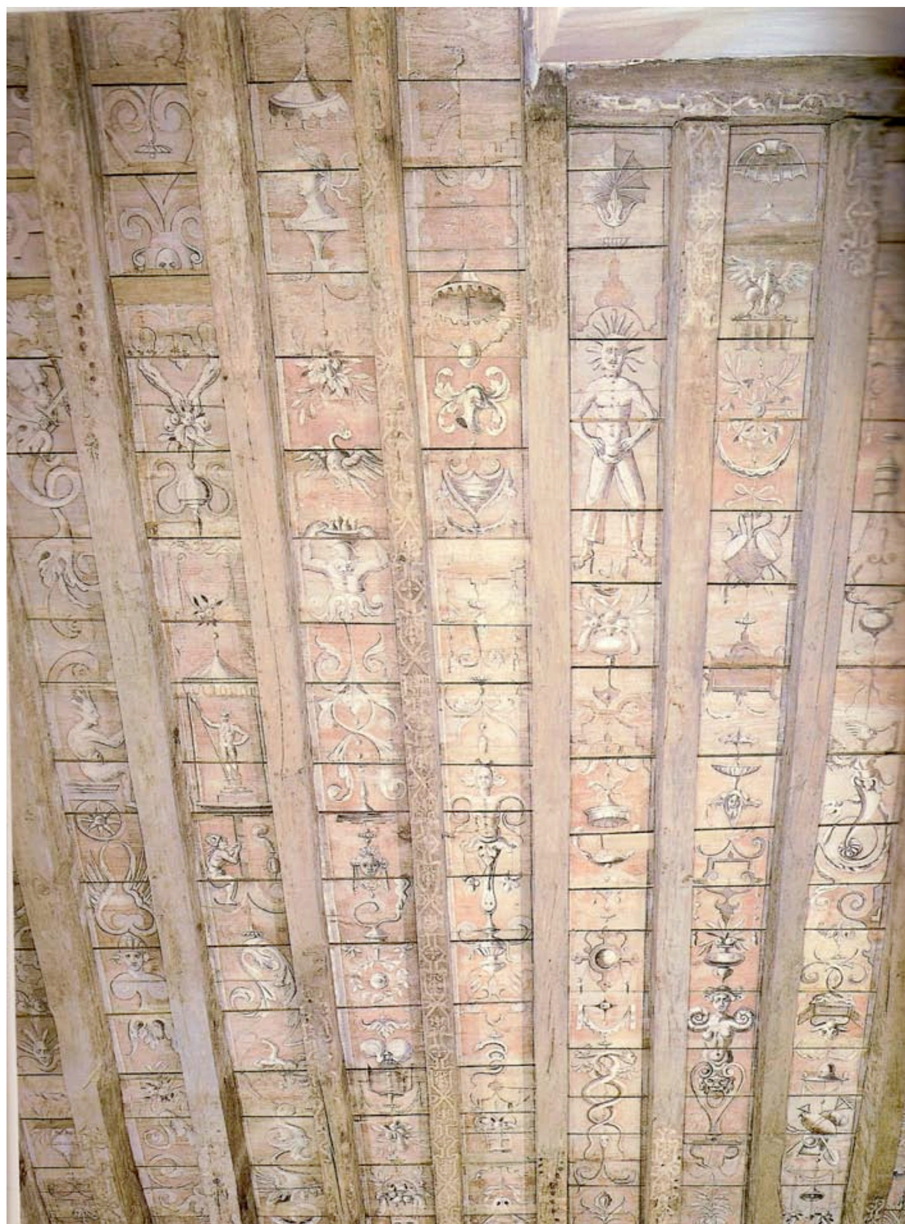

Fig. 5. *Grotesque decoration copying details from Vredeman de Vries,* Grottesco *(c. 1565), and other sources, painted ceiling, tempera on board, from Prestongrange (East Lothian), 1581, when the house was owned by Mark Kerr; the ceiling has been reassembled at Merchiston Tower, Edinburgh, on the Napier University Morningside campus. Photo RCAHMS.*

