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### ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*  
MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

*Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.*



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# New Evidence for the Origins of a Royal Copper Head from the Ancient Near East

**MELISSA EPPIHIMER**

When The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired an ancient Near Eastern copper head in 1947, the Museum's annual report described it as "one of the very proudest pieces of ancient sculpture that has come down through the centuries" (figs. 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> The report also noted that viewers could appreciate the work without knowing the identity of the man depicted. The prevailing hypothesis at the time was that the sculpture represented an Elamite ruler from ancient Iran, in part because it was supposedly found in the country's northwestern region. Later, art historical study and technical analysis suggested stronger ties with the art of ancient Iraq, but the association with Iran remained, leading to a degree of uncertainty about the work's ancient cultural context. Now, new evidence points away from Iran and toward Iraq





*fig. 1* Head of a ruler,  
ca. 2300–2000 B.C. Copper  
alloy,  $13\frac{7}{16} \times 8\frac{3}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{16}$  in.  
(34.4 × 21.3 × 23.3 cm). The  
Metropolitan Museum of  
Art, Rogers Fund, 1947  
(47.100.80)



*fig. 2* Side view of the head  
of a ruler (fig. 1)

fig. 3 Top view of the head of a ruler (fig. 1)

as the geographic locus of the sculpture's ancient and modern life. First, archival sources suggest that the purported Iranian findspot (or provenience) is unfounded. They connect the head (which emerged via the art market, rather than a supervised excavation) to an antiquities dealer who described it as coming from Babylonia (in southern Iraq) more than a decade before it was first linked with Iran. Second, a stone fragment found at the site of Tello in southern Iraq during the late nineteenth century was recently recognized as a parallel for the copper head, suggesting an ancient Mesopotamian cultural context for the most distinctive attributes of the latter. Divested from an Iranian provenience and bolstered by the Tello parallel, the copper head stands more assuredly as an example of early Mesopotamian royal art.

#### THE IRANIAN CONNECTION

The object in question is a life-size head of a bearded man with bands wrapped around his elaborate hairstyle. The sculpture was cast from an arsenical copper alloy via lost-wax casting.<sup>2</sup> Production flaws may have caused surface cracks and a large gap in the beard, but the rough surface is attributable to corrosion, which

has also turned the copper green. A tenon on the underside indicates that the head was originally attached to something, perhaps a sculpted body. The face has often been described as a naturalistic portrait, which has influenced efforts to identify the man (see later discussion), but it is stylized in a manner typical of ancient Near Eastern images. Eyebrows ornamented with a chevron pattern frame heavy-lidded, originally inlaid eyes. Prominent downturned ears, a rounded nose, strong cheekbones, fleshy lips, and two horizontal furrows in the brow complete the face. The facial hair is defined by three main components: (1) rows of short, spiral curls across the cheeks and chin, (2) a long, tapered, wavy lower beard ending in curls, and (3) fine hairs on the mustache and lower lip. Such textural interest is also visible in the distinctive hairstyle that tops the head (fig. 3). Because of its bumpy appearance and complicated arrangement, this feature has sometimes been described as a cloth turban, but the similarly formed rows of hair at the cheek edge of the beard suggest that it is hair, not cloth. The hair on the head is divided and then subdivided into overlapping sections that are incorporated into a braid encircling the head along the hairline. Three intertwining







*fig. 4* Head of a king excavated at Nineveh. Akkadian, ca. 2334–2154 B.C. Copper alloy, H. 14<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (36.6 cm). The Iraq Museum, Baghdad (inv. IM 11331)

bands wrap around the braid, partially concealing it. Another band spans the forehead from ear to ear like a fillet. A sliver of hair hangs beneath it, above the right eye.

The head made its modern debut in 1931 at the International Exhibition of Persian Art in London. This significant exhibition brought together items from collections around the world to convey the artistic history of Persia, as Iran was then called.<sup>3</sup> In exhibition-related materials, the head was introduced as a representation of an Achaemenid king (550–330 B.C.), found in north-west Persia.<sup>4</sup> However, two contemporary publications dated the head to the later Persian empire of the Sasanians (A.D. 224–651),<sup>5</sup> suggesting that the identity of the man and the date of the sculpture were not settled. After the exhibition, Anton Moortgat offered the first detailed art historical analysis of the object and associated it with the art of the Elamites from ancient Iran dating to the second millennium B.C.<sup>6</sup> Whether the head was described as Achaemenid, Sasanian, or Elamite, the earliest publications presented it as a product of ancient Iran.<sup>7</sup>

Eventually, scholars began to observe stronger visual similarities with Mesopotamian art, but the specter of Iran remained. In 1947, Igor Diakonoff likened the head to the (also copper-alloy) head of an Akkadian king (ca. 2334–2154 B.C.) from Nineveh in modern-day Iraq (fig. 4), which was discovered in 1931 but only published in detail in 1936.<sup>8</sup> Among their many similarities, the two heads have parallel furrows in the brow, an unusual feature in ancient Near Eastern art. However, because Diakonoff perceived the copper head now in The Met to be a representation of a non-Mesopotamian ethnic type, he concluded that it represented a Gutian king rather than an Akkadian king. The geographic origins of the Gutian people are obscure today, but they are most often associated with the highlands of western Iran. According to Mesopotamian historiographical texts, they brought an end to the Akkadian dynasty. Although his route was circuitous, Diakonoff preserved the head's connection to Iran.

In recent decades, analyses of the head have settled upon a date of production in the late third millennium B.C., during or after the Akkadian dynasty.<sup>9</sup> The Nineveh head remains the closest visual parallel, and it and the Bassetki statue, a copper-alloy sculpture from the Akkadian period, have similar metallurgical compositions and production technologies.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, scholars acknowledge that the copper head may belong to the corpus of Mesopotamian art from the late third millennium B.C., but they leave open the possibility of influences from the art and cultures of ancient Iran and possibly even production in Iran. Consequently, the statue has remained in limbo, not fully at home within the art of ancient Iran or the art of ancient Mesopotamia. Perhaps the best indication of the dual (or, possibly, dueling) regional associations of the head is the fact that two recent international loan exhibitions, one dedicated to Iran and another to Mesopotamia, both considered it for display.<sup>11</sup>

Problematically, however, there is no firm evidence supporting the notion that the head was found in Iran. On the contrary, archival evidence related to the head's modern ownership (its provenance) and the history of its alleged findspot (its provenience) reveals that the Iranian connection is unfounded, instead suggesting that the sculpture was discovered in and exported out of what is now Iraq. Although this is no guarantee of the head's place of production, its cultural affinities, or even its actual provenience, this new evidence eliminates the need to account for an Iranian origin when studying the head.

fig. 5 Brummer Gallery stock card for the copper head, obverse and reverse, ca. 1930. Brummer Gallery Records. Donated to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1980, through Ella Baché Brummer, wife of Ernest Brummer. Transferred to The Cloisters Archives in 1993

### THE PROVENANCE OF A PROVENIENCE: 1918–1919

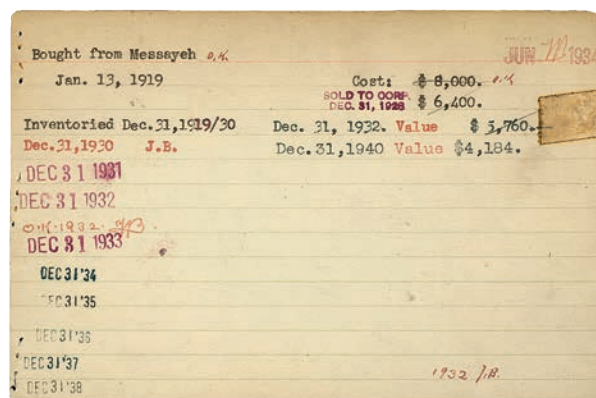
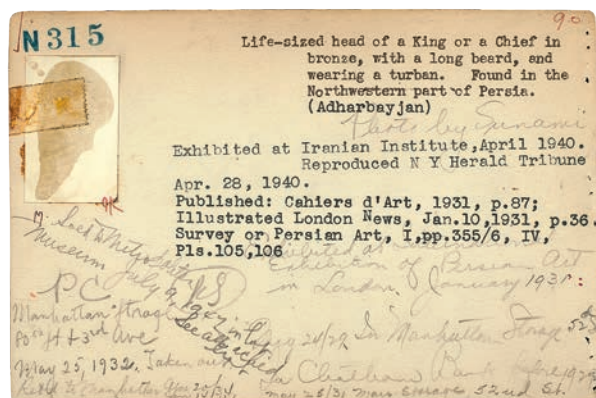
When the head debuted at the Persian exhibition in 1931, its owner was the art dealer Joseph Brummer (1883–1947). Together with his brothers Ernest and Imre, Joseph Brummer ran a successful art gallery with branches in Paris and New York. While best known for its operations in the realm of medieval art, the Brummer Gallery dealt in many other fields.<sup>12</sup> The copper head is among the most significant pieces from the ancient Near East that moved through the gallery, and Brummer<sup>13</sup> prized it greatly as part of his quasi-private collection. Although it had a Brummer Gallery inventory number (N315), publications during and after Brummer's lifetime described the head as belonging to him personally, rather than to the gallery.<sup>14</sup> What those publications did not say is how or when Brummer acquired this piece. A stock card from the records of the Brummer Gallery shows that he purchased the head in New York from "Messayeh" on January 13, 1919, for \$8,000 (fig. 5).<sup>15</sup>

"Messayeh" refers to Rizouk D. Messayeh (1878–1957), an antiquities dealer who immigrated to New York in 1913 after working as a clerk for the U.S. consulate in Baghdad.<sup>16</sup> The Messayeh family had been offering antiquities from Baghdad to European collectors since the late nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Before reaching the

United States, Messayeh<sup>18</sup> offered the family's goods to noteworthy scholars in Europe.<sup>19</sup> The Brummer Gallery, then operating only in Paris, likely became a client during Messayeh's stay in that city; a Brummer stock card refers to the purchase of a Mesopotamian bronze vessel "in 1912 from Messayeh" in Paris.<sup>20</sup> Once in New York, Messayeh set up shop as an importer and exporter of sundry items, including machinery, raw materials, textiles, and antiquities.<sup>21</sup>

Messayeh's move to the United States coincided with a growing demand for Mesopotamian antiquities, especially tablets and other inscribed artifacts, and he soon began to offer them to U.S. academic institutions and private collectors.<sup>22</sup> He advertised "Babylonian antiquities right at your door" and said "new shipments are constantly arriving. Every American University, museum and library ought to have a collection."<sup>23</sup> In several transactions with Messayeh between April 1918 and January 1919, the Brummer Gallery in New York purchased what it called "Babylonian" sculptures, vessels, jewelry, and cylinder seals.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, the stock card recording the purchase of the copper head is not the original from 1919, but a replacement made about 1930.<sup>25</sup> Without the original, it is impossible to know what Messayeh told Brummer about the head's origins.<sup>26</sup>

Such a significant object could have crossed many miles and passed through many hands before reaching New York, but the nature of Messayeh's business and archival letters suggest that the head, like the works mentioned in his advertisement, came from within the boundaries of what is today Iraq, not Iran. Messayeh's New York business was facilitated from Baghdad by his older brother Alex, with contributions from their younger brother Emile. In letters to Albert T. Clay, curator of the nascent Babylonian collection at Yale University, Messayeh mentions objects coming from three provinces of Ottoman-ruled Iraq (Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul), and he often spoke of items from specific sites.<sup>27</sup> For example, when introducing himself to George B. Gordon (the director of the Free Museum of Science and Art at the University of Pennsylvania) shortly after arriving in the United States, Messayeh claimed to have tablets from "Tel-Khaled, Tel-Nekhla, Tel-Ibrahim, Senkereh, Busmya, Mugheir, Warka."<sup>28</sup> Overall, the sites Messayeh mentions are mostly within the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys in what is now Iraq. Any claim that objects came from a particular site, however, was not a reliable guarantee that they came from that location.<sup>29</sup> The family acquired antiquities directly from illicit diggers and indirectly from





*fig. 6* Head of a man, formerly owned by the Brummer Gallery. Date unknown. Copper alloy,  $6\frac{1}{8} \times 4\frac{5}{16} \times 4\frac{5}{16}$  in. (15.6 × 11 × 11 cm). Cincinnati Art Museum, Mary Hanna Fund (1958.520)



intermediaries. One of Messayeh's advertisements notes that, although the supply of tablets was abundant, he could only offer other types of objects when his "workmen who are now at the excavations" were able to acquire them.<sup>30</sup> These "excavations" were probably not taking place in Persia. The Messayeh brothers mention Persia or Persian objects only rarely in surviving communications. In their 1912 letters to the French scholar Henri de Genouillac, the brothers refer to a "marble" sculpture from "Chaldean" ruins *near* the Persian boundary and a stone "Anzanite" inscription said to be from Susa in Persia.<sup>31</sup> Of the few Persian objects they sold, many are types that can be found at archaeological sites in Iraq with Achaemenid levels.<sup>32</sup>

It was illegal under Ottoman law to export antiquities, but enforcement was imperfect.<sup>33</sup> The copper head made the journey during World War I, when the conflict between the Ottomans and the British scrambled the state of affairs in Iraq. For the antiquities market, the war disrupted both the supply of objects and European demand.<sup>34</sup> For the Messayeh brothers, it was a challenge and an opportunity. Emile fled to British-held Basra, while Alex remained in Turkish-controlled Baghdad watching over their inventory; both did what they could to acquire objects.<sup>35</sup> In New York, before the United States officially entered the war, Messayeh pestered Clay at Yale to provide funds to purchase, insure, and ship new items from Basra.<sup>36</sup> After the British took

Baghdad in March of 1917, it was finally possible to move the family's Baghdad collection, which represented "three years hard and risky work collecting for you [Clay] in the districts of Mosul and Bagdad [*sic*]."<sup>37</sup> For safety, the Messayehs shipped the Baghdad collection via a Pacific route, although not without a delay due to insufficient funds.<sup>38</sup> The copper head was included in this U.S.-bound shipment.

The first mention of the head is in Messayeh's letter to Clay on April 1, 1918, sent while waiting for the collection to ship. In his words, the shipment would include one of

the most unique and notable objects ever discovered in Babylonia and in fact in the whole Orient and probably in Greece or Rome and [*sic*] the object I mean is the life size bronze head (bearded) and which weigh [*sic*] over 24 kilos. My brother is so enthusiastic about it that he thinks it the most wonderful and remarkable Babylonian piece hitherto extant.<sup>39</sup>

This must be the head now in The Met.<sup>40</sup> According to the letter, this head was found "in Babylonia."<sup>41</sup> The term is not very precise, and the letter does not reveal how or how much Messayeh knew about the origins of the sculpture, but if northwest Persia was somehow involved, he does not indicate it.

Of course, Messayeh might have assigned the head a Babylonian origin to make it more attractive to Clay, who was building up a collection of Babylonian antiquities. Yet he did not suggest that Yale should purchase the sculpture; in fact, he implied that Clay could not afford to. In the same letter, Messayeh regrets that Clay did not view two smaller sculptures: a "Semitic Babylonian bronze head" (actually of copper alloy; *fig. 6*) and a stone head "of the Gudea school." Messayeh had just that day sold these (to Joseph Brummer!) for, he claimed, \$2,000.<sup>42</sup> With these selling for such a high price, Messayeh suggests that Clay tell his treasurer "how dirt cheap" he got three bronze statuettes in late 1917.<sup>43</sup> With limited funds, Clay was a bargain hunter, not a potential buyer for the extraordinary metal head on its way.<sup>44</sup> Later, at the end of 1918, Messayeh expressed this view himself. While still waiting for the shipment to arrive by rail from San Francisco, he wrote that "these pieces are very expensive for [the] Yale Collection."<sup>45</sup> Moreover, by that time Messayeh had promised not to show them to anyone other than "my collector friend," presumably Joseph Brummer. Clay had long insisted that Messayeh show him newly arrived objects before other collectors, so

Messayeh's admission here indicates that he did not expect Clay would be interested in the sculpture. At most, he might have hoped that Clay would mention it to other collectors, should his "collector friend" not end up buying it.<sup>46</sup>

The head arrived in New York on January 6, 1919;<sup>47</sup> Joseph Brummer purchased it less than two weeks later. Did Messayeh tell Brummer it was from Persia, rather than from Babylonia, to increase its appeal? This seems unnecessary. During its early years, the Brummer Gallery bought and sold a variety of objects from Near Eastern cultures, including works they described as Assyrian, Babylonian, Chaldean, and Persian (pre-Islamic and Islamic).<sup>48</sup> Although Persian art would eventually outpace Babylonian art in the gallery's inventory, neither was more important than the other when Joseph Brummer was buying from Messayeh in New York. Because the copper head was never included in the gallery's inventory binders (which were arranged by culture), it is unclear which category was assigned to the head upon its arrival. However, records indicate that the Brummer Gallery placed all other items purchased from Messayeh in 1918 and 1919 in its Babylonian category.

