**A possible identification of the subject of the Hospitalfield portrait attributed to Antonis Mor (1512-16 - c.1576).**

The portrait is clearly of a cleric of the mid-sixteenth century. A likely date for the painting would seem to be about 1540 - 1560. The sitter has a strong brow and cheekbones, a prominent beard, distinctive nose, deeply set eyes, and the ring on his right hand appears to have the letter ‘B’ on the shoulder of the gold setting. He is modestly dressed in working/travelling robes and plain black cap but is clearly a person of some distinction, indicated by the red trimming on his overgown, the generous folds of fine cloth in his white undergown, the lace and embroidery at his cuffs, the gold rings, and the gloves of soft leather carried in his left hand. In his right hand he holds papers probably suggesting a scholarly and/or diplomatic status.

I would suggest James Beaton, archbishop of Glasgow (1517 or 1524 - 1603) as a possible subject of this portrait for the following reasons.

**1.** The ‘B’ on the ring might have several interpretations, but Beaton is at least a possibility.

**2.** Although Antonis Mor visited England to paint Queen Mary Tudor, it is not clear that he ever visited Scotland. However, James Beaton travelled extensively on the continent, where he might have met the artist. Beaton was sent to study in Paris and Poitou as a teenager in the 1530s, and in the 1540s and 1550s he travelled between France and Scotland frequently. In 1560 he moved to live in exile in France, following the Scottish Reformation. The most likely location of an encounter between the two men would probably be Italy because, as a subject of the Spanish crown, Antonis Mor might have had difficulties travelling in France (at war with Spain for much of the period), although a visit there would not necessarily have been impossible with the right papers. Beaton visited Rome in the summer of 1552, which might be a possible date for this portrait. Antonis Mor is also known to have visited Rome but the dates of his visit/s are uncertain.

**3.** James Beaton was a career clergyman from a family of prelates. Amongst his titles, he was abbot of Arbroath for a while (1546-1551). Since the painting has an Arbroath provenance, this may be significant. Arbroath Abbey was passed between prominent members of the Beaton family in this period. His immediate predecessors in the abbacy were

i. An older namesake, James Beaton (d.1539), abbot of Arbroath, archbishop of Glasgow and later of St Andrews, who was his great-uncle.

ii. David Beaton (d.1546), abbot of Arbroath, archbishop of St Andrews and a cardinal, who was his uncle. Cardinal Beaton sponsored his nephew’s education in France and passed on to him the abbacy of Arbroath in 1546. The younger James Beaton was abbot of Arbroath *in commendam* (in care, i.e. not resident) until 1551, when he became archbishop of Glasgow.

**4.** The Hospitalfield estate originated in the hospital and chapel of St John the Baptist, which was established by the Abbey of Arbroath sometime in the thirteenth century. The early history of the Mor portrait is unknown. If a search of the archives of Hospitalfield House fails to identify a record of its acquisition in the nineteenth century, there might be a remote possibility that the painting had been inherited from the monastic past and had been in the possession of the Arbroath Abbey estate or that of its hospital for centuries, in which case the likelihood of the sitter being a former abbot would be quite strong.

**5.** James Beaton went to Rome in the summer of 1552 for the confirmation of his appointment as archbishop of Glasgow. This would have been an eminently suitable moment for him to have his portrait painted, although one might have expected him to be portrayed in more ceremonial clothing. However, Beaton was known as a man of great integrity who was not in any way ostentatious (even his Protestant opponents praised his personal qualities), so perhaps the modest attire was his personal preference. It would have been a nice gesture to send the portrait as a memento back to Arbroath, where he had just stepped down as abbot.

**6.** Antonis Mor, or his studio, painted another member of the Beaton family, so the artist was clearly known within James Beaton’s circle. Mary Beaton, one of the ladies-in-waiting of Mary, queen of Scots, was James Beaton’s cousin. Her portrait of about 1550 - 1570 is now at Kenwood House and appears on the Art UK website. James Beaton and his cousin were both trusted advisors to Mary, queen of Scots. James Beaton served as Queen Mary’s ambassador to the French court from 1561 until her execution in 1587. Thereafter, he served her son, King James VI, in the same capacity. Queen Mary kept a collection of portraits of friends and family around her during her personal reign in Scotland (1561-67). Possibly James Beaton’s portrait came to Scotland from France in her collection in 1561 or shortly afterwards and found its way to Arbroath after her deposition, when her household goods were dispersed. The commendator of Arbroath at the time, Lord James Hamilton, was powerful enough to have taken the painting then had he wished.

**7.** There is another portrait of James Beaton in existence. It was made as a memorial at his death in 1603 for the Scots College in Paris, where he was a notable patron and benefactor. It shows him in old age: according to the inscription at the age of 86 in 1603, which would give a birth date of 1517. If he was actually born in 1524 (the date accepted by the *ODNB*) he would have been 79 at his death. The portrait is now in the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow (bequeathed by Archbishop Charles Eyre in 1902) and appears on the Art UK website. The Hunterian online catalogue gives the sitter the title of cardinal, in error. The 1603 portrait is of much lesser quality than the Mor painting. It shows a man with a very long, bushy beard, now grey, and with a bald head, The distinctive nose, prominent cheekbones and deep-set eyes are very similar to the facial features on the Mor portrait. Beaton is dressed very simply, in a white undergown which looks almost identical to the one in the Mor painting, and with an overgown which is similar to that in the earlier portrait (also with red edging) but with a different cut at the shoulders and neckline. There are no visible rings but the right hand is partly obscured. Beaton clutches a crucifix in his left hand and his hands are crossed. The portrait carries Beaton’s coat of arms and motto as well as an identifying inscription. A comparison of the two portraits does not reveal any elements which would obviously discount the possibility of the sitter being the same man, some fifty years apart. Indeed, there are sufficient similarities in the features and clothing for the identification to be a distinct possibility.

All of this is rather speculative and nothing is conclusive but in my judgement, the identification of James Beaton as the sitter in the Mor portrait is a strong possibility.

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