Although it is chiefly noted for its biblical *Good Samaritan* sequence, this is surrounded by *trompe-l'oeil* classical pilasters, medallions, and antique-work which must go back to continental print-sources, and are certainly in a lighter *all'antiqua* style of painting which is handled with some assurance. (Fig. 2) The coffered oak ceiling to this 'Parable Room' (Fig. 3), moreover, takes its pattern from the most influential pre-Palladian guidebook to classical architecture, Sebastiano Serlio's *Regole generali di architectura*, Book IV of which (the first volume to be published) had appeared in 1537. (Fig. 4) This discovery ought, finally, to banish whatever doubts we might still have about the immediacy of Scottish access to and familiarity with continental prints sources from an early period. None of these sources, so far, are what we should properly describe as *grottesco*, but they are all examples of classical *antique* decoration. Any doubt as to the extent to which artistic and architectural tastes aspired to imitate strictly 'classical' design models from a period that begins some time before the mid-sixteenth century in Scotland ought to be dispelled by these tell-tale examples. They make it seem at least possible that Scottish houses, as early as 1540, might have been so frequently decorated with grotesque painting as to impress an educated and well-travelled Italian immigrant.

By 1581 we certainly have the compelling evidence of Mark Kerr's 'dreamwork' at Prestongrange to convince us that the grotesque style was, by then, fully assimilated into the rich Scottish tradition of fully Renaissance domestic decorative painting. (Fig. 5) As I show in my book, the painted ceiling from this house makes extensive use of a set of ornament prints which stands as a direct successor to the *Leviores picturae* series, namely the *Grottesco in diversche manieren* designed by Jan Vredeman de Vries and printed in Antwerp, *c.* 1565-71 (Bath 2003, 104-21, Apted 1966, pl. 42). It is not just the sheer accomplishment of this painting at Prestongrange that stands out, but also the fact that the same set of prints was used by Robert Melville at Rossend, Fife, probably in preparation for James VI's royal visit in 1617 (Bath 2003, 43-52, 258-60). The Rossend ceiling can now be seen on display in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Grotesque painting survives at several other sites and although no continental print sources have yet been identified for these we can be in no doubt that – well before the end of the sixteenth-century – it was a widespread and familiar part of the decorative painters' available repertoire of styles. The idea that it had already become fashionable as early as 1540 thus begins to seem a little less ridiculous: indeed we might conclude that it was only what Charles McKean has called the 'nineteenth-century cult of rubblemania' and its 'ratcheting up the romanticism' of early Scottish architecture (McKean 2001: 6) that ever made it seem so.[7] As Geoffrey Harpham puts it, 'For decades after the initial discoveries, the appearance of the antique style was often the first sign that the Renaissance had arrived' (Harpham 1982: 34). That would be as true in Scotland as it was anywhere else in Europe.

