

Glynn Vivian Art Gallery

ACW Beacon Award Research Project, 2008-2010

Picture Report by Kirstine Dunthorne

Acc. Number: GV 27

Artist: Ippolito Scarsella, Lo Scarsellino, (Ferrara c.1550-Ferrara1620) attributed to (previously Ludovico Carracci, (Bologna 1555 -1619), attributed to

Biography:

A Ferrarese painter who originally trained with his father, Sigismondo Scarsella (1530 – 1614) in Ferrara, Scarsellino is said to have spent four years in the studio of Veronese in Venice from c.1570. Later, in the 1590s, he worked closely with the Carracci, including decorative painting at the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara. His work is influenced both by the Venetian school and by Mannerist painters such as Parmigianino and Dosso Dossi, his famous predecessor in Ferrara, as well as by the Carracci. In addition to frescoes, altarpieces and mythological scenes, he painted many small-scale devotional images of the Virgin and Child and Holy Family on copper and panel similar to GV27. He had a considerable workshop about which little is known.

Chronology:

Title: *Virgin and Infant Saviour (Virgin and Child with Female Saint –St. Catherine?)*

Date: Late 16th Century

Medium: Oil on wood panel

Dimensions: 339 x 289mm

Inscription: Inscribed in ink on verso: AGOSTINO CARRACCI

Credit: Richard Glynn Vivian Bequest

Context of Picture:

The Virgin and child are seated beneath a tree. She turns her head away from her son to look down pensively at the empty red-lined cradle in the right foreground corner of the painting. On her lap, the Christ Child is twisting away from his mother to embrace the female saint who is kneeling reverently on the ground before him. The saint is wearing a rich crimson gown and golden cloak, while the BVM has a light red dress under her blue cloak. In the left background, the distant landscape and evening sky have the warm colouring associated with Venetian painters such as Titian and Veronese. Cleaning would undoubtedly reveal more of the colour and detail of this intimate scene, which is at present

covered in thick brown varnish. There seems to be some damage and overpaint in area of the Virgin's cloak. (Condition Report, 2009).

RGV bought GV27 *Virgin and Infant Saviour* and GV 26 *The Holy Family* from the Duke of Marlborough's sale at Christies in August, 1886 as by Ludovico Carracci. Although the inscription on the verso of GV27 says 'Agostino Carracci', both paintings were catalogued in Swansea in 1911 as 'Ludovico Carracci (attributed to)'. George Scharf, who had seen the paintings at Blenheim in 1862 attributed GV27 to Ludovico Carracci, describing it as 'an imitation of Correggio' while GV26 was attributed simply to 'L. Carracci'. His full description is as follows: 'in the Smaller Drawing Room. Ludovico Carracci – The Virgin seated under a tree with the infant saviour in her lap, who turns to embrace a female saint kneeling on the left hand side. The cradle is in the opposite corner. A small picture, an imitation of Correggio, painted on panel.'

The two paintings are probably by different hands and a number of experts [Dr. Gian Paolo Cammarota, Curator of the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna and Dr. Catherine Whistler, Senior Assistant Keeper at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, both in correspondence 2009; Mr Andrew MacKenzie, Director of Old Master Paintings at Bonhams, February 2009] have suggested that the present painting, *Virgin and Infant Saviour*, GV 27 is of higher quality than GV26. It is GV 26, however, which has pointed the way to a new attribution for GV27. GV26, *The Holy Family*, is very close to a painting in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, *The Holy Family with the Young St. John the Baptist* by Ippolito Scarsella, Lo Scarsellino (Ferrara c.1550 – 1620). (see Novelli, Maria Angela *Scarsellino* Skira: Milan, 2008 p.145, Cat.117) It may even be a copy, perhaps made at Wilton House, where the Ashmolean's painting was in the collection of the Earls of Pembroke from the early eighteenth century.

Although further research is needed to confirm the attribution, it seems probable that GV 27 is also linked with Scarsellino. The saint and subject represented here have not yet been identified. The general outline of the group suggests the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*. However, the Christ Child is not placing a wedding ring on the Saint's finger, nor can St. Catherine of Alexandria's usual attribute, the wheel, be seen in the picture. A *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* by Scarsellino which does show these features is now in a private collection in Cento, Italy (see ed. Benati, Daniele, *La Grazia dell'Arte. Collezione Grimaldi Fava. Dipinti e Disegni* (Milan, 2009, no. 26). It had belonged to the Mond family until sold at Sotheby's in 1990 (see Novelli, M.A., 2008, p.201, Cat.177) and was published in J.P.Richter, *The Mond Collection: An Appreciation*, 1910, plate 28 (Witt Library). It differs in composition and symbolism from the Glynn Vivian painting, but is quite similar in size and style. Another, early, version of the subject, in the Musee du Louvre, Paris (Inv. RF3824,) includes St. John the Baptist and St. Joseph. It shows an embrace between Christ Child and saint, as in GV27, but no ring or other attributes. (see Novelli, M.A., 2008, p.146, Cat.118)