#### THE PROVENANCE OF A PROVENIENCE: 1919 TO TODAY

This reconstruction of the pre-Brummer phase of the head's modern life suggests that the head acquired a Persian provenience after it arrived at the Brummer Gallery in 1919. The provenience was certainly in place by 1930; a notice on the Brummer stock card from that year is the oldest preserved reference to it (fig. 5).

Although it cannot be determined when the gallery applied a Persian provenience to the head, or whether it preceded or followed the identification of the head as a work of Persian art, one can imagine why this occurred. Interest in Persian art among collectors and museums in the United States was increasing during the 1920s, especially toward the end of the decade.<sup>49</sup> The Brummer brothers sometimes invented stories about how they acquired objects to raise their significance and value,<sup>50</sup> and they might have tried to capitalize on Persian art's popularity by describing the head as an object coming from the region. Alternatively, an outside adviser could have helped them make the connection. Among the possible candidates, one stands out: Arthur Upham Pope.

Pope was the leading force behind Persian art's rise in the United States, as well as the International Exhibition of Persian Art in London, where the head debuted in 1931. While he cultivated a reputation as

a scholar of Persian art, Pope was also a collector and dealer.<sup>51</sup> In this capacity, he began a relationship with the Brummer Gallery by 1924.<sup>52</sup> He bought from the gallery as early as 1927, and in 1930 he sold Joseph Brummer a Persian pot to, in his words, "secure his [Brummer's] support for the [London] exhibition."<sup>53</sup> Pope led the process of selecting objects from U.S. collections for the exhibition, to which Brummer loaned the copper head of a ruler, the smaller copper head (now in the Cincinnati Art Museum; fig. 6), and some two dozen other objects.<sup>54</sup> Many dealers used the exhibition to highlight their inventories, although Brummer seemingly did not intend to sell what he sent.<sup>55</sup> In light of this history, the 1930 production of a new Brummer stock card identifying the head as a work from northwest Persia may have occurred as a result of Brummer's conversations with Pope about the exhibition.

Pope was not as well versed in early Persian art as he was in later periods, but he did provide attributions and proveniences for ancient works (sometimes changing them depending upon the circumstances).<sup>56</sup> He might have been responsible for introducing the northwestern Iranian city of Hamadan as the copper head's specific place of discovery in two publicity notices for the London exhibition: one an art journal article and the other a full-page illustration in *The Illustrated London News*,<sup>57</sup> an outlet Pope regularly used to link antiquities from the art market to noteworthy sites.<sup>58</sup> In 1931, Hamadan was recognized as a frequent place of origin for "indeterminate Persian antiquities."<sup>59</sup> Hamadan was not, however, the only place associated with the head at this time. As the American archaeologist Oscar Muscarella has observed, by the time of the head's debut in 1931 there was already a noticeable slipperiness in its provenience, or, more accurately, proveniences.<sup>60</sup> Although the publicity notices specified Hamadan, the catalogue for the London exhibition referred only to northwest Persia, and an art history book from the same year described the head as coming from the shores of Lake Van in eastern Turkey.<sup>61</sup> None of the sources included evidence supporting their claims.

If Pope suggested that the head represented a Persian king, he took pains to assure the Brummer Gallery of the merits of the attribution. In January 1934, he brought in the classical archaeologist Stanley Casson to "verify our [Brummer Gallery's] Persian head."<sup>62</sup> Casson was sufficiently satisfied with the sculpture's Persian qualities to include it in the essay on Achaemenid sculpture he wrote for *A Survey of Persian Art* (1938), the scholarly complement to the London exhibition edited by Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, Pope's

partner.<sup>63</sup> There, a new description of its provenience appeared—Adharbayjan (Azerbaijan). Hamadan, which is not in the Azerbaijan region of Iran, is absent, and the *Survey* does not explain the change.<sup>64</sup> Subsequently, someone updated the Brummer stock card with the annotation “(Adharbayjan)” (fig. 5).<sup>65</sup> This was not Pope’s last say in the matter. In 1945, he added that the head was found near Lake Urmia in northwestern Iran, and then a year later specified the town of Salmas, citing the earlier *Survey*, which states that the head was found together with the smaller “bronze” head (fig. 6) “from Salmas, near Lake Vān.”<sup>66</sup>

The provenience of the copper head remained unsettled during the next phase of its modern life. In 1947, The Met purchased the head from the estate of the recently deceased Joseph Brummer. Although Museum publications initially mentioned that the head came from Azerbaijan or northwest Persia, they soon began to refer to the site of “Tikhon Teppah” (modern Takab in the West Azerbaijan province of Iran).<sup>67</sup> It is not clear why Tikhon Teppah became the newest entry in the history of the head or who was responsible for the change. In 1963, yet another location surfaced when the dealer (and Pope’s associate) Ayoub Rabenou told the Museum that the head was from Gouchichi (probably Qoshachay, in northwestern Iran).<sup>68</sup> This is more than four decades after the head passed through the hands of Alex Messayeh in Baghdad before reaching Rizouk Messayeh and then Joseph Brummer in New York. Such information might have been maintained privately and only later shared, but the head’s constantly changing proveniences leave the strong impression that this was just the latest in a series of unsubstantiated geographic associations. The inevitable conclusion is that the Iranian provenience is a modern fiction.

This conclusion is bolstered by the history of the small copper head, which also moved from the Messayehs to the Brummer Gallery and then to the London exhibition (fig. 6).<sup>69</sup> Persia is absent from the earliest documentation of its existence, namely letters from Rizouk Messayeh to Albert T. Clay at Yale announcing its arrival in the United States (February 8, 1918) and its sale (April 1, 1918).<sup>70</sup> Messayeh described it as the “Semitic Babylonian bronze head (small)” without mentioning a place of origin. The object’s Brummer Gallery stock card, which is a replacement from 1928, also originally lacked a provenience.<sup>71</sup> Later, “Found in Adharbayjan” was added after the publication of the *Survey of Persian Art*, as on the larger copper head’s card (fig. 5).<sup>72</sup> Despite its public promotion by Pope and Ackerman as an example of Persian art, the smaller

head retained its Babylonian classification in the Brummer Gallery records.<sup>73</sup> Less stable was its alleged provenience. In the 1930s and 1940s, publications associated with Pope and Ackerman tied it to the same variety of Persian proveniences as the larger head.<sup>74</sup> Further embellishing the story, Pope claimed that the two heads were found together and were a related pair (a king and his vizier) but gave no evidence to support this shared history.<sup>75</sup> In reality, Messayeh’s letters show that both heads reached New York via the Messayeh brothers, but they did so separately and without mention of a connection between them. The Brummer Gallery acquired them at different points in time and never linked them in any of their internal documentation, ultimately undermining the claims that the two copper heads were found together and were ever in Persia at all.

After digging into the modern history of the large copper head now in The Met’s collection, one determines that, first, the head was not discovered in northwest Iran and, second, that this invented provenience was revised over time to suit the needs or interests of those telling the story. Consequently, it is unwise to use the alleged Iranian provenience as grounds for interpreting the head’s ancient life. At the same time, we must be cautious not to interpret the head solely based on the Babylonian provenience given in Messayeh’s letters. From this alone, it is not possible to establish that the sculpture came from an archaeological site in Iraq. Unless additional evidence for the head’s actual place of discovery emerges—an unlikely prospect—the head will continue to lack the spatial and temporal anchors that can be derived from an archaeological context. This is especially problematic for a work like the head, whose most unusual features seem unmatched in other works of art.<sup>76</sup> Fortunately, it is now apparent that a stone fragment discovered at the southern Iraqi site of Tello shares the copper head’s two most exceptional elements: its hairstyle and hair bands.<sup>77</sup>

#### A PARALLEL FROM TELLO

The Tello fragment (now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris) is composed of dark gray stone and comes from an approximately life-size sculpted head (fig. 7).<sup>78</sup> The piece preserves only the proper left, upper front of the head, but enough remains to see that it resembles the copper head more closely than any other work of ancient Near Eastern art. The hair covering the crown of the head is divided into sections; overlapping bands conceal a braid encircling the head; and a fillet stretches across the forehead. These are the same elements found on the copper head, where they are easier to



*fig. 7* Statue fragment from Tello. Early Dynastic III to Old Babylonian(?), ca. 2600–1600 B.C. Stone (diorite?),  $3\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{16} \times 4\frac{15}{16}$  in. (9.5 × 11 × 12.5 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (inv. AO 16)



understand due to its completeness. However, even in the Tello sculpture's partial state, the two heads are clearly alike, down to the distinct Y-shaped part in the hair. As similar as they are, the two works are not identical. The bands on the stone head are wider, smoother, and straighter, and their arrangement is a mirror image of the copper head. The texture of the hair also appears slightly different in the two mediums. In copper, the hair effects a gridlike pattern, whereas in stone, undulating incised lines cut across wide, modeled ridges.<sup>79</sup>

The Louvre fragment is one of scores of statues and statue fragments uncovered at Tello, Iraq, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the most famous of which are the statues of Gudea (r. ca. 2100 B.C.).<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, there is no information about this piece's specific archaeological context. Even so, the fact that the object was unearthed at Tello reveals quite a bit. First, the stone statue likely represented someone who ruled Girsu, as Tello was known in antiquity.<sup>81</sup> Second, the fragment dates no later than the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000–1600 B.C.), when Tello ceased to be occupied until the Hellenistic era

(323–31 B.C.).<sup>82</sup> Royal sculptures composed of dark stone have been found at Tello and elsewhere in southern Mesopotamia throughout these early periods of occupation. Beyond its local significance, the Tello fragment establishes that the copper head is not and was not a unicum. Although its authenticity has never been seriously questioned, it is now possible to eliminate any doubts derived from the copper head's previously unparalleled appearance. It is also possible to reconsider this man's identity. If the person represented in the fragment ruled the city of Girsu before or during the Old Babylonian period, then the man depicted in the copper head was, if not a ruler of Girsu during this time, represented in the same manner as one. Who was he and when did he rule?

#### ATTRIBUTES OF HIS KINGSHIP

Early efforts to identify this man focused on his image as a portrait of an ethnic type. Inspired by the alleged Iranian provenience first reported in association with the London exhibition of 1931, scholars recognized a vaguely defined Elamite, Iranian, or Gutian ethnicity

*fig. 8* Helmet excavated from PG 755 of the Royal Cemetery of Ur. Early Dynastic III, ca. 2600–2350 B.C. Gold, H. approx. 9 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (23 cm). Iraq Museum, Baghdad (inv. IM 8269)



in his facial features.<sup>83</sup> Central to their process was the perception that the head was more naturalistic than other ancient Near Eastern faces. Their expectation that the sculpture would portray the man's identity through a naturalistic representation of an ethnic type is, however, a modern, Western notion.<sup>84</sup> Ancient Near Eastern images utilized a combination of stereotyped physical features, attributes, and inscriptions to convey the identity of the individual depicted—a portrait in a more inclusive sense of the term.<sup>85</sup> The physical features of the sculpted (or painted) face and body derived not from a person's real-life appearance, but from a desire to convey certain valued traits; in rulers these included masculinity, strength, and devotion. Attributes like hairstyles, garments, headgear, and jewelry communicated an individual's social identity. Inscriptions added their name and sometimes their familial ties and could reinforce what the figure's physical features and attributes conveyed. Beyond these inherent elements, external factors, such as the placement of an image within a specific location or context and its treatment by others during the presentation of offerings or the recitation of a name or inscription, could help establish the person's identity.

Looking at the copper head from this perspective, its prominent ears are not likely the shape of the man's actual ears. Rather, they could indicate the wise ruler's capacity to listen (as Irene Winter has argued for the ears of Gudea's statues), or they could also be functional elements to support other attributes once attached to the head.<sup>86</sup> The man's broad face does not indicate his ethnicity but is instead a metal canvas ideally shaped and sized for the display of his facial hair, complex hairstyle, and headdress. Similarly, the Nineveh head of an Akkadian king (fig. 4) is narrow

across the face but deep from front to back; the former may be related to the elongated spirals on the chin and the latter to the volume of the hairstyle.<sup>87</sup>

The attributes he wears upon his body, rather than in the shape of his ears or nose, provide greater clues about the man's identity. The scale, materials, and quality of the copper head mark him as a man of high status, but the element that suggests his royal identity is the braided band of hair. The earliest extant example of this feature is an Early Dynastic III (ca. 2500–2350 B.C.) gold helmet from the Royal Cemetery of Ur (fig. 8). During the transition to the Akkadian period, such a braid appears on a statue of Ishqi-Mari, a king of the city of Mari (in modern Syria).<sup>88</sup> In the art of the Akkadian dynasty, it is a common royal attribute (fig. 4).<sup>89</sup> On these images, a smooth fillet rests beneath the braid—something also visible on the copper head and the Louvre's Tello fragment. After the Akkadian period, the braid disappears as a royal attribute,<sup>90</sup> thus suggesting that the copper head and the stone fragment could each represent a ruler from the late Early Dynastic or Akkadian period.

The treatment of the hair on the two heads supports this dating. Such ornately arranged hair occurs in some Early Dynastic statues of women whose braids wrap around the head at an angle (fig. 9), similar to the copper head in The Met.<sup>91</sup> With a full beard, the



*fig. 9* Two views of a head of a woman excavated from Sin Temple IX at Khafajah. Early Dynastic II, ca. 2700–2600 B.C. Limestone, shell, gypsum, bitumen, H. 3 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (8 cm). Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago (A12431)



*fig. 10* Head of a ruler excavated at Susa, Old Babylonian, ca. 2000–1600 B.C. Diorite,  $6 \times 3\frac{13}{16} \times 4\frac{5}{16}$  in. (15.2 × 9.7 × 11 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (inv. Sb 95)



copper head represents a man, but his statue demonstrates that he, like the women, had access to the time and skill required for such a complex hairstyle. In early Mesopotamian royal images, the complexity of the copper head's hair is matched only by the basket-weave hairstyle of the Nineveh head (fig. 4), from the Akkadian period. It too develops an Early Dynastic precedent (see fig. 8), transforming the simple bun into a mass of intricately woven hair. This continues a trend in the Early Dynastic period toward more complex hairstyles and headdresses.<sup>92</sup> For several centuries following the Akkadian period, a brimmed cap hides the king's hair (fig. 10).

The intertwined bands that wrap around the braid are, after the hairstyle, the most unusual feature of the copper head and its stone parallel from Tello. As attributes of Mesopotamian kingship, bands or ribbons around the hair are rare, and no other examples have a similar arrangement of three bands. A simple, thin band stretches around the helmet of Eannatum of Lagash on the Stele of the Vultures and the gold helmet from the Royal Cemetery of Ur (fig. 8), both from the Early Dynastic period.<sup>93</sup> The fillet replaces this element on the Nineveh head (fig. 4), but on a life-size statue from Ashur representing either an Akkadian king or a later ruler imitating the Akkadian kings, a wider ribbon

wraps around a voluminous chignon, crossing over itself in a manner reminiscent of the crisscrossed bands on the copper head and the Tello fragment.<sup>94</sup> A single hair ribbon also appears on a smaller, possibly royal statue from the Akkadian period.<sup>95</sup> Significantly, hair ribbons and bands disappear from representations of kings after the Akkadian period. Like the braid they adorn, the intertwined bands on the copper head and the piece from Tello were attributes of Early Dynastic and Akkadian kingship.

If the sculpted bands were originally covered with gold or silver, they would recall the gold and silver hair ribbons found in elite Mesopotamian tombs from the second half of the third millennium B.C., most notably in the Royal Cemetery at Ur, where they were associated with women.<sup>96</sup> These strips of metal required time, effort, and expertise to make and were costly expressions of status and identity.<sup>97</sup> The women buried in the cemetery were affiliated with the temple, the palace, or perhaps both institutions, but whether ribbons were signs of their royalty, devotion to the royal family or the gods, or personal sacredness cannot be determined without knowing more about the women's identities.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, the intertwined bands on the copper head and the Tello fragment could signify these kings' devotion (and their statues' dedication) to a god or their own divine qualities, possibly even their deification. Kings in Mesopotamia always possessed aspects of the divine, but their deification first occurred with Naram-Sin of Akkad (r. 2254–2218 B.C.) and continued intermittently into the Old Babylonian period.<sup>99</sup>

Compared to the previously discussed attributes, beards are a more common feature of Mesopotamian royal statues, yet no other sculpted beard perfectly matches the copper head. (The Tello fragment cannot be considered in this respect, as it does not preserve any part of the beard.) For the spiral curls on the cheek and chin, the Akkadian head from Nineveh and a fragment of an Akkadian stone statue head from Tello are a close match, even if the details are executed differently.<sup>100</sup> These heads also have mustaches and underlip hairs, although they look more artificial and are differently shaped than those of the copper head. The possibly Akkadian statue from Ashur defines the mustache only on the upper lip, but its downturned shape resembles the mustache on the copper head. This statue also features a similar wavy lower beard. Adding to the difficulty of using the beard to identify the man, some of its characteristics reappear in post-Akkadian works. The head of an unidentified Old Babylonian ruler found at Susa has fine hair around the mouth (fig. 10),<sup>101</sup> and the



rounded lower beard of a statue of an Old Babylonian ruler of Eshnunna features soft waves.<sup>102</sup> Of all the attributes of the copper head, the beard is the most challenging to date, but, given the head's other attributes, it is significant that the beard, in design and execution, is compatible with the beards of Akkadian royal images.