University of Glasgow

NOTES

[1] For these see my *Emblems for a Queen: The Needlework of Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Archetype Publications, 2008), 78, 83-5, 124.
[2] The standard work on grotesque remains Nicole Dacos 1969.
[3] Dacos 2002: 79 : 'on n'a pas encore remarqué qu'en inversant les gravures, Vico a rendu tous ses personages gauchers'.
[4] For these left-handed figures see Miller 1999, cat. 33b pl. 6, 33b pl. 13; 33c pl. 14(l) shows a conventionally right-handed archer in the version supposedly published by Lafrery, whereas Vico's reversal of 1541/42 (unillustrated in Miller) makes him left-handed.
[5] See Dacos 2001: 82 and, for Chareil, A. Regond, *Peinture murale du xvie siècle en Auvergne* (1983 : 328-9).
[6] See RCHMS *Stirlingshire*: 220-23, pl. 71, 72, 76, 78; I am not convinced that the two further, badly eroded, statues at Stirling copy Burgkmair's engravings of Sol and Saturn, and Helena Shire's argument that the iconography of James V's palace at Stirling followed an extended programme of sun symbolism is tendentious and unconvincing (Shire 1966). Burgkmair's engravings of Mars and Venus from the same set also supplied the patterns for the representation of these two figures on Henry VIII's wonderful writing desk, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.
[7] McKean's recent 'What Kind of Renaissance Town was Dundee?' (Chapter 1 in McKean, Harris and Whatley 2009: 1-32) is wholly relevant, as its title suggests, to the wider issue of whether Scotland enjoyed any kind of Renaissance. McKean identifies various books published in Britain and abroad, including what can only be a copy of Whitney's *Emblemes* (1586) in the library of Dundee merchant ship owner, David Wedderburn, and which are mentioned in his account book in 1621. Although Wedderburn also, apparently, imported paintings from the Netherlands and France (McKean, Harris and Whatley, p.21), these dates are rather too late to tell us anything about the early use of a *grottesco* style in sixteenth-century Scotland.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apted, M. R. 1966. *The Painted Ceilings of Scotland 1550-1650* (Edinburgh: HM Stationery Office)

Bartsch, Adam von. 1854-1876. *Le peintre graveur*, 21 vols (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1st edn. Vienna, 1803-1821)

Bath, Michael. 2003. *Renaissance Decorative Painting in Scotland* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland Publications)

Bath, Michael. 2008. *Emblems for a Queen: The Needlework of Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Archetype Publications)

Berliner, Rudolf, and Gerhart Egger. *c.* 1981. *Ornamentale Vorlageblätter des 15. bis 19. Jahrhunderts,* 3 vols (Leipzig, 1926, repr. Munich: Klinkhardt und Biermann)

Brydall, Robert. 1889. *Art in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Blackwood)

Dacos, Nicole. 1969. *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesques à la renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute)

Dacos, Nicole. 2001. «Leviores et extemporaneae picturae ... quas grotteschas vulgo vocan» . Du profane chez Domenico Fiorentino', in S. Poeschel, R. Steiner and R. Wegner, eds., *Heilige und Profane Bilder: Festschrift für Herwarth Röttgen* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaft), 79-96

Durkan, John. 1953. 'The Beginnings of Humanism in Scotland', *Innes Review* 4: 5-24

Durkan, John. 1980. 'Giovanni Ferrerio, Gesner and French Affairs', *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance: travaux et documents* 42 : 349-60

Durkan, John. 1981. 'Giovanni Ferrerio, Humanist: His Influence in Sixteenth-Century Scotland', in K. Robbins, ed., *Religion and Humanism* (Oxford: Blackwell), 181-94

Ferrerio, Giovanni. 1839. *Historia Abbatum de Kynlos* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club)

Harpham, G. 1982. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton)

Leslie, John. 1885-1890. *The historie of Scotland wrytten in Latin by Jhone Leslie and translated in Scottish by James Dalrymple,* ed. E.G. Cody (Edinburgh)

Macmillan, Duncan. 1990. *Scottish Art 1460-1990* (Edinburgh: Mainstream)

McKean, Charles. 2001. *The Scottish Chateau: The Country House of Renaissance Scotland* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing)

McKean, Charles, Bob Harris and Christopher A. Whatley (eds.). 2009. *Dundee: Renaissance to Enlightenment* (Dundee: Dundee University Press)

Miller, Elizabeth. 1999. *Sixteenth-Century Ornament Prints in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publications)

RCAHMS. 1963. *Stirlingshire* (Edinburgh: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland)

Regond, Annie. 1983. *La peinture murale du XVIe Siècle dans la région Auvergne* (Clermont-Ferrand : Institut d'Etudes du Massif Central)

Shire, Helena M. 1996. 'The King in His House: Three Architectural Artefacts belonging to the Reign of James V', in J. Hadley Williams, ed., *Stewart Style 1513-1542: Essays on the Court of James V* (E. Linton: Tuckwell), 62-96