In An 'Extract from the Third Codicil to the Will of Richard Glynn Vivian, Esquire deceased', dated 5th April 1902/8?, in which RGV describes his bequest to the Mayor and Corporation of Swansea, two other pictures attributed to 'Caracci' are mentioned in the context of GV26 and GV27:

The following articles now at Sketty Hall, that is to say: -.....celebrated picture by Caracci "*The Holy Family*" from the Blenheim Collection. Two small pictures by Caracci Picture of the "*Dead Christ*" by Caracci. These last three pictures are now in the drawing room".

The 'two small pictures by Caracci' are almost certainly GV26 and GV27. The *Holy Family*' is probably the same as Lot 640 in the Blenheim Sale of August 1886, where it is described as 'Agostino Carracci, *Madonna and Child with St. Joseph*. A composition of three figures, life size. Half length... (price) £21.0.0'. Neither the *Holy Family*' nor the *Dead Christ*' is mentioned in the 1911 *Catalogue of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea*. This suggests that RGV's Trustees exercised their right to 'except from the above bequest a few specimens of each description which shall be selected ...and retained by them and left in the rooms where they now respectively are...' Richard Glynn Vivian's *Holy Family*' was sold in Swansea by John M. Leeder & Son in a sale of *Part of the Collection of Works of Art made by the Late Glynn Vivian, Esq.* on 9 January, 1914 (Lot 71). Now attributed to Annibale Carracci, it was given to the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne as part of the Felton Bequest in 1971.

Web Summary:

The Virgin Mary sits with the infant Jesus on her lap. She turns to look down pensively at the empty cradle. The Christ Child leans in the opposite direction to embrace the female saint kneeling reverently before him. In the left background, the distant landscape and evening sky have the warm colouring associated with Venetian painters such as Titian and Veronese. Richard Glynn Vivian bought the painting at the Duke of Marlborough's sale in 1886. It was then attributed to Ludovico Carracci, but it may instead be associated with the Ferrarese painter, lo Scarsellino (c.1550 -1620), who made a speciality of this kind of small-scale, intimate devotional image.

108 words

Provenance:

Purchased by RGV from the 'Collection of Pictures and Porcelain from Blenheim Palace sold by order of His Grace the Duke of Marlborough by Christies. Saturday August 7, Monday August 9, 1886'. Lot 639. Price 15.15.0 (15 guineas)

'An Extract from the Third Codicil to the Will of Richard Glynn Vivian, Esquire deceased', dated 5th April 1902 (8?), which describes his bequest to the Mayor and Corporation of Swansea, notes '(c). The following articles now at Sketty Hall that is to say: - Two small pictures also by Caracci. Picture of the Dead Christ by Annibale Caracci. These last three pictures are now in the drawing room.'

Bibliography:

References:

Scharf, George FSA *Catalogue Raisonne, or a List of the Pictures in Blenheim Palace with occasional remarks and illustrative notes*, London, 1862, p.51.

GV27 is described by Scharf as follows: 'in the Smaller Drawing Room. Ludovico Carracci – The Virgin seated under a tree with the infant saviour in her lap, who turns to embrace a female saint kneeling on the left hand side. The cradle is in the opposite corner. A small picture, an imitation of Correggio, painted on panel.'

Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures and Porcelain from Blenheim Palace sold by order of His Grace the Duke of Marlborough by Christies Saturday August 7, Monday August 9 1886, p.101, Lot 639.

Price 15.15.0. (15 guineas)

County Borough of Swansea *Catalogue of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea* (Swansea, 1913), p.3 No.27

Christopher Wright? *Old Master Paintings in Britain* (Sotheby's Parke Bernet, 1976)

The National Inventory of Continental European Paintings online:

[www.http://:nicepaintings.org](http://www.nicepaintings.org). Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea

Further reading:

Novelli, Maria Angela *Scarsellino* (Skira: Milan, 2008)

There is no mention of this painting or composition in this Catalogue Raisonne, but a number of similar works are illustrated. (See above)

Notes:

I am immensely grateful to Dr. Catherine Whistler of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for her helpful suggestions and for allowing me to see her unpublished catalogue entries on two paintings by Scarsellino in the museum.