Overall, the attributes of the copper head—the braided band, fillet, hairstyle, intertwined bands, and beard—imply that this sculpture was designed to resemble an Akkadian king, even if its suite of attributes is unmatched by extant Akkadian royal images. The intertwined bands may be another example of the Akkadian kings adopting different attributes to reflect their various roles as kings and, after Naram-Sin's deification, divine kings. The varieties of Akkadian royal headgear include the Nineveh head's braided band and fillet, the conical ribbed cap of Naram-Sin on his stele from Pir Hüseyin, and the horned helmet on Naram-Sin's stele from Susa.<sup>103</sup> Akkadian art also exhibits stylistic variety. For example, the human bodies on early Akkadian steles are less refined than the lithe bodies on Naram-Sin's Susa stele. Thus, the greater precision and angularity of the Akkadian head from Nineveh should not deny the copper head in The Met an Akkadian identity. What might deny him this is if the head is a post-Akkadian statue that draws upon Akkadian precedents.<sup>104</sup> The Akkadian kings drastically transformed the ideology and practices of kingship, and they were remembered as model kings long after the dynasty ended. Later rulers who wished to align themselves with the Akkadian model incorporated elements from Akkadian art to establish and make visible their relationship to the dynasty.<sup>105</sup>

We may not yet know exactly who is represented in the copper head or when and where his sculpture was produced, but we are closer to answering these questions now that the need to account for an Iranian provenience has been eliminated and the stone fragment from Tello has trained our focus on early Mesopotamian art and its diagnostic attributes of kingship. Future technical analysis will hopefully provide further insight regarding its method, place, and date of production. For now, we can describe it as a portrait of Akkadian kingship borne by an Akkadian king or someone who wanted to look like one in the centuries after the dynasty's demise. This conclusion was hidden in plain sight for many decades by a false and misleading Iranian provenience, and the consequent ambiguity led to the head's marginalization within discussions of ancient Near Eastern royal images. With a clearer sense of its history, the head is now recognizable

as a rare and important example of early Mesopotamian royal sculpture.

The copper head also reminds us that market-derived proveniences cannot reliably establish the ancient life of an object. In such cases, only the object's visual and material features can tell us about its ancient past. In this case, the visual and material features place the beginning of the copper head's ancient life in Mesopotamia during the late third or early second millennium B.C. As for the head's modern life, the earliest archival traces position it in Iraq during World War I. Because of the geographical concordance between Mesopotamia and Iraq, it is tempting to compress these phases of its history together and say that the head comes from Mesopotamia/Iraq, but the distinction between its early life as a Mesopotamian royal sculpture and its later life on the modern art market must be retained.<sup>106</sup> As museums integrate the history of their collections into the histories of their objects, audiences will become increasingly familiar with this more complex kind of origin story.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## NOTES

- 1 Metropolitan Museum 1948, 12.
- 2 For technical analysis by Jean-François de Lapérouse, see Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 210–12.
- 3 Wood 2000; Rizvi 2007.
- 4 Royal Academy of Arts 1931a, 5; *Illustrated London News* 1931; Pope 1931a.
- 5 *Art News* 1930, 25; *Literary Digest* 1931, 20.
- 6 Moortgat 1934, 6–10.
- 7 One early reference described the head as a depiction of an Armenian prince from the region of Lake Van (located in Turkey); Pijoán 1931, 195, 197. All other publications mention only Iranian locations and cultures.
- 8 Diakonoff 1947. Nineveh head: Iraq Museum, Baghdad, inv. 11331, Mallowan 1936.
- 9 Muscarella 1988, 373–74; Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 195, 210–12; Thomas and Potts 2020, 188–89.
- 10 Nineveh: Strommenger 1986. Bassetki: Iraq Museum, inv. 77823, Müller-Karpe 2002, 142–48. These are more similar technically than the copper and bronze statue of a Middle Elamite queen (Louvre, inv. Sb 2731) from Susa that Moortgat (1934, 6) used to connect the museum's copper head to the Elamites. Françoise Tallon in Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 132–35, no. 83.
- 11 Personal communication with the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, The Met, April 29, 2021.
- 12 Brennan 2015; Brennan 2019.
- 13 Unless otherwise specified, “Brummer” refers to Joseph Brummer.
- 14 *Art News* 1930; Royal Academy of Arts 1931b, 7; *Literary Digest* 1931, 20; Pope 1931a; Pope 1931b, 31; Casson 1938, 355–56; Ackerman 1940, 309; Pope 1945, pl. 24; Metropolitan Museum 1950, 294–96; Forsyth 1974, 3.
- 15 N315 stock card, Brummer Gallery Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (hereafter BGR). The BGR can be accessed at <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/libraries-and-research-centers/watson-digital-collections/cloisters-archives-collections/the-brummer-gallery-records>.
- 16 Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Manufactures 1910, 87; *Exporters' Review* 1919, 48. See also Lassen 2019, fig. 1.4.
- 17 Messayeh's father, Daud, was offering tablets and other antiquities to the British Museum as early as 1894 in partnership with N. Ghanima. D. Messayeh and N. Ghanima to E. A. Wallis Budge, August 23, 1894, British Museum Archive.
- 18 Unless otherwise specified, “Messayeh” refers to Rizouk Messayeh.
- 19 He wrote to Henri de Genouillac in Brussels to collect payment for objects that his brother, Alex Messayeh, had already supplied and to offer new objects. R. D. Messayeh to H. de Genouillac, December 12, 1912, and December 15, 1912, Archives of the Département des Antiquités Orientales, Musée du Louvre (hereafter Messayeh/Louvre). He also showed two inscribed clay cylinders to Father Vincent Scheil; Scheil reported on these at the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres on December 20, 1912, where he described them as belonging to Messrs. Messayeh. Scheil 1912.
- 20 P11088 stock card, BGR. The stock card dates to 1934, when the object was transferred from Paris to the New York inventory. It states that the vessel, which was in four fragments, came from “Daud Messayeh, Baghdad,” so Messayeh may have been a courier for his father. Unfortunately, there is no corresponding entry in the “Livres de Police” purchase register of the Brummer Gallery in Paris to verify these later notes.
- 21 Hough 1915, 70.
- 22 In an undated advertisement, Messayeh lists curators and researchers at Yale University, Harvard University, Columbia University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Pennsylvania as references; Lassen 2019, fig. 1.4. He also supplied several items to the private collector George Plimpton, who later donated his collection to Columbia University. Robson 2002, 254.
- 23 R. D. Messayeh, “To the PRESIDENT, FACULTY and TRUSTEES:-,” undated. At least two copies of this letter are preserved: one in the R. D. Messayeh files in the archives of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago (hereafter Messayeh/Chicago) and one in folder 498 of the Curatorial Files of the Yale Babylonian Collection (hereafter Messayeh/YBC).
- 24 The earliest are N175 and N176 on April 1, 1918; the latest are N315 (the copper head), N316a, N317a–k, N318a–e, N319a–e, and N320 on January 13, 1919. Stock cards, BGR. Messayeh had limited inventory during the war years, which could explain why business with the Brummer Gallery in New York only picked up in 1918, when the supply of antiquities began anew. On the effects of the war on the business, see below.
- 25 It differs from the cards for the other objects acquired from Messayeh on the same day and instead resembles cards produced for objects acquired starting in 1926. Its annual inventory begins in the year 1930, suggesting when it was made.
- 26 Most Brummer stock cards for Messayeh objects lack provenience information, except for N210 (Babylonia) and N211 (Varka [i.e. Warka]). Stock cards, BGR.
- 27 “We can get you good things from southern Babylonia, through Basra.” R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, January 14, 1916, folder 499, Messayeh/YBC. “My brother is in the best position to catch hold of the Best materials in Bagdad [sic]. He has his regular men, and diggers all the time in the field.” R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, February 3, 1913, folder 498, Messayeh/YBC. “My brother has now an opportunity to buy at Mossoul.” R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, March 11, 1916, folder 499, Messayeh/YBC.
- 28 R. D. Messayeh to G. B. Gordon, February 4, 1913, box 14, George B. Gordon Director's Office Records, University of Pennsylvania.
- 29 James H. Breasted of the University of Chicago told Messayeh that a set of tablets that the latter had described as coming from Bismaya, the site of an earlier University of Chicago expedition, could not have come from that site. J. H. Breasted to R. D. Messayeh, October 31, 1913, Messayeh/Chicago. In response, Messayeh blamed the mix-up on the workmen who supplied the tablets. R. D. Messayeh to J. H. Breasted, November 7, 1913, Messayeh/Chicago.
- 30 Lassen 2019, fig. 1.4.
- 31 Statue: A. Messayeh to H. de Genouillac, July 19, 1912, Messayeh/Louvre. Inscription: A. Messayeh to H. de Genouillac, May 7, 1912, Messayeh/Louvre; R. D. Messayeh to H. de Genouillac, December 12, 1912, Messayeh/Louvre.
- 32 For Achaemenid jewelry, see N4410 and N4411 stock cards, BGR. Messayeh wrote a description of these two gold bracelets alleging that they were found at Nippur, according to the Arabs that sold them. “The Gold Bracelets from Nippur, In Southern Babylonia,” n.d., folder 500, Messayeh/YBC. Alex tried to sell a gold tablet with an Achaemenid inscription to Yale; A. Messayeh to Charles C. Torrey, April 15, 1926, folder 500, Messayeh/YBC.
- 33 Kersel 2010, 85–86.
- 34 R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, November 16, 1914, folder 499, Messayeh/YBC.

- 35 R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, November 23, 1915, January 6, 1916, February 19, 1916, and March 11, 1916, folder 499, Messayeh/YBC.
- 36 R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, January 6, 1916, February 19, 1916, May 27, 1916, June 7, 1916, and June 13, 1916, folder 499, Messayeh/YBC.
- 37 R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, May 3, 1917, folder 500, Messayeh/YBC.
- 38 R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, May 3, 1917, May 28, 1917, and August 2, 1917, folder 500, Messayeh/YBC.
- 39 R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, April 1, 1918, folder 500, Messayeh/YBC.
- 40 Like other ancient copper sculptures, the material of the head was once described as bronze. It currently weighs 43 lbs. The discrepancy in weight may be due to the loss of loose dirt from the interior cavity, a measurement error, and/or the likelihood that Messayeh's number was an estimate for shipping purposes. I thank Jean-François de Lapérouse for the latter two suggestions.
- 41 Note that in another letter he differentiates Babylonian goods from those that would come from Mosul, so Babylonia for Messayeh (as for others then and now) refers to southern Iraq. R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, March 11, 1916, folder 499, Messayeh/YBC.
- 42 N175 (stone head) and N176 ("bronze") stock cards, BGR. These cards each list a purchase price of \$550, so either Messayeh inflated their sale price, or the cards do not reflect actual prices paid. N175 is likely modern; Muscarella 2000, 163. See below for the history of N176.
- 43 Yale offered \$900 for three bronze figures of "Sumerian" kings (George P. Day to R. D. Messayeh, November 26, 1917, folder 500, Messayeh/YBC); Messayeh insisted on \$1,200 (R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, November 26, 1917, folder 500, Messayeh/YBC). The Messayeh/YBC files do not preserve the final sale price.
- 44 On Clay's finances, see Foster 2013, 127–29.
- 45 R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, December 19, 1918, folder 500, Messayeh/YBC.
- 46 I thank Lindsay Allen for this suggestion.
- 47 R. D. Messayeh to A. T. Clay, January 8, 1919, folder 500, Messayeh/YBC.
- 48 See entries like "vase babylonienne" or "plaque persane" in the register recording Paris purchases from 1911 to 1914. "Livre de Police": Blvd. de Raspail, Paris: Feb. 1911–Oct. 1927, BGR.
- 49 Case studies of Chicago, Kansas City, Washington, DC, and Boston museums appear in Kadoi 2016.
- 50 Brennan 2019, 260–62.
- 51 Gluck and Siver 1996; Kadoi 2016. For a critical view of Pope's collecting and dealing, see Muscarella 2013d.
- 52 The earliest exchange is a quote for a "Siamese head in bronze" on December 19, 1924. "Pope, Arthur Upham" address card, BGR.
- 53 Pope's purchases from the Brummer Gallery: N462, P2195, and P6971 stock cards, BGR. Pope's quote: page 16 of the Commission of Inquiry, February 4th, 1931, Commission of Inquiry, box 2, Arthur Upham Pope Papers, New York Public Library (hereafter AUPP/NYPL).
- 54 "Partial List of Objects to Come from Joseph Brummer," November 12, 1930, General Correspondence: International Exhibition of Persian Art, box 2, AUPP/NYPL.
- 55 "Brummer went to the expense exceeding £400 to send to the Exhibition exceedingly important things from his private collection which are not and never have been for sale." "Major Longden, 27.1.1931," January 27, 1931, Personal Correspondence, 1930–31, Longden, box 2, AUPP/NYPL. See also "Major Longden, 22nd February 1931," February 22, 1931, Personal Correspondence, 1930–31, Longden, box 2, AUPP/NYPL.
- 56 Muscarella 2000, 209–10nn36,38; Lerner 2016, 214n141.
- 57 Pope 1931b, 31; *Illustrated London News* 1931, [35]. The latter is linked to Pope 1931a.
- 58 Muscarella 2000, 210n38; Muscarella 2013d, 832.
- 59 Ashton 1931. Pope was later involved in the sale of several gold and silver Achaemenid bowls allegedly from the site. Allen 2016, 158–61.
- 60 Muscarella 1988, 368.
- 61 Royal Academy of Arts 1931a, 5; Pijoán 1931, 197.
- 62 "Pope, Arthur Upham" address card, BGR.
- 63 Casson 1938, 355–56.
- 64 Muscarella (2013b, 1062) hypothesized that Pope or Ackerman added the footnote with this attribution.
- 65 The typescript and ink indicate that this was added concurrently with the reference to Casson's contribution to the *Survey* from 1938.
- 66 Pope 1945, 17; Pope 1946, 64. See also Casson 1938, 356. While preparing the *Survey* for publication, Pope wrote to the dealer Ayoub Rabenou about finds from a "dig" at Salmas (A. U. Pope to A. Rabenou, March 5, 1937, Personal Correspondence 1937 "Ra," box 3, AUPP/NYPL). Salmas also pops up in Pope's dealings with the Brummers. In 1934, Pope told them that a bronze lion he sold them came from Salmas (N3155 stock card, BGR). A second lion, bought from Pope and shipped by Rabenou, carries the same provenience in a Pope-related exhibition catalogue (Ackerman 1940, 303), but not in the Brummer stock card, where it is more vaguely described as "N.W. Persia" (N3165 stock card, BGR).
- 67 Metropolitan Museum 1952, 218; Lerman 1969, 304.
- 68 Catalogue card, Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 69 This head has many unusual features (including its bust shape and bulging eyes) that this essay cannot address.
- 70 Folder 500, Messayeh/YBC.
- 71 N176 stock card, BGR. The dating of the card follows the logic applied above for N315's card.
- 72 The typescript and ink again indicate an addition during or after 1938.
- 73 Persian: Pope 1931b, 31; Ackerman 1940, 309; Pope 1945, 17–18. Babylonian: Held Inventory Binder no. 2; Accounting pads for art sales and proposals, 1947–48, A. B. Martin, July 27; Accountants work sheet pad of quotes and sales, 1947–78, Martin, March 10, 1948; BGR. An auction catalogue from 1949 after the death of Joseph Brummer described it as pre-Achaemenid Persian with Babylonian influences. Brummer sale 1949, 20, lot 87.
- 74 Near Hamadan: Pope 1931b, 31; northwest Persia: Royal Academy of Arts 1931a, 16; Salmas, near Lake Van: Casson 1938, 356, and Brummer sale 1949, 20, lot 87; Adharbayjan: Ackerman 1940, 309.
- 75 Royal Academy of Arts 1931b, 18; Pope 1931b, 31; Pope 1945, 17; Pope 1946, 64. The first edition of the London exhibition catalogue is more vague; it states that the small head was found with "the head of a king" without specifying which head of a king. Royal Academy of Arts 1931a, 16.



