

A Renaissance Depiction of a Tornado

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ABSTRACT: In the present paper a Renaissance depiction of a tornado is discussed which is presumably the earliest pictorial presentation of a tornado worldwide. This tornado appears on a tapestry woven by the carpet manufacturer Willem de Pannemaker in Brussels around 1550. The prototype for this tapestry was painted on a cartoon by the Dutch painter Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen between 1546 and 1550. The cartoon's painter was authorized by the emperor Charles V to join his crusade to Tunis in 1535 against the Muslim in order to document and more to praise the emperor's expedition. The depiction of the tornado and the additional one of heavy rain at a different location of the tapestry is discussed in terms of its meteorological, decorative and symbolic importance. Although these weather elements are depicted realistically, they are implemented not for their own sake but to support the imperial ideas behind the historical event in an emblematic kind. It is a typical Renaissance time characteristic for depicting atmospheric phenomena and landscapes in pieces of art by combining realistic details in an unrealistic manner.