- 76 On the problem of unicums from the art market, see Muscarella 2013a and 2013c.
- 77 Thomas and Potts 2020, 188.
- 78 de Sarzec and Heuzey 1884–1912, 1:147, 3:pl. 21, no. 2; Heuzey 1902, 201, no. 62. The Louvre database identifies the stone as diorite, but to my knowledge the fragment has not been tested to confirm this.
- 79 Note that corrosion amplifies the bumpiness of the copper head's hair. The original, smoother texture is visible in the braid at the rear left side.
- 80 Two other dark gray stone fragments from Tello may be part of the same statue or a similar one. Louvre, inv. AO 17A and inv. AO 17B, de Sarzec and Heuzey 1884–1912, 1:147; Heuzey 1902, 202, no. 63. AO 17A preserves a right eye and a narrow band across the forehead recalling the fillet on the fragment in question; hair emerges from beneath the fillet above the eye, as on the copper head. AO 17B preserves part of a similar left eye.
- 81 Because military campaigns and other interventions moved statues, this one may have come to Girsu from another location, but none of the statues from Tello are labeled as plunder like those brought to Susa by the Elamite ruler Shutruk-Nahhunte I in the twelfth century B.C. On Susa, see Prudence Harper in Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 159–62.
- 82 Louvre, inv. AO 16 is not likely Hellenistic. On the archaeology of Tello, see Huh 2008.
- 83 Moortgat 1934, 10; Casson 1938, 356; Diakonoff 1947, 118. José Pijoán (1931, 197) is again the outlier, seeing a Semitic face in the sculpture.
- 84 On portraiture in the ancient Near East, especially Mesopotamia, see Winter 1997 and Winter 2009. On the problem of naturalism in the study of early Mesopotamian portraits, see Knott 2022, 179–81. Elizabeth Knott kindly shared her article in advance of its publication, and I am grateful for our discussions.
- 85 Winter 2009, 266.
- 86 Winter 1989, 579, 581. CT scans suggest that the copper head's ears might have been cast separately, perhaps another sign of their symbolic importance. Lapérouse in Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 212.
- 87 The Nineveh head's nose appears more angular than the nose of The Met's head. In the past, this was viewed as a sign that the men were of different ethnicities. Beyond the above-discussed limitations of this approach, intentional damage in antiquity altered the shape of the Nineveh head. See Nylander 1980. This introduced flat planes with angular edges that distort the nose.
- 88 Aleppo National Museum 10406, Jean Evans in Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 148–49, no. 88.
- 89 Nineveh head; stone head fragments from Ur (British Museum, London, inv. 114197 and inv. 114198, Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 213, no. 138); Pir Hüseyin stele of Naram-Sin (Museum of the Ancient Orient, Istanbul, inv. 1027, Donald Hansen in Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 203–4, no. 130).
- 90 The closest example in later images is a head covering with a voluminous braided band on several Old Babylonian worshipper figures. British Museum, inv. 134962 and inv. 91145, Spycket 1981, 249–50. The headband on two Middle Elamite statuettes from Susa once regarded as parallels for the copper head is twisted, not braided. Louvre, inv. Sb 2758 and inv. Sb 2759, Moortgat 1934, 6–10.
- 91 Women continue to wear ornate hairstyles in later periods (Spycket 1981, 251–52), but the Early Dynastic hairstyles share the copper head's profile.
- 92 Baadsgaard 2008, 256–57.
- 93 Stele: multiple Louvre AO numbers, Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 190, fig. 52.
- 94 Iraq Museum, inv. 89000 and Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, inv. 2147 (Ass 7332), Eppihimer 2019, 90, 132–38. For a photograph of the ribbons, see Ehrenberg 1997, fig. 3.
- 95 Louvre, inv. AO 21367, Amiet 1976, 14.
- 96 For example, MMA 33.35.4–.41. A line cut diagonally across the bands on the left side of the copper head may have helped affix metal sheeting through crimping and/or hammering in a thin, malleable wire. Jean-François de Lapérouse, personal communication, May 21, 2021, and September 9, 2021. On the Royal Cemetery ribbons, see Holly Pittman in Zettler and Horne 1998, 102, and Baadsgaard 2008, 221–23. Some Early Dynastic statues of women have single hair ribbons. Spycket 1981, 114–16. Women wear crisscrossing ribbons over headcloths in Early Dynastic shell inlays. Benzel 2013, 164, figs. 51, 52.
- 97 Benzel 2013, 135–36, 168–69.
- 98 On the women's social identities, see Pollock 1991. On their jewelry as evidence for their identity, see Gansell 2007.
- 99 Winter 2008; Brisch 2013.
- 100 Tello head: Louvre, inv. AO 14, Françoise Demange in Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 212–13, no. 137.
- 101 Louvre, inv. Sb 95. Harper in Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 175–76, no. 113. On this head, see Knott 2022.
- 102 Louvre, inv. Sb 56. Harper in Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 174–75, no. 112.
- 103 Susa stele: Hansen in Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 203–4, no. 130; Louvre, inv. Sb 4, Pierre Amiet in Harper, Aruz, and Tallon 1992, 166–68, no. 109. Sargon's head on a stele from Susa is damaged but appears to be reminiscent of the Nineveh head. Louvre, inv. Sb 1, Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 192, fig. 54.
- 104 As hypothesized by Schlossman 1981–82, 156–57.
- 105 Eppihimer 2019.
- 106 On the need for such precision and transparency in object labels and catalogue entries, see Marlowe 2013, 44–46.

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BGR Brummer Gallery Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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# Sculpting Reputation: A Terracotta Bust of Senesino by Roubiliac

**MALCOLM BAKER**

In 1749 the engraver and antiquarian George Vertue wrote in his notebooks that “of all the Arts now practised in England none has shone late years more apparently than that of Sculpture or Statuary workes.”<sup>1</sup> It is therefore not surprising that sculpture figures prominently in the recently reopened British Galleries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Among the works displayed there is an exceptional terracotta bust identified as a portrait of the celebrated castrato singer Francesco Bernardi, known as “Il Senesino” (1686–1758), by Louis François Roubiliac (figs. 1, 2).<sup>2</sup>

The bust was purchased in 2016 from the art dealer Patricia Wengraf, who acquired it from Maria Avanzati in Florence, to whom it had come by family descent along with its traditional identification as Francesco Bernardi.



**fig. 1** Louis François Roubiliac (British, b. France, 1695/1702–1762). *Francesco Bernardi, known as “Il Senesino”* (ca. 1686–1758), ca. 1735. Terracotta with later marble base,  $24\frac{1}{4} \times 21\frac{9}{16} \times 8\frac{15}{16}$  in. (61.6 × 54.8 × 22.7 cm) (bust only). Inscribed behind proper left shoulder: *Fran[?]co*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Gift of Irwin Untermyer by exchange, 2016 (2016.47)

**fig. 2** Reverse view of terracotta bust of Senesino (fig. 1)



An inscription in clay behind the proper left shoulder reads as “*Fran[?]co*,” which might possibly be regarded as part of the sitter’s first name but remains puzzling.<sup>3</sup> As Elisabetta Avanzati has shown, both the identity of the sitter and the attribution to Roubiliac are confirmed by an entry in a document recording Bernardi’s expenses, including one for “My bust done by the famous Roubiliac,” costing seven pounds, fifteen shillings.<sup>4</sup> This entry appears on the last page of what seems to be a priced inventory written by Senesino of possessions he was shipping from London to his house in Siena via the Italian port of Livorno. On the front page of the manuscript the words “Livorno to Siena” are followed by “Book of payments for necklaces and comforts for the house in Siena made by me Francesco Bernardi and sent in cases.” As well as specifying objects to be “sent in cases,” it goes on to mention “other small payments for particular commissions made in London in the year 1732.”<sup>5</sup> If we assume that a bust modeled in clay would have to dry and then be fired, Senesino’s terracotta must have been made some time before his departure in June 1736. A date of about 1735 therefore seems likely.

The existence of a bust of Senesino by Roubiliac has for some time been known from a poem by John Lockman in a manuscript volume in the Beinecke Library at Yale University.<sup>6</sup> Titled “To Mr. Roubillac [*sic*], on seeing a Bust, carv’d by him, of Senesino,” it reads:

When Senesino breathes in Vocal Strains,  
We think Apollo’s left th’ Aethereal Plains:  
When we the Warbler view, by thee exprest,  
He seems as by the Hand of Nature drest.

Thy Art so happily eludes the Eye;  
His Voice such Sweetness boasts, & swells so high,  
That which best imitates, ‘twill doubtful be,  
Thou, Senesino, or, Apollo, he.

This was evidently a transcription from Lockman’s original and the same verse had appeared in the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* on June 4, 1736, with Lockman’s name below the title. It was one of several verses by Lockman about Roubiliac’s sculptures, including one about a terracotta model of the Rape of Lucretia, and it appears that the writer played a significant role in promoting the sculptor’s work.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from the bust’s provenance and the documentary record, the identity of the sitter as Senesino is supported by comparison with two prints of the singer. One, dated 1727, is by Elisha Kirkall after Joseph Goupy and the other, dated 1735, is by Alexander van Haecken after a portrait by Thomas Hudson (fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> The attribution of the bust to Roubiliac, who was to become by the late 1740s the leading sculptor working in London,

**fig. 3** Alexander van Haecken (British, b. Flanders, 1701–1757), after Thomas Hudson (British, 1701–1779). *Senesino*, 1735. Mezzotint,  $13\frac{15}{16} \times 9\frac{1}{4}$  in. (35.5 × 25.1 cm). British Museum, London (inv. 1922.0612.15)





fig. 4 Louis François Roubiliac. *Isaac Newton* (1642–1727), mid-1730s. Terracotta, 29½ × 19¼ × 11¾ in. (74 × 50 × 29 cm). Royal Greenwich Observatory on loan to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (inv. ZBA1640)



rivalled only by John Michael Rysbrack, is supported not only by the entry in Senesino's manuscript account book and Lockman's poem but also by comparison with other terracotta busts by Roubiliac from this period, most notably that of Sir Isaac Newton, probably dating from the mid-1730s (fig. 4). Both busts have open backs, deeply excavated with thin walls of clay. Unlike most of Roubiliac's later busts, apart from the cast multiples, neither has a central supporting strut. Although the drapery conventions employed differ, the way in which the details of the drapery of the Senesino are modeled is likewise wholly consistent with those of Newton. The evidence of its provenance, its relationship to the engraved portraits and Lockman's poem, its comparison to Roubiliac's documented bust of Newton, and, above all, the reference in the account book leave little doubt that The Met terracotta is indeed the lost bust of Senesino by Roubiliac.

#### SENESINO IN LONDON IN THE 1730S

Born in Siena about 1686, Francesco Bernardi, nicknamed Senesino (from his place of birth), was by 1707 singing in operas in Venice, followed by appearances in Bologna, Genoa, and Naples.<sup>9</sup> In 1717 he was hired for a large sum to sing in Dresden, where George Frederic

Handel heard him and engaged him to sing at his Royal Academy of Music in London. Having arrived there in 1720, he received huge acclaim, prompting the dramatist John Gay to declare, "People have now forgot Homer and Virgil and Caesar, or at least they have lost their ranks. For in London and Westminster, in all polite conversations, Senesino is daily voted to be the greatest man that ever lived."<sup>10</sup> During this period no fewer than thirteen operas by Handel included parts written specially for him, most notably the title role in *Giulio Cesare*. With the closure of the Royal Academy in 1728 he returned to Siena and resumed singing in Venice. Reengaged by Handel and the impresario John James Heidegger, Senesino sang in the composer's operas and oratorios over the next three years and became ever more celebrated. During his time in London he enjoyed the hospitality and friendship of many of the aristocratic elite while at the same time building a substantial art collection, including old master paintings and works by contemporaries such as Jacopo Amigoni and Antonio Bellucci.<sup>11</sup> In accord with the British predilection for portraiture—just one aspect of a taste for British styles in the visual and decorative arts that continued throughout his life—he also acquired many portraits of musicians who were his contemporaries, including the singers Francesca Cuzzoni and Carlo Broschi Farinelli and the librettist Paolo Rolli.<sup>12</sup> All these he acquired, like the bust by Roubiliac, to adorn his elegant villa, bought with his London earnings, outside Siena. He was, however, a notoriously difficult person, and his relationship with the imperious Handel was stormy and fraught. A decisive split came in 1733 when on May 24 Charles Delafaye reported to the Earl of Essex:

Here is like to be a Schism in the musical world. Hendel [sic] is become so arbitrary [a] prince, that the Town murmurs, Senesino not being able to subscribe any longer to his Tyranny threatens to revolt and in conjunction with Cuzzona [the soprano] to set up a separate Congregation on Lincolns Inn Fields, which it is thought will be sooner full than that for the Haymarket.<sup>13</sup>

This rival opera company, which was based at a theater in Lincoln's Inn Fields run by John Rich, was supported by powerful aristocratic figures and became known as the Opera of the Nobility.<sup>14</sup> For works to be staged there Senesino brought in the composer Nicola Porpora and the soprano Cuzzoni. The first production took place on December 30, 1733, when Senesino sang the role of Theseo in Porpora's *Arianna in Naxos*, with Cuzzoni singing the part of Arianna. The adulation of Senesino

fig. 5 George Bickham the Younger (British, ca. 1704–1771). *The Ladies' Lamentation for ye Loss of Senesino*, 1737–38. Etching and engraving, 12½ × 8 in. (32.8 × 20.2 cm). British Museum, London (inv. 2006,U.713)

continued and in February 1736 Henry Coventry wrote that he “was always a good Favourite of mine; besides the pleasure he gives me in Singing, I can never help looking on him with some Esteem, as imagining him to be a Man of excellent Sense.”<sup>15</sup> Shortly afterward they were joined by the younger castrato Farinelli who, while being on good terms with Senesino, was to achieve equal if not more fame.<sup>16</sup> To counter this, the Haymarket company brought in new singers from Italy and introduced rival works such as Handel’s *Arianna in Creta*. However, by 1736 the rivalry between the two companies proved difficult to maintain and, having sung the part of Apollo in Porpora’s *La festa d’Imeneo*, Senesino left in June of that year for Italy, prompting a song entitled “The Ladies’ Lamentation for ye Loss of Senesino,” which proved popular in London for several seasons (fig. 5).<sup>17</sup>



## ROUBILIAC IN LONDON IN THE 1730S

While Senesino was already a celebrated figure when he arrived in London, Roubiliac's standing in the mid-1730s is less clear. To what extent was he still establishing himself or had he already built a reputation? Born in Lyon in 1702, Louis François Roubiliac was the son of a silk merchant who by 1710 had moved with his family to Frankfurt, where he worked as a language teacher, and then on to Berlin, where in 1723 he was recorded as a bookseller.<sup>18</sup> Nineteenth-century sources state that he worked in Dresden for Balthasar Permoser, the artist responsible for the rich sculptural decoration of the Zwinger.<sup>19</sup> By the late 1720s he was in Paris at the Académie Royale, where he won second prize for sculpture in 1730.<sup>20</sup> Then for an unknown reason he moved to London, where he is recorded in 1730 as a member of the White Bear Masonic Lodge. According to the account given by Joseph Nollekens's biographer, John T. Smith, Roubiliac's early years in England were spent in the workshop of Henry Cheere, while other sources suggest that he also worked for Thomas Carter.<sup>21</sup> His role in what appear to have been collaborative projects, and which works he helped to make for Cheere, is unclear.<sup>22</sup> Certainly by 1738, when his acclaimed statue of Handel was erected in Vauxhall Gardens, he had achieved both independence and considerable fame (fig. 6). After this date his career as a sculptor of busts, statues, and monuments may be tracked in considerable detail. Between his arrival in England in 1730 and 1738, however, his activity is more difficult to determine. The reappearance of the bust of Senesino therefore prompts a reassessment of these early works and of Roubiliac's reputation before the erection of the Handel statue in 1738, an event usually seen as the key turning point in Roubiliac's career as a sculptor.

After his early, albeit ill-defined, activity within Henry Cheere's workshop, Roubiliac evidently began taking on commissions as an independent sculptor beginning in 1733. His earliest documented works are busts of the prince de Condé and the vicomte de Turenne, made for the Duke of Argyll's gallery at Adderbury in Oxfordshire, England. Other modern busts in this interior were by Rysbrack but those of Turenne and Condé were recorded as the work of Roubiliac in the French periodical *Le Pour et contre* in 1733. This French article was translated from an English article about the work of Rysbrack but adds the following significant footnote: "The Duke of Argyll is having two busts made in marble, the one of the Great Condé, the other of Marshall Turenne. He is not employing Rysbrack, but connoisseurs value no less the hand he is



fig. 6 Louis François Roubiliac. *George Frederic Handel*, 1738, with 19th-century plinth. Marble, H. 53¼ in. (135.3 cm) (statue and plinth). Victoria and Albert Museum, London (inv. A.3&A-1965)



using. It is that of Roubillac [*sic*], the young Frenchman, pupil and worthy imitator of the celebrated *Coustou*.”<sup>23</sup> It is telling that already at this date Roubiliac is being seen as the equal of the well-established and celebrated Rysbrack. The Condé bust has yet to be identified but that of Turenne, already known from a drawing made of a plaster version in about 1762 (fig. 7), has recently come to light. Interestingly, Roubiliac’s portrait differs considerably in its details of dress from the familiar painted and engraved images of Turenne, notably the painted portrait by Hyacinthe Rigaud and the engraved portrait by Robert Nanteuil, both of which show the sitter wearing a large lace collar above his armor. Roubiliac’s bust, by contrast, shows the gorget of his armor without a collar above it. These differences hint at a certain independence on the part of the sculptor, although an earlier bust by Antoine Coysevox, which may have been known to Roubiliac, likewise lacks the collar.<sup>24</sup>

Roubiliac’s two busts for Adderbury formed part of a project in which the leading sculptor was Rysbrack. Another collaborative project of about 1735 in which both sculptors were involved was Charles Clay’s musical clock in the Royal Collection, which is surmounted by a bronze group of Hercules and Atlas modeled by Roubiliac along with the bronze flanking figures of the Four Monarchies (Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome).<sup>25</sup> The faces of the clock combine silver reliefs cast from models by Rysbrack with painted scenes by Amigoni.<sup>26</sup>

fig. 7 Joseph Nollekens (British, 1737–1823) after Louis François Roubiliac. *Henri de la Tour d’Auvergne, vicomte de Turenne*, ca. 1762. Pencil on paper mounted on card, 8¼ × 6¾ in. (20.5 × 16.3 cm). Harris Museum, Art Gallery & Library, Preston, England (inv. PRSMG.P503)

Roubiliac’s contributions, which form the major sculptural component, draw, as Tessa Murdoch has demonstrated, on the French tradition of sculptors who supplied models for the bronze figures on clocks (such as Nicolas Coustou).<sup>27</sup> They also seem to be akin to those small-scale models, including one of the Rape of Lucretia, executed about this time and praised by John Lockman in a poem published on May 18, 1738.<sup>28</sup>

The majority of Roubiliac’s work during the 1730s, however, consists of portrait sculptures. Some of these were executed late in the decade, including a bust of Handel made in 1739 and a series of busts of Alexander Pope, made from 1738 onward. Others, however, were evidently produced earlier. Among these was a now lost bust of Farinelli that must have been executed between September 26, 1734, when the singer arrived in London, and 1737, when he returned to Italy; it is possible, though unlikely, that this had been made as early as June 1735, as discussed below. Still more significant, not least because he continued to use it as a model for marbles, was Roubiliac’s bust of Sir Isaac Newton. The terracotta model (the facture of which has been compared with that of the Senesino terracotta above) had been bequeathed to the Royal Society in 1785 by the physician John Belchier, who stated, “This Bust in Terra Cotta was made under the Eyes of Mr Conduit [*sic*] and several of Sir Isaac Newton’s particular friends by Roubiliac, from many Pictures and other Busts.”<sup>29</sup> This must therefore have been made at least before







fig. 8 Louis François Roubiliac. *Isaac Newton*, ca. 1732–35. Marble, 22 × 19½ × 8½ in. (55.9 × 48.5 × 22 cm) (bust); 4½ × 7½ × 7½ in. (12.5 × 19.3 × 19.2 cm) (socle). Royal Society, London (inv. S/0018)

John Conduitt’s death in May 1737. Some reference to it, however, seems already to have been made between 1732 and 1735 by William Hogarth, who appears to have drawn on it in combination with features of Rysbrack’s Newton in his conversation piece showing Conduitt and his family, along with other distinguished guests.<sup>30</sup> The marble version of this bust (fig. 8), purchased after Conduitt’s death, was presented by William Freman (or Freeman) of Hamels in April 1738 to the Royal Society, which then commissioned from Roubiliac a new socle decorated with a diagram representing the movement of the planets.<sup>31</sup> Various other versions, such as that at Trinity College, Cambridge, continued to be executed by Roubiliac in later years.<sup>32</sup>

One way of thinking about Roubiliac’s work during the mid-1730s is in terms of the sculptor’s developing reputation and his suitability as the recipient of major commissions. One such commission was the statue of Handel executed for Jonathan Tyers and installed in Vauxhall Gardens in 1738, long seen as a key work of British sculpture.<sup>33</sup> While the flood of poems and other “puffs” in the contemporary press was no doubt part of Tyers’s astute marketing of the renovated and reformed gardens, some of these verses made overt claims for the statue’s aesthetic qualities and for Roubiliac’s abilities as an artist. In the *London Magazine* for June 1738 one such poem (not by Lockman but by the unidentified “I. W.”) celebrates “the finish’d beauties of the sculptor’s hand” and, addressing the patron, claims that:

When times remote dwell on Roubiliac’s name,  
They’ll still be just to thee who gave him fame.<sup>34</sup>

While the reception of the Handel statue in such a public setting, as well as its originality as a statue, certainly gave Roubiliac and his sculpture new visibility, not enough attention has been given to why the young sculptor received either this prestigious commission or that for a now lost figure of Venus for Sir Andrew Fountaine.<sup>35</sup> As John T. Smith’s comments suggest, Henry Cheere, in whose workshop Roubiliac had worked and who was to design the lighting for Vauxhall, no doubt played a part in recommending him to Tyers.<sup>36</sup> But the design and making of a statue on this scale, involving an expensive block of marble, seem likely to have been entrusted only to a sculptor whose abilities were already known. What was the basis for Roubiliac’s reputation when he received this commission from Tyers? The reappearance of the bust of Senesino offers the opportunity to reconsider the sculptor’s work during the 1730s and the role that the making of busts played in the establishment of his reputation.

#### THE PLACE OF THE BUST OF SENESINO WITHIN ROUBILIAC’S EARLY WORK

With Roubiliac’s activity as a sculptor in the 1730s in mind, we therefore need to return to Senesino’s own description of the bust as “My bust done by the famous Roubiliac,” apparently written in 1735.<sup>37</sup> What prompted him to describe Roubiliac as “famoso” and what could he have been famous for at this date? The evidence for Senesino’s keen and well-informed interest in art suggests that the singer would have been well aware of what was happening in the London art world and may well have known what Roubiliac was making. At this

particular point the images of Handel and Pope had yet to be envisaged and the busts of Condé and Turenne seem unlikely to have been familiar or celebrated enough to secure such fame for the young sculptor, the remarks in *Le Pour et contre* notwithstanding. It is possible, though unlikely, that the lost terracotta bust of Farinelli had already been made by 1735, in which case it would certainly have been familiar to Senesino.<sup>38</sup> But whichever terracotta was executed first, the two singers were familiar, we may assume, with the other's bust. The busts might have been visually related in some way, just as the engravings produced by Van Haecken in 1735 presented their respective portraits by Thomas Hudson and Charles Lucy in paired and complementary frames (figs. 3, 9).<sup>39</sup>

The most widely known of Roubiliac's portrait busts from about this date, however, was the bust of Newton (fig. 8). As an image of the greatest Englishman of his age and a figure who was already being celebrated with Locke, Shakespeare, and Milton as a national "worthy," Roubiliac's bust was commissioned by Conduitt, the husband of Newton's niece, as part of a sustained effort to preserve Newton's fame and to secure his international reputation.<sup>40</sup> Along with the bust of Newton by Rysbrack and, not least, the same

sculptor's monument to the mathematician in Westminster Abbey, Roubiliac's bust was to play a key role in this initiative.<sup>41</sup> But if a sculptural image articulated the subject's fame, so being recognized as the author of such an image could bring fame to the sculptor himself. The execution of such a bust, especially if it could be replicated and more widely distributed among an elite audience, could contribute to the development of a sculptural career, even if the monetary rewards were not necessarily great. As Roubiliac was to suggest in a letter of 1741 to James Harris (to whom he was offering busts of Newton, Handel, and Pope), busts were not a source of much profit and rather were "works by which there is little to be got but Reputation."<sup>42</sup> The implication of this statement is, of course, that busts could enhance not only a sitter's reputation, but a sculptor's as well.

Unlike Roubiliac's bust of Newton, neither that of Senesino nor that of Farinelli was to be replicated or made available as a multiple by the sculptor. Nonetheless, he is likely to have seen the commission for a bust of such a celebrated singer, secured just after the execution of the Newton bust, as a significant achievement. But how well known might the bust of Senesino have been? As it is unlikely to have been made more than a year or so before the singer left for Italy, it would not have been displayed in his London house for very long. However, the publication of Lockman's verse, albeit after both bust and sitter had departed, suggests that the work made some impression. At the very least, those promoting the sculptor wished to indicate that some notice had been taken of it. There is no record of it having been seen in any interior or having been reproduced in print. The same, however, might be said of almost all of the early busts by Roubiliac as well as Rysbrack, and the comments made by George Vertue in his notebooks—notably lists of models he saw in Roubiliac's workshop in 1738 and 1741—constitute the only documentation for their contemporary reception.<sup>43</sup> While the gift of the bust of Newton to the Royal Society is recorded in the late 1730s, we do not know where the work had been displayed by its first owner.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, although we know about the purchases of multiples of busts of Handel and Pope during the 1730s, we know nothing of the early locations of the various marble versions. The fact that we have no evidence about where the Senesino terracotta might have been seen in London in 1735 does not in itself mean that it was not known to at least some of those in the circles of both Senesino and Roubiliac. Indeed, given Senesino's sociability at his house on Great Marlborough Street,



fig. 9 Alexander van Haecken, after Charles Lucy (British, 1692–ca. 1736). Carlo Broschi Farinelli, 1735. Mezzotint, 13<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 10 in. (35.5 × 25.3 cm). British Museum, London (inv. 1902.1011.6030)





fig. 10 Interior of the Basilica dell'Osservanza, near Siena, Italy, before restoration in 1922

we may assume that it was familiar to at least some of his many elite acquaintances.

The entry in the account book suggests that the bust's eventual location, along with the rest of Senesino's collection, was to be in Siena, where his villa was decorated very much according to British taste. According to Avanzati, the portrait bust was bequeathed by the singer (presumably in a cited document of 1743) to the Basilica dell'Osservanza with a view to it forming part of a monument in the church, where his grave slab remains.<sup>45</sup> There, in a prestigious and important location, it would have been viewed near Renaissance sculptures such as the roundels of the Evangelists and Church Fathers, the Annunciation figures, and the Coronation of the Virgin, all by Andrea della Robbia, and Giacomo Cozzarelli's terracotta *Lamentation* (fig. 10).<sup>46</sup> Alongside these were more recent seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works that are no longer there.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the terracotta bust was to have been copied in marble to accord with these, though a marble version was unlikely to have been made in England.<sup>48</sup> To have been commemorated in a setting of such sculptural splendor would certainly have been commensurate with Senesino's sense of style and grandeur, and this possibility raises the intriguing question as to how a portrait bust by (or after) a young London-based sculptor would have registered in such a setting. However, we should not take the proposed bequest of the bust as evidence that the portrait was originally intended for a monument nor that this was Senesino's purpose in commissioning the work from Roubiliac.

It seems far more likely that the existing bust (or a marble version of it) was only later—at the time of the making of the will—considered as part of a future monument. This was often the case with busts that were recontextualized after a sitter's death.<sup>49</sup> In any event, the bust was never set up in the Osservanza; as Senesino's relationship with his heirs grew steadily worse, the singer decided that the contents of his villa should be auctioned after his death while his heirs, in the end, denied his wish for a monument incorporating the bust.<sup>50</sup>

At the time when the bust was made Senesino was at the height of his fame and promoting the Opera of the Nobility as his new venture in rivalry with Handel's house. While a familiarity with the Newton bust might have prompted Senesino to choose Roubiliac for his own bust, other factors may have played a role, especially the sculptor's links to networks associated with the London operatic world. Most obviously John Lockman connected the two, not only writing "puffs" for Roubiliac's sculpture but also being actively involved in the writing of texts about opera and even libretti for operatic works.<sup>51</sup> Roubiliac also seems to have been a friend of John Rich, in whose theater at Lincoln's Inn Fields the Opera of the Nobility was launched and whose daughter's ear was later cast by the sculptor.<sup>52</sup> Apart from that, two figures who played roles in the history of the bust of Newton also had operatic connections: John Belchier, who owned the terracotta of Newton, was a friend of Handel's and had served as a go-between when Pope wished to have his *Cecilia Ode* set by the composer; and William Freman, who purchased and donated the marble to the Royal Society and was a subscriber to many of Handel's scores.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps these connections overlapped, too, with the Huguenot and Masonic networks that played a continuing role in Roubiliac's commissions on account of the sculptor's connections with both communities.<sup>54</sup>

If this is the wider context in which the bust of Senesino fits, the terracotta also differs strikingly from the other works by Roubiliac mentioned so far in ways that suggest that this particular bust, as much as that of Newton, contributed significantly to Roubiliac's growing reputation (a point to which Lockman's verse attests and enhances further). Unlike the busts of Turenne and Condé, or indeed that of Newton, the person represented here was neither an historical figure nor a recently deceased "great man," the customary subjects of portrait sculpture. Instead, Roubiliac was producing a portrait of a living figure, epitomizing a vibrant contemporary culture. Not based on any painted or graphic image, the portrait appears to have been modeled



*ad vivum*. It is thus the first of Roubiliac's animated images of contemporary celebrities that were to form such a striking aspect of his achievement as a portrait sculptor, exemplified by images of figures such as Handel and David Garrick, as well as Martin Folkes and the Earl of Chesterfield.<sup>55</sup> What is just as significant is how exceptional this terracotta is as a portrait bust of a singer. (The other portraits of singers owned by Senesino all seem to have been painted.) While later in the century busts were made of actors such as Garrick (again by Roubiliac) and Larive (by Jean Antoine Houdon) and of musicians and singers such as Christoph Willibald Gluck and Sophie Arnould (both by Houdon), the busts of Senesino and Farinelli are rarities at this date.<sup>56</sup> There was a long tradition of representing writers, both ancient and modern, in this way. In 1728 Rysbrack executed a bust of Edmund Waller, though Waller had died in 1687 and so was seen in the same light as Shakespeare, Milton, and Fletcher.<sup>57</sup> Beginning with Coysevox's 1714 bust of writer and diplomat Matthew Prior and followed by Roubiliac's series of busts of Pope from 1738 onward, sculptural images of contemporary authors became steadily more common, articulating shifts in the notion of authorship.<sup>58</sup> Busts of architects and artists were likewise familiar in the early eighteenth century, again reflecting their rising status.<sup>59</sup> But it is difficult to find examples of busts of singers or performers as early as the 1730s.<sup>60</sup> The bust of Senesino, like the lost bust of Farinelli, would seem to stand as an innovatory use of the genre and in this way established the use of sculpture to represent those in the performing arts, something that was yet to be done on a larger scale, and in a still more public setting, until the statue of Handel in 1738.

But the bust of Senesino is also distinctive in other ways. The conventions of dress employed here are not easily classified. Roubiliac often used classicizing conventions in a way that was idiosyncratic when compared to their use by his rival sculptors, John Michael Rysbrack and Peter Scheemakers.<sup>61</sup> The bust of Newton, for example, adopts vaguely classical dress without replicating any Roman bust, but the bust of Senesino is different. The way in which the drapery is pulled down so as to expose the chest or, on the sitter's proper right side, arranged into a wide lapel-like fold does not invoke any classical model. Instead, the arrangement of the drapery functions as a dramatic gesture articulating the overt performativity of the sitter. Unlike contemporary painted or printed portraits, this is not an image with the sitter shown in rich and fashionable contemporary dress (as in van Haecken's engraving). The same might be said of the highly distinctive hair.

The absence of any specific attributes makes it unlikely that he is being shown in one of his roles—Theseo from Porpora's *Arianna in Naxos*, for instance—and in any case the appropriate dress on stage would have been more clearly classical. What is presented here is something more generalized but still outwardly performative. For both sitter and sculptor alike, this bust would have been viewed as a tour de force, a true register of the exceptionality of Senesino as a celebrity and a performer, while at the same time it makes a claim for the sculptor's own exceptionality as an artist. It is this parallel between Senesino and Roubiliac that is indeed brought out in Lockman's verse.

With its distinctive mode, Roubiliac's 1735 bust of Senesino might also be seen in relation to the bust and the statue of Handel or rather the other way round, as the reappearance of the Senesino image allows us to see the Handel sculptures in a different way. At once wittily allusive and informally contemporary, the statue of Handel presents the sitter in modern dress, including a soft cap and a falling sandal, but also with a lyre, referring to his mythical role as either Apollo or Orpheus.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the bust shows him in contemporary dress, albeit with a little classicizing drapery to mask the bust's truncation. Might the choice of down-to-earth contemporary dress be seen as a rejection of the overt showiness of Senesino's bust? While it might be tempting to see both the Senesino and lost Farinelli images as being associated with the familiar images of Handel, the fact that they were created earlier in the sculptor's career should prompt us to see them separately and so perhaps look at the images of Handel in a new way. The discovery of the bust of Senesino allows us to place Roubiliac's early work in a new light and to recognize how his virtuosity as a sculptor was already apparent some years before the Handel statue.

Placing the bust of Senesino in this context also allows us to see the role that the execution of busts, whether in terracotta or marble, played in the making of a sculptor's reputation during the first half of the eighteenth century. The portrait bust had become increasingly prominent as a genre from the 1720s onward, and by 1747 Robert Campbell's *London Tradesman* could refer to "Figures in Clay, Wax, and Plaister of Paris" and comment that "the taste of Busts and Figures in these Materials prevails much of late Years, and in some Measure interferes with Portrait Painting."<sup>63</sup> Traditionally used to commemorate or celebrate the illustrious (usually aristocrats or historical figures), the bust increasingly became a mode of representation employed to promote contemporary celebrity, as may

be seen in the case of Senesino's bust. Busts indeed formed a significant component of what Berta Joncus has described as "an emergent industry of star production."<sup>64</sup> Such celebrity, from the sculptor's point of view, made these images more marketable, and some sculptors such as Roubiliac and Houdon took advantage of this by developing business practices involving the making of multiples in plaster and terracotta.<sup>65</sup> In Roubiliac's case this began as early as 1738, when he was producing plasters of his Pope bust, and continued throughout his career and indeed after his death.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, making a bust of a celebrated figure, especially a living sitter, not only brought fame to the person represented but also to the sculptor, who could use it to build a reputation. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of Roubiliac in the 1730s, when the sculptor followed his busts of Turenne and Newton with those of Senesino and Farinelli, and then with images (steadily replicated by the artist) of Pope and Handel. The emergence of Roubiliac's virtuoso terracotta of Senesino brings into sharper focus not only Roubiliac's career in the 1730s but also the role that the making of busts could play in the formation of a sculptural reputation.

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## NOTES

1 Vertue 1933–34, 145.

2 On its acquisition by The Met, the bust was conserved by Jack Soutanian Jr. According to Soutanian (quoted in an email sent by Elyse Nelson to the author, September 10, 2021), "The small traces of dun found on the surface of the bust may suggest that this coloration was the initial intention, perhaps as an imitation of grayish-green stone, and that the predominant white now visible is largely a preparation for this darker layer."

3 This seems unlikely to be a signature—even though Roubiliac's signatures on his early busts are not standard, none uses his first name in full; see Baker 2022.

4 "Il mio Busto fatto dal' famoso Roubiliac." Avanzati 2009. I am grateful to Patricia Wengraf for copies of the entry and the title page of this document, described by Avanzati as a "registro delle uscita" (exit register), which forms part of the Archivio Famiglia Bernardi Siena. The payment recorded was seven pounds, fifteen shillings. This compares with ten pounds, ten shillings, paid for each of the terracotta busts of Lady Grisell Baillie and Lady Murray in 1745 (Baker 2014c, 292).

5 The full title reads: "F[rancesco] - [symbol of Marian cross here] - B[ernardi] - N°: &= Al Sig: Gio: Valen. / Berardi [sic] / Livorno per Siena; / Libro di Spese di momili [=monili?] ed / comodità per la Casa di Siena / fatte da me Francesco Ber- / nardi e mandate in Casse con la sud: Marca numerale / ed altre picciole spese di commissioni di Particolare / fatte in Londra nell' anno / 1732. / con la grazia di Dio amen." (Francesco Bernardi. Number: &= To Signor Giovanni Valente/Valentino Berardi [presumably

Bernardi] Livorno to Siena; Book of payments for necklaces [i.e., valuables] and comforts for the house in Siena made by me Francesco Bernardi and sent in cases with the above numeric mark and other small payments for particular commissions made in London in the year 1732. by the grace of God amen.) (I owe this transcription to Gordon Balderston and am grateful to him and Dimitrios Zikos for help with the translation.) The name "Gio: Valen. Berardi" may refer to Senesino's brother, with the surname misspelled, but it is perhaps more likely to refer to an entirely different person, named Berardi. The word "momili" may be a mistake for "monili," meaning "pendant necklaces" and perhaps standing here for "valuables" or "plate."

6 Bindman and Baker 1995, 66. Balderston has pointed out to me that the Beinecke transcription of Lockman's verses appears to postdate December 12, 1737, since the poem immediately after "To Mr. Roubillac" refers to Miss Bincks as "now Mrs. Vincent"; the marriage took place on December 12, 1737. My transcription here modernizes the spelling in accord with customary literary practice.

7 Bindman and Baker 1995, 66.

8 For the mezzotint after Hudson, see J. C. Smith 1883, 1412, no. 13; for that after Goupy, see Simon 1985, 123–24, no. 93. For an impression of the Goupy image, see British Museum, London, inv. 1902,1011.2968.

9 Scotting 2018, 22.

10 Letter from John Gay to Dean Swift, London, February 3, 1723; see Melville 1921, 58, quoted in part by Scotting 2018, 3.

- 11 Avanzati 2009, 146.
- 12 Ibid. The account book also includes purchases of silver, including pieces by Paul de Lamerie.
- 13 Burrows et al. 2013–, 2:630.
- 14 Thomas McGeary (2013) has argued that this was not, as sometimes assumed, associated with the opposition group centered around Frederick, Prince of Wales. For a contrary view, see Donald Burrows (2004).
- 15 Burrows et al. 2013–, 2:126–27.
- 16 On Farinelli, see McGeary 2005 and Joncus 2005 along with other articles in that issue of the *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*. For the place of both Farinelli and Senesino on the London operatic stage, see Aspden 2013, 207–44.
- 17 Dean 1980, 130.
- 18 In recent years records of the Roubiliac family's presence in Frankfurt from 1710 to 1718, of the death of Pierre Roubiliac in Berlin on May 11, 1723, and of the burial of the sculptor's younger sister Gabrielle (a Roman Catholic) in Dresden on March 12, 1724, have been found in [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) by Balderston, to whom I am grateful for this information. Roubiliac was first associated with Dresden and Permoser by John T. Smith (1829, 2:96), but the significance was played down in favor of his later French training. However, Smith's statement seems to be corroborated by an independent Dresden source, the implications of which were first explored in Baker 1984. Roubiliac's origins and connections will also be discussed in a forthcoming study about newly discovered archival material concerning Roubiliac and Nicholas Sprimont by Tessa Murdoch and Sandra Robinson (n.d. [forthcoming]).
- 19 For Roubiliac's possible relationship with Permoser and Paul Egell, see Baker 1984.
- 20 Bindman and Baker 1995, 58–60.
- 21 John T. Smith 1829, 2:90, 96. These sources as well as the ambiguous nature of sculptural collaboration in the 1730s are discussed in "Collaboration and Sub-contracting in British Sculptors' Workshops," in Baker 2000, 70–85.
- 22 The bust of Lord Chief Justice Raymond (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. A.1-1947), whose monument had been made by Cheere, has been attributed to Roubiliac on the basis of a back of a type later used by Roubiliac (Baker 1995a, 827–28; Baker 2000, 82), although Cheere may also have used the same pattern earlier. The involvement of Roubiliac in the design of Cheere's statue of George Cooke (proposed in Baker 2000, 79–82) now seems less convincing in the light of more recent work on Cheere by Matthew Craske (2007, 162–68, 416–22). The Cooke statue is on loan at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford.
- 23 "M. le Duc d'Argyle fait faire deux Bustes en marbre, l'un du grand Condé, l'autre du Maréchal de Turenne. Il n'employe point M. Rysbrack, mais les Connoisseurs n'estiment pas moins la main dont il se sert. C'est celle de M. Roubillac, jeune François, élève & digne imitateur du célèbre Coustou." Antoine François Prévost, *Le Pour et contre* 1, no. 14 (November 1733): 329, note c; see Prévost 1993, 1:190. This report is based on an article in the London periodical *The Free Briton* 195 (August 16, 1733). Both the English source and Prévost's slightly truncated version are concerned with Rysbrack's sculptures, and this passage added by Prévost in a footnote introduces Roubiliac as a worthy alternative to Rysbrack. For Adderbury, see Hewlings 1996; for the sculpture in the gallery, its arrangement, and interpretation, see Baker 2000, chap. 11:29–43, 179–80 ("Ancient and Modern. French and English, War and Peace: The Sculpture in the Duke of Argyll's Gallery at Adderbury"). The bust of Turenne (along with several other busts from Adderbury) was added to the sale on April 15, 1777, "of a nobleman gone to France" held by Walsh, Clayton & Co, where it (as lot 58) was attributed to "Bouchardon of Paris."
- 24 The bust by Coysevox (sometimes ascribed to Jérôme Derbais) in the Musée Condé, Chantilly, France, inv. OA367, reproduced in early nineteenth-century bronze versions such as that in the Royal Collection Trust, United Kingdom, inv. RCIN 33466; Marsden n.d. (forthcoming), lacks the collar but the Roubiliac bust differs significantly in other ways from it.
- 25 Royal Collection Trust, inv. RCIN 1418.
- 26 Croft-Murray 1943; Murdoch 2013.
- 27 Murdoch 2015. It is conceivable that Roubiliac's modeling of small-scale figures for casting in other materials continued in the later 1740s through his connections with Sprimont and the Chelsea porcelain factory. My impression, however, is that such attributions rest only on a combination of circumstantial evidence and vague stylistic analogies. Roubiliac's reported aim of casting the relief for the Hough monument in porcelain (in Bindman and Baker 1995, 280) is perhaps best interpreted not as evidence for any work by him as a modeler for Chelsea but rather an aspiration prompted by an awareness (through his relatives in Dresden) of the larger-scale sculptural use of the material for the Saxon court.
- 28 *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, May 18, 1738; the verse is transcribed in Esdaile 1928, 43. David Bindman (in Bindman and Baker 1995, 58–59) has suggested that these works were akin to the small-scale sculptures of mythological subjects characteristic of Robert Le Lorrain.
- 29 According to the Society's Council Minutes Original (CMO/7), August 18, 1785, the terracotta was bequeathed to the Royal Society by John Belchier with the intention that it should be "placed at the Observatory in Greenwich Park, and to be scheduled in like manner as the bust of Flamsteed which I gave to the Society some years ago. N.B. This Bust in Terra Cotta was made under the Eyes of Mr Conduit [*sic*] and several of Sir Isaac Newton's particular friends by Roubiliac, from many Pictures and other Busts." See Baker 1995a, 822n12.
- 30 Keynes 2005, 84; Einberg 2016, 107–10. Although Hogarth was already engaged on initial sketches of the figures as early as April 1732, the painting (in a private collection) was executed over several years and we cannot assume that Roubiliac's model of Newton was available to the painter in 1732.
- 31 According to the entry in the Royal Society's *Journal Book* 17 (April 1738): 231–32, Freman had purchased the bust "with the intention of making a present of it to the Society." The Society's Council Minutes Original (vol. 3, 1727/28–42; CMO/3/79, <https://catalogues.royalsociety.org/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=CMO%2f3%2f79>) recorded on June 19, 1738, stated that approval had been given for payment of "Mr Roubillac's Bill for a Pedestal to Sir Isaac Newton's Bust . . . £2.7.0." See Baker 1995a, 829.
- 32 Baker 1995b, 125–27, 133; for the version in the Long Room, Trinity College, Dublin, see Baker 1995a, 829.
- 33 Bindman 1997; Aspden 2002; Baker 2014c, 249–61; McGeary 2015.
- 34 Baker 1998.
- 35 As Tessa Murdoch (1983, 30) has shown, the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* for Thursday, November 16, 1738, reported, "Mr. Roubillac the Statuary, is carving a curious figure of a Ldy for Sir Andrew Fountaine Knt, which we hear, will



- cost 300l"; as she suggests, this was presumably the same as "the fine Venus . . . finish'd at a Sculptor's in St Martins Lane for a person of Quality" reported in the same newspaper three days earlier.
- 36 J. T. Smith 1829, 2:90.
- 37 See note 4 above.
- 38 The bust of Farinelli was recorded by Vertue in 1738 when, in an early note about Roubiliac and the Handel statue, he mentions "a Model in Clay the portrait of Farranelli [*sic*] the famous singer very like him, and well done." Vertue 1933–34, 84. The Farinelli terracotta must of course have been made before late June 1737, when Farinelli left for Spain, but Thomas McGeary has suggested that it may have been made by June 30, 1735, when Lady Mary Brown wrote to the Earl of Essex in Turin reporting that "Farinelli . . . says he hopes your Lordship has not forgotten to send the head to the person that was to have it." McGeary 2005, 348, citing British Library Add. MS 27,733, f.194v. It is unclear, however, if this refers to the bust since the word "head" might well refer to a painted or engraved portrait. In any case, the period between September 1734 and June 1735 would seem to be too short a time for Farinelli to sit for Roubiliac, have his bust modeled in clay, have the clay model allowed to dry, and then be fired and dispatched to Italy. If the terracotta had already been sent to Italy before June 1735 it also seems odd that Vertue comments on it in 1738 as if he had seen it recently. Nonetheless, given Farinelli's celebrity in London, why was this bust not more commented on?
- 39 The way in which visual images were employed to promote Farinelli's fame is compellingly demonstrated by Joncus 2005.
- 40 Fara 2021, 60–78.
- 41 Fara 2002.
- 42 Roubiliac to James Harris, July 10, 1741; see Burrows et al. 2013–, 3:713.
- 43 Among the few examples of busts being reproduced in print were Giovanni Battista Guelfi's images made for Queen Caroline's Hermitage at Richmond Lodge (disseminated as mezzotints by John Faber, no doubt on account of their patron and location) and Rysbrack's terracotta of the Scottish poet Arthur Johnston, engraved by George Vertue in 1740 as a frontispiece to Johnston's *Psalmi Davidici Interpretatione* (1741). Fictive busts were frequently considered appropriate for author frontispieces; see Baker 2021. Although busts sometimes appear in conversation pieces, it is difficult to associate them with specific sculptures. For Vertue's lists of 1738 and 1741, see Vertue 1933–34, 84 and 105.
- 44 In Hogarth's painting *The Indian Emperor* (private collection; 1732–35), which shows the Conduitt family below the bust of Newton, the bust represented appears to combine elements from the busts by both Roubiliac and Rysbrack.
- 45 For the location of the grave slab, see Bertagna 1984. For the reference to the will, see Avanzati 2006, 6, and Avanzati 2009, 149; this was presumably the document of April 30, 1747, that was then replaced by a will of March 30, 1757, following Senesino's dispute with his nephew. The copies of the wills in Archivio Famiglia Bernardi in Siena are inaccessible so I have relied on the references in the two versions of Elisabetta Avanzati's article.
- 46 On these, which remain in the church, see Cornici 1984, 58–67.
- 47 Some were removed in the 1890s, and others in a restoration of the 1920s. The present appearance of the interior was established in a postwar restoration following a bombing raid in 1944. The inventory of works in the Osservanza taken in 1862 (Brogi 1897, 228–34) mentions several eighteenth-century sculptures, including a marble group of angels and seraphim by Giuseppe Mazzuoli that stood on the high altar until 1895; see Cornici 1984, 51 and 53.
- 48 There is no evidence that a marble version was made in England. Interestingly, while the manuscript version of Lockman's verse describes the bust as "carv'd" (suggesting it was in marble rather than modeled clay or terracotta), the title in the printed version apparently corrects this to "made," so more accurately describing a terracotta.
- 49 This was the case, for example, with the bust of Lady Lechmere, placed on a monument in Westminster Abbey, long after her death, alongside a bust of her husband, Sir Thomas Robinson; both had been carved decades earlier in Rome. See Baker, Harrison, and Laing 2000.
- 50 Avanzati 2006.
- 51 Burden 2013, 1:151–71, 179–89. Michael Burden also suggests that Lockman was the likely translator of Luigi Riccoboni, *An Historical and Critical Account of the Theatres in Europe* (1741).
- 52 Joncus and Barlow 2011, 41. For the anecdote about Rich's daughter's ear, see Esdaile 1928, 156; this must have taken place later than the 1730s.
- 53 For Belchier and Freman, see Burrows et al. 2013–, 2:102, 379–80, 406–7.
- 54 Murdoch 1983; Bindman and Baker 1995, 62–69.
- 55 Versions of these busts include Royal Collection Trust inv. RCIN 35255 (Handel); National Portrait Gallery, London, inv. NPG 707a (Garrick); Earl of Pembroke, Wilton House, Salisbury, England (Folkes); National Portrait Gallery, inv. NPG 5829 (Chesterfield).
- 56 For the Garrick bust see Baker 2014c, 328–43. On Houdon's busts of Gluck and Arnould and the representation of musicians and singers, see Sauerländer 2002, 22–28. On the busts of Gluck and Larive (Jean Mauduit), see Bückling and Scherf 2010, 170–73, 213. Versions of these busts include Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. RF 2596 (Arnould); Cleveland Museum of Art, 1988.59 (Gluck); and Musée de la Comédie-Française, Paris (Larive).
- 57 Rysbrack's fine terracotta survives in the collection of Waller's descendants at Hall Barn, Beaconsfield, England; see Rogers 1977.
- 58 Coysevox's bust was later incorporated into the poet's monument by James Gibbs and Rysbrack in Westminster Abbey. For the Pope bust and changing notions of authorship, see Baker 2014a; Baker 2014b; Baker 2014c; Baker 2018; and Baker 2023, forthcoming. For the commemoration of authors, see also Connell 2005. The various autograph versions of Roubiliac's Pope bust include that in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (B1993.27).
- 59 For busts of architects, see Baker 2000, 95–107.
- 60 Interestingly, however, an enigmatic marble bust in Sir John Soane's Museum, London, inv. M444 is said to be of the operatic manager J. J. Heidegger and, with its still rather baroque features, is likely to have been carved about 1720. Its flat back suggests that it was set in an architectural context. If the identity and date are correct this would predate any bust representing a sitter associated with the Italian opera in London. I am grateful to Greg Sullivan for discussing this with me.
- 61 Mary Beard (2021, 107, 315) has observed that the apparent imitation or re-creation of Roman Republican images by eighteenth-century sculptors was more problematic than has been acknowledged.

- 62 Baker 2014c. For the argument for seeing Handel in the guise of Orpheus, see Bindman 1997; for a challenging counterargument in favor of Apollo, see McGeary 2015.
- 63 Campbell 1747, 139.
- 64 Joncus 2005, 438.
- 65 Baker 2006; Baker 2014c, 207–16; Baker 2014d.
- 66 Although Roubiliac was evidently producing multiples as early as 1738, his workshop and working practices seem to have been regularized about 1740; see Murdoch 2021 and Baker 2022.

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# Witnessing Ingenuity: Lacquerware from Michoacán for the Vicereine of New Spain

**RONDA KASL**

Today there flourishes a celebrated painter, an Indian nobleman, named don José Manuel de la Cerda, who has greatly perfected this skill, such that it is finer and more lustrous than the lacquer of China. I saw a dozen large trays made of ash wood that he was painting for the most excellent lady, the marquesa de Cruillas, Vicereine of Mexico, which are worthy of a person of such elevated character.<sup>1</sup>

—Francisco de Ajofrín, 1764

In an often-cited travel diary entry, the Capuchin alms collector Francisco de Ajofrín recorded the name of a celebrated lacquer painter, José Manuel de la Cerda, and identified the vicereine of New Spain as his patroness.<sup>2</sup> The artist, who worked in the city of Pátzcuaro in west-central Mexico, has been connected with a handful of surviving works, three of which bear his signature. One of them is a newly discovered tray (*batea*), now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 1), while another in



*fig. 1* José Manuel de la Cerda (Purépecha, Mexico, mid-18th century). Tray (*batea*) with Turnus provoked into war by Aeneas, ca. 1764. Wood, lacquer, gold, Diam. 42 in. (106.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Fund and Sansbury-Mills Fund, 2020 (2020.321)



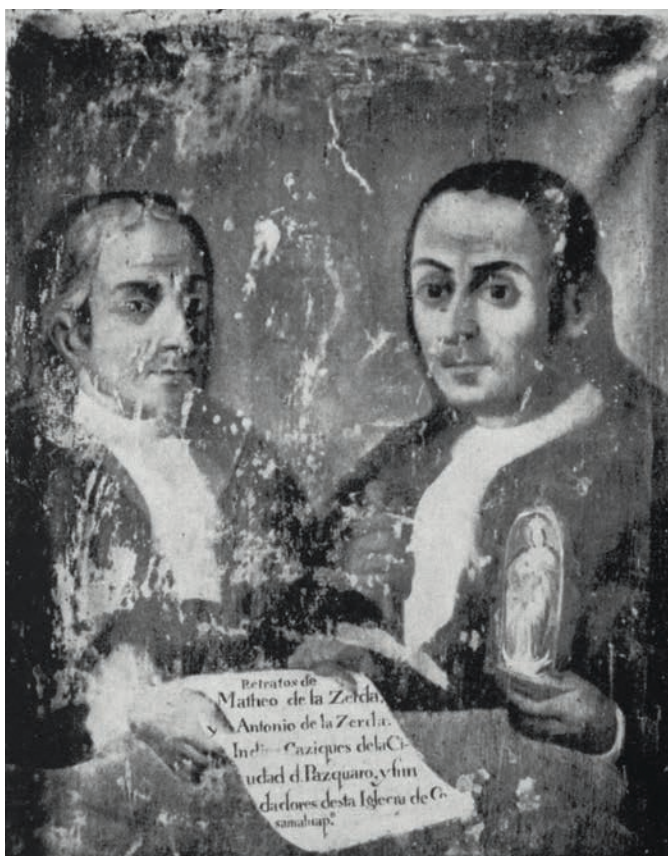


*fig. 2* José Manuel de la Cerda. Tray (*batea*) with the coat of arms of María Josefa de Acuña y Prado, marquesa de Cruillas, vicereine of New Spain. Wood, painted lacquer, gold, Diam. 42½ in. (107 cm). Museo de América, Madrid



fig. 3 Unknown painter.  
Portraits of Mateo and  
Antonio de la Cerda,  
Caciques of Pátzcuaro,  
Founders of the Church  
of Cosamaluapan.  
Private collection

the Museo de América, Madrid, displays the vicereine's long-unidentified coat of arms (fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> Both *bateas* have identical dimensions and may have been among the twelve works seen by Ajofrín when he passed through Pátzcuaro in 1764. The friar's eyewitness account, excerpted from a lengthy diary he claimed to have written for his personal use, was purportedly "a simple report of what he discovered" from 1763 to 1766, as he traversed much of New Spain by foot. The scarcity of written evidence documenting lacquerware made in the viceroyalty may explain the uncritical repetition of Ajofrín's assertions by modern scholars who routinely cite the painter's fame, the high regard for his work, and its resemblance to Chinese lacquer. The validity of these claims is corroborated by additional period witnesses, both real and fictional, even though none can be considered wholly objective or unbiased. Renewed consideration of these sources suggests that their importance lies not only in what writers witnessed and reported but also in what their descriptions reveal about the visual and material properties of lacquerware that were most valued by their contemporaries. The same sources also record the perceptions and attitudes of observers regarding the skill and ingenuity of the Indigenous artisans who traditionally made these objects.



#### A CELEBRATED PAINTER AND INDIAN NOBLEMAN

The Spanish surname of Cerda (or Zerda) was common among the Tarascan (Purépecha) nobility of Michoacán and it was shared by a number of artists active in Pátzcuaro and its environs.<sup>4</sup> Juan Bautista de la Cerda, a featherworker (*plumajero*), is documented there in the early 1590s,<sup>5</sup> and multiple generations of sculptors who specialized in sacred images molded from cornstalk paste (*caña de maíz*) have been identified, beginning in the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Works by the "Cerdas," sculptors named in Franciscan and Augustinian chronicles of Michoacán and neighboring Jalisco, are lauded for their lifelikeness and beauty, as well as their capacity to effect miracles. Writing in 1639, the Franciscan chronicler fray Alonso de la Rea declared that the fineness (*primor*) of works by the Cerdas was "valued in all of Europe before it was extolled in this humble history."<sup>7</sup> Subsequent accounts enumerate miracle-working cult images and relate their origin stories, naming the Spanish-born sculptor Matías de la Cerda and his mestizo (mixed race) son, Luis de la Cerda, as the artists who made them.<sup>8</sup> Neither Matías nor Luis de la Cerda is named in sources that predate the chronicles of the mid-seventeenth century, but so-called "Cristos de Michoacán" are documented in Spain as early as the 1530s and a considerable number are still preserved there.<sup>9</sup> The renown of such works, which derived from their status as cult images with the capacity to perform miracles as well as the knowledge that they were esteemed in Europe, was historiographically linked to the Cerda surname and may have conditioned Ajofrín's recognition of José Manuel de la Cerda's fame.

Another father and son, Mateo and Antonio de la Cerda, were active as artists in Pátzcuaro and nearby Valladolid in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Their patronage of the Valladolid sanctuary of Our Lady of Cosamaluapan (Nuestra Señora de Cosamaluapan), founded by Mateo in 1680, is commemorated in a double portrait (fig. 3). Mateo displays a document that identifies the pair as "Indios Caciques" (Indian Nobles) of the city of Pátzcuaro.<sup>10</sup> The two men, who are identifiable as Native by the length and cut of their hair, wear European-style dress. Antonio carries a small image of the Virgin of Cosamaluapan and appears to hold a staff (*vara*), representing the authority of a municipal office.<sup>11</sup>

About the middle of the eighteenth century, Juan and Manuel de la Cerda, two painters who may have been brothers, also worked in and around Pátzcuaro. Signed works by Juan de la Cerda include the painting *Trinity and Souls in Purgatory*, dated 1755, in the Templo

fig. 4 José Manuel de la Cerda. Cabinet on stand, ca. 1760. Wood, painted lacquer, gold, 61 × 40<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 24 in. (155 × 102 × 61 cm). The Hispanic Society Museum and Library, New York (LS1642)

de la Soledad, Tzintzuntzan, and a portrait of Francisco de Lerín in the basilica of Nuestra Señora de la Salud, Pátzcuaro.<sup>12</sup> Manuel de la Cerda signed and dated a portrait of Bishop Vasco de Quiroga in 1755 (also in the basilica de la Salud) and, in 1760, a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the Templo de Santiago Apóstol, Tupátaro.<sup>13</sup> Manuel de la Cerda is probably the same artist Francisco de Ajofrín called “José Manuel de la Cerda” and praised as a “celebrated painter” in 1764. In this regard, it is significant that lacquerware bearing the signature “Manuel de la Zerda” features ornamentation executed in paint, not lacquer.

Three pieces of lacquerware signed by Manuel de la Cerda are known, including a writing cabinet painted with military sieges and skirmishes between European and Muslim cavalymen (in the Hispanic Society Museum and Library, New York; fig. 4),<sup>14</sup> a large *batea* emblazoned with the coat of arms of the marquesa de Cruillas (in the Museo de América, Madrid; fig. 2),<sup>15</sup> and a *batea* that features a central medallion with a galleon at harbor (in a private collection; fig. 5).<sup>16</sup> Unsigned but securely attributed works include *bateas* that depict the story of Arachne in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (fig. 6) and scenes from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, now in





fig. 5 José Manuel de la Cerda. Tray (*batea*) with a galleon, ca. 1764. Wood, painted lacquer, gold, Diam. 36½ in. (92.5 cm). Private collection



The Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 1). These works share a distinct decorative style marked by the pronounced influence of imported Japanese *maki-e* lacquerware, which is distinguished by the extensive use of gold on a glossy black ground. The Spanish word for lacquer, *maque*, derives from the name for this Japanese process.<sup>17</sup> Many of the motifs—willows, flowering trees, pagodas—likewise recall Asian sources, while others point to an awareness of European chinoiserie.<sup>18</sup> The materials used to create the lustrous jet-black grounds that characterize these works are, however, unrelated to East Asian lacquer. *Aje* fat and chia oils, mineral clays, and colorants were combined to create the “lacquer” of

New Spanish works, which were then painted with figures and ornamentation in the style of East Asian lacquerware and European imitations of it.<sup>19</sup> Some of the same works also show a notable familiarity with subjects drawn from classical sources.<sup>20</sup> The *bateas* in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The Met depict scenes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*, respectively, while the table beneath the writing cabinet in the Hispanic Society displays an emblem-like vignette of Pegasus on the Hippocrene fountain. Well suited for the decoration of a writing cabinet, this image depicts the waters of poetic inspiration springing from the rocky heights of Mount Helicon, where the winged horse





fig. 6 José Manuel de la Cerda. Tray (*batea*), ca. 1760. Wood, painted lacquer, gold, Diam. 34½ in. (87.6 cm). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund (inv. M.2010.6)

fig. 7 Detail of tray (*batea*) with the coat of arms of María Josefa de Acuña y Prado, marquesa de Cruillas, vicereine of New Spain (fig. 2)

strikes the ground with his hooves.<sup>21</sup> Pegasus is accompanied by trophies representing the arts, including an array of musical instruments, a palette and paintbrushes, books inscribed with numbers and musical notation, and a sculpted figurine.

In describing his stopover in Pátzcuaro, Francisco de Ajofrín thought it worthwhile not only to identify the painter José Manuel de la Cerda by name, using the honorific prefix “don,” but also to record that he was an “Indian nobleman” (*indio noble*). This is a detail of some consequence, even though, by the mid-1760s, the political authority of the local Indigenous nobility had been greatly diminished. As the descendant of one of the principal Purépecha families, José Manuel de la Cerda would have enjoyed elevated social status as well as privileges recognized by the Spanish Crown.<sup>22</sup> By invoking both the artist’s fame and his nobility, Ajofrín suggests that the *bateas* he had seen and declared worthy of the vicereine were suitable not only because of De la Cerda’s skill and renown but also because of his lineage. In this respect, the painter’s audacity in placing his signature just beneath the marquesa’s coat of arms, within the same central medallion, may be meaningful (fig. 7).

#### A PERSON OF ELEVATED CHARACTER

María Josefa de Acuña y Prado (1725–1779) was the youngest child of Juan Manuel de Acuña, III marqués de Escalona (1695–1742), and María Micaela de Prado (1709–1755), VII condesa de Obedos. Her great-uncle, Juan Vázquez de Acuña y Bejarano (1658–1734), I marqués de Casa Fuerte, was the thirty-seventh viceroy of New Spain (1722–34). In 1749, in the oratory of the Escalona palace in Madrid, María Josefa married the Valencian nobleman Joaquín Manuel de Montserrat y Cruillas (1700–1771), an accomplished military commander who was twenty-five years her senior.<sup>23</sup> He was a veteran of Spain’s Italian campaigns in support of the patrimonial claims of the future king Charles III, who rewarded him with the hereditary title of marqués de Cruillas in 1735 and made him viceroy of New Spain in 1760, the first to be named to that post by the new king. In late June, the newly appointed viceroy, his family, and an entourage numbering more than forty passengers departed for New Spain from the port of Cádiz.<sup>24</sup> Accompanied by the vicereine, the new viceroy made his public entry into Mexico City on January 25, 1761, framed by a seventy-six-foot-tall triumphal arch decorated with paintings that hailed him as a second Hercules and celebrated his heroism in battle.<sup>25</sup> His official portrait (fig. 8), also dated 1761, was made by Pedro Martínez, the same artist who created the paintings that decorated the triumphal arch.<sup>26</sup>

“The magnificence, authority and grandeur of a Viceroy is imponderable,” wrote fray Francisco de Ajofrín, asserting further that “only someone who has seen it and examined it close by can believe it.”<sup>27</sup> The Spanish Capuchin friar had ample occasion to observe





fig. 8 Pedro Martínez (Mexico, act. mid-18th century). Portrait of Joaquín de Montserrat y Cruillas, Viceroy of New Spain, 1761. Oil on canvas, 40 × 31¼ in. (101.5 × 80.6 cm). Museo Nacional de Historia, Castillo de Chapultepec, Mexico City

the viceregal court up close during his long sojourn in New Spain. He had been sent to the viceroyalty under the auspices of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, known as the Propaganda Fide, to collect alms in support of its Tibet mission (in reality, the evangelization of Nepal and northern India). In a complicated arrangement with the Propaganda, fray Francisco's undertaking was linked to the repayment of a debt owed by the Spanish Crown to Giovanni Domenico Spinola. In 1734, Spinola's descendants donated the outstanding debt to the Propaganda Fide, which in turn dedicated it to the support of its Tibet mission. In 1738, the Spanish king Philip V transferred responsibility for repayment of the debt to the government of New Spain and granted permission for the Propaganda to send Capuchin friars to the viceroyalty to collect alms to support the same mission.<sup>28</sup> With the expulsion of the Capuchins from Tibet in 1745, authorities in Rome largely lost interest in financing the mission, if not in recovering the debt, much of which was actually used to fund other activities.

Soon after his arrival in Mexico City in late December 1763, Francisco de Ajofrín presented himself to the viceroy and secured his support for the alms-collecting mission. Ajofrín also earned the viceroy's personal favor, which included an invitation to reside in the palace (which he declined) and culminated in his service as chaplain during the family's return voyage to Spain in summer 1767.<sup>29</sup> The friar's relationship with the viceroy and his family is relevant to the current analysis because it supports the reliability of his account of the vicereine's patronage of José Manuel de la Cerda and her commission of twelve large *bateas* from him. It was more than hearsay; Ajofrín was in a position to have firsthand knowledge of the matter.

Another Franciscan author, José Joaquín Granados y Gálvez (1734–1794), also claimed direct knowledge of the vicereine's appreciation for Mexican lacquer. In his *Tardes Americanas* (1778), a work conceived as a fictional dialogue between an "Indian" and a "Spaniard," the latter claims that he has seen and admired "some sewing boxes, a folding screen, and other lacquered pieces" belonging to the vicereine, which "after attracting admiration in New Spain, filled the Old one with wonderment." Further, he cites multiple affirmations by the marquesses that they valued the lacquerware "more than all the precious objects they possessed and had acquired at great expense."<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that the Spaniard's remarks were made in the context of the book's Fourth Afternoon (*Tarde Cuarta*) in which he and the Indian debate the greatness of the Mesoamerican past and present. Specifically, the works



were cited as evidence in support of the Indian's claims regarding the astonishing and inimitable qualities of Tarascan (Purépecha) lacquerware. Even though this previously overlooked literary representation of the vicereine's enthusiasm for New Spanish lacquer does not share the descriptive aims of Ajofrín's travel diary, it nonetheless corroborates the friar's account of her patronage of José Manuel de la Cerda. Moreover, it makes clear that the marquesses took the objects that adorned the royal palace in Mexico City to Madrid when they returned to Spain in 1767. If Granados y Gálvez is to be believed, their display in their palace on Madrid's calle Ancha de San Bernardo was cause for both admiration and astonishment.<sup>31</sup> This would have been consistent with the practice of other former viceroys and colonial officials for whom it was a mark of distinction to furnish their peninsular residences with luxuries and curiosities acquired in America.<sup>32</sup> It is noteworthy that the marquesses also collected objects from China, including two ivory pagodas, three made of mother-of-pearl, and four large porcelain jars, all of which were probably acquired during their residence in New Spain.

Granados y Gálvez was by no means the first to cite the transatlantic demand for and appreciation of New Spanish lacquer as tangible evidence of the skills of Tarascan (Purépecha) artisans. His argument echoes that of the Augustinian chronicler fray Matías de Escobar, who had earlier in the century singled out

lacquerware made in the town of Peribán for its renown: “not content to be sought after in all of New Spain for their curiosity, they went on to be celebrated in Spain.”<sup>33</sup> The fame of such works was clearly dependent upon their appreciation beyond the region where they were produced. It was not merely a question of local acclaim, but rather, recognition and appreciation by Spanish elites in the capital and abroad. Similarly, for Ajofrín, some measure of José Manuel de la Cerda’s celebrity was likely inferred by his knowledge of the vicereine’s patronage.

#### ONE DOZEN LARGE BATEAS

It is highly likely that one of the dozen large *bateas* Francisco de Ajofrín saw in Pátzcuaro was the tray displaying the vicereine’s coat of arms, now in the Museo de América, Madrid (fig. 2). The elements of the shield, which belong to María Josefa de Acuña y Prado, are supplemented with a coronet that signifies her status as a marchioness and a heraldic panoply of flags, drums, and weapons.<sup>34</sup> The *batea* entered the collection of the Madrid museum from the Museo Arqueológico de Toledo, having previously formed part of the Borbón-Lorenzana collection. Because of its provenance, it has been argued that Francisco Antonio de Lorenzana, archbishop of Mexico (1766–72), and later archbishop of Toledo (1772–1800), received it as a gift while in Mexico. According to this hypothesis, he would have taken it with him on his return to Spain and incorporated it into the cabinet of antiquities or natural history associated with the library he established in the archbishop’s palace in Toledo in 1773.<sup>35</sup> While Cardinal Lorenzana could have acquired the *batea* as a gift while in New Spain, it is more likely that he obtained it from the public sale of the marquesa’s estate in 1779, at a time when he was actively seeking objects for his new library.<sup>36</sup>

*fig. 9* Detail of tray (*batea*) with the coat of arms of María Josefa de Acuña y Prado, marquesa de Cruillas, vicereine of New Spain, showing an encounter between a Spanish nobleman and Indigenous men (fig. 2)

*fig. 10* Detail of tray (*batea*) with the coat of arms of María Josefa de Acuña y Prado, marquesa de Cruillas, vicereine of New Spain, showing women at a fountain (fig. 2)

*fig. 11* Detail of tray (*batea*) with the coat of arms of María Josefa de Acuña y Prado, marquesa de Cruillas, vicereine of New Spain, showing Indigenous hunters (fig. 2)

The central and visually dominant presence of the coat of arms on the Madrid *batea* has tended to overshadow other details of its profuse ornamentation. The heraldic device is encircled by a series of eye-catching vignettes, framed by alternating willow and camellia trees. The little scenes are populated by Indigenous and European elites, both men and women whose interactions, whether casual or formal, reflect a contemporary sensibility that conceived of civilization as a process that was fundamentally concerned with social comportment.<sup>37</sup> One scene depicts an encounter between a Spanish nobleman and three Indigenous principals or caciques (fig. 9). In what appears to be a formal act, the Spaniard, who wears military-style attire, has dismounted his horse to receive or be received by a Native delegation, literally on equal footing. Other scenes pair Spanish and Indigenous women, who are distinguished by the types of garments they wear and who interact more casually at fountains and in parklike settings (fig. 10). The local style of dress (*ropa de la tierra*) worn by the Indigenous women anchors the vignettes in the daily life of New Spain, if not in that of a particular place. These scenes of recreation and mediation contrast with others in which Indigenous men are shown as seminude hunters and warriors (fig. 11). The killing of a stag by three agile hunters is likely to have been read as a metaphor for their prowess in warfare. The seemingly contradictory representations of and attitudes toward Indigenous subjects were commonplace at the time, as was the conception of Native people in terms of convenient dichotomies such as civilization/barbarism.<sup>38</sup> In this case, it is notable that the painter who expressed these tendencies was José Manuel de la Cerda, himself an Indigenous man and a member of the Purépecha elite.

Unfortunately, Francisco de Ajofrín’s eyewitness account gives no indication of what was depicted on







fig. 12 Detail of tray (*batea*) with Turnus provoked into war by Aeneas (fig. 1)

any of the twelve *bateas* he saw in Pátzcuaro. If the Madrid *batea* was among them, as it probably was, it must have been paired with another armorial one (now lost) that displayed the coat of arms of the marqués de Cruillas. A case can also be made that the *batea* preserved in The Met (fig. 1) was originally part of the set. It is the same size as the Madrid *batea* and employs the same decorative vocabulary of willows and flowering trees framing figural vignettes encircling a central medallion, although its design is somewhat more complex and it incorporates a greater number of secondary scenes.<sup>39</sup> The central medallion of the New York *batea*, which depicts an episode from Virgil's *Aeneid*, conforms with Ajofrín's judgment that the *bateas* he saw in Pátzcuaro were worthy of the vicereine's high status. The scene, which features the Trojan hero Aeneas's depraved antagonist, Turnus, is unlikely to have been conceived as an independent subject and almost certainly formed part of a set or series that included episodes that emphasized the noble character of Aeneas.

The *batea* in The Met features two related scenes from book 9 of the *Aeneid* encircled by the following inscription: *TURNUS AENEAS PROVOCA A LA GUERA* [*sic*] (Turnus provoked into war by Aeneas) (fig. 12). Turnus is shown astride a charging white horse outside

the walls of a Trojan fortress, whose defenders refuse to engage him in battle. The flag and lances of the Trojans protrude above its battlements; Aeneas is not present. Turnus, the embodiment of irrational furor, was likened by Virgil to a raging wolf: "So wildly Turnus, / scanning the camp and ramparts, flares in anger, / brute resentment sears him to the bone."<sup>40</sup> In response to the Trojan's refusal to fight, Turnus, who brandishes a flaming torch, would set fire to the Trojan ships, two of which can be seen in the waters behind him. This act of rage will assure Aeneas's Roman destiny: his ships destroyed; his years of wandering the Mediterranean come to an end in Italy. The secondary scene below shows another rarely depicted subject: the nighttime foray of the Trojan companions Nisus and Euryalus. The armed men on horseback, accompanied by foot soldiers with lances, converge on a pair of camp tents and their drunken, sleeping occupants. The bloody ambush against Turnus's encampment would end in tragedy for the Trojan pair. Encircling the episodes from the *Aeneid* is a wide band of ornamentation containing eight vignettes framed by willows and camellia trees that feature clashes between armed men. While the mythological warriors in the central scene wear suits of armor, the figures that populate the vignettes that surround it wear military-style dress of the mid-eighteenth century. Neither the subject matter nor the location of the skirmishes is identifiable. Although the vegetation and some of the buildings recall Asia, the scenes constitute a repertoire of visual motifs that is primarily decorative and does not appear to correspond to actual places.

Since the set to which the *batea* in The Met must have once belonged has not been preserved intact, it is all but impossible to propose anything more than a generalized reading of its program or argument. Allegorical treatment of the *Aeneid* was prevalent in Spanish court contexts, the best-known contemporaneous example being Tiepolo's ceiling for the Guard Room of the Royal Palace in Madrid, which was finished by 1766.<sup>41</sup> As a foundational myth, the *Aeneid* had long served Spanish monarchs as an instrument of political and genealogical legitimation. It also served to legitimize and celebrate the Spanish conquest of Mexico and was invoked from the outset as a narrative model.<sup>42</sup> In a letter to Emperor Charles V, Hernán Cortés famously cited the destruction of Aeneas's ships and the subsequent founding of Rome in connection with the alleged burning of his own fleet to prevent the retreat of his army at the beginning of the conquest of Mexico, calling it "a Trojan deed."<sup>43</sup>

In New Spain, the heroic deeds of Aeneas were presented in conjunction with the public entry of more than one viceroy into Mexico City. Upon his entry into the capital in 1663, Antonio Sebastián de Toledo, marqués de Mancera, was proclaimed the “true Aeneas,” and his virtues were compared to those of the Trojan hero in the pictorial program of a monumental triumphal arch conceived by the poet Alonso Ramírez de Vargas.<sup>44</sup> Nearly a century later, in 1756, the marqués de Cruillas’s immediate predecessor as viceroy, Agustín de Ahumada, marqués de Amarillas, was hailed as the “Spanish Aeneas” upon his entry into Mexico City.<sup>45</sup> If, as appears likely, the *Aeneid batea* and the hypothetical set to which it once belonged were destined for display in the viceregal palace, it would be appropriate to regard them in a similar light, as the presentation of a model of rulership, distinguished by prudence and *pietas* as well as heroism.

Political allegories aside, the story of Aeneas’s Mediterranean odyssey readily lent itself to comparison with the long, often treacherous sea voyage from Spain to America and was frequently invoked by panegyrists and chroniclers alike. Not only was it habitually cited in connection with the Atlantic crossings of new viceroys, but it was also compared to other expeditions and arrivals by sea, beginning with that of Hernán Cortés in 1519. More than two centuries later, Matías de Escobar likened the passage of the first Spanish Augustinian friars to America to the journey of Aeneas in his *Americana Thebaida* (1729).<sup>46</sup> The same author related the peregrinations of the Trojans to the supposed migration of the Tarascan people from Asia via the mythical Strait of Anián, comparing the founding of Tzintzuntzan to that of Troy.<sup>47</sup>

#### **MORE LUSTROUS THAN THE LACQUER OF CHINA**

The production of works like the *Aeneid batea* in New Spain was stimulated by the presence of and demand for lacquer imported from China and Japan. Along with other Asian luxury goods, it was shipped via the Manila galleons to Acapulco, then dispersed and sold in the viceroyalty and beyond. The enormous demand for East Asian lacquer in Spanish America encouraged the local production of works that used pre-Hispanic techniques and local materials to achieve visual effects comparable to those admired in imported lacquer. The most important centers of production were located in Michoacán, where local masters and workshops in Pátzcuaro, Peribán, and Uruapan developed distinctive lacquer techniques and styles of painting. Lacquerware produced in Pátzcuaro by José Manuel de la Cerda and

his workshop reveals the most pronounced influence of Asian imports. Contemporary observers like Francisco de Ajofrín frequently declared the superiority of lacquerware made by Indigenous artisans in Michoacán to “Chinese” works, making hyperbolic claims that offer characterizations of the visual and material properties that were most valued.<sup>48</sup> Ajofrín called the works of José Manuel de la Cerda “finer and more lustrous” than Chinese lacquer, while he neglects to characterize the artist’s Asian-inspired painting style.<sup>49</sup> In a similar vein, the fictional Indian of Granados y Gálvez’s *Tardes Americanas* claimed that the “boldness and durability” of Peribán lacquer had nothing to be envious of in comparison with the most celebrated works of China. Declaring it “inimitable,” the Indian affirmed that “even the most skilled Spaniards could not approximate the crudest piece.”<sup>50</sup> Matías de Escobar, who likewise maintained that the Spanish had not been able to imitate it, declared Tarascan lacquer to be finer than ebony, unequaled by European jet, and so black that it turned the surfaces of the objects it covered into mirrors.<sup>51</sup> Both Escobar and Granados y Gálvez stressed its hardness and permanence, contending that the colors became one with the wood itself.<sup>52</sup>

The writings of clerical elites in New Spain, especially those who belonged to monastic orders (like Rea, Escobar, Ajofrín, and Granados y Gálvez), consistently called attention to the skill of Purépecha artisans, chronicling their accomplishments in diverse media. The recurring trope of Indigenous ingenuity (*ingenio*) is not far beneath the surface of many early accounts, in which the artistic capability of Native people, whether innate or learned, is taken as proof of their capacity to receive the gospel and be incorporated into a Christian community.<sup>53</sup> One of the earliest and clearest expressions of this position is found in the *Memoriales* (1536–43) of fray Toribio de Benavente, known as Motolinía. One of the first Franciscans to arrive in Mexico, Motolinía devoted a chapter of his Mesoamerican history to the ingenuity and ability (*buen ingenio y grande habilidad*) of Indigenous peoples who quickly mastered manual skills through observation alone.<sup>54</sup> Hernán Cortés, writing in 1520, had also reported that Indigenous artisans made things according to his designs and perfectly copied “images, crucifixes, medals, jewels, and necklaces, and other things of ours” that he gave them.<sup>55</sup>

Seventeenth-century chroniclers of Michoacán, like fray Alonso de la Rea, singled out Tarascan (Purépecha) artisans not just for their ability to make copies and master European skills but for the comprehensiveness

of their ingenuity.<sup>56</sup> Diego Basalenque, an Augustinian friar, declared that “in general the ingenuity of the Tarascan exceeds that of Indians of other provinces.”<sup>57</sup> Far from being considered mere copyists and imitators, they were celebrated as inventors of unheard-of arts such as lightweight sculpture made from cornstalk paste (*caña de maíz*), images and adornments made from feathers, and an inimitable type of lacquer that was applied to gourds, wooden objects, and furniture. It is commonplace, especially in eighteenth-century accounts, to attribute to Indigenous artisans a profound knowledge of natural materials that was not discoverable by Europeans. Granados y Gálvez’s fictional Indian, citing the authority of reliable witnesses, avowed that the lacquer artists used “a variety of plants, entirely hidden from the knowledge of the most astute and curious.”<sup>58</sup> According to Matías de Escobar, the black lacquer of Peribán was achieved with “nothing more than a little powdered earth” sprinkled on oil.<sup>59</sup> His claim that Spaniards had not yet been able to imitate it is corroborated by the painter-theorist Antonio Palomino, who, despite comprehending the process by which what he called “inlaid painting” (*pintura embutida*) was made, had only a vague grasp of the materials that were used, stating that it was finished with “very strong varnishes they make from various fruits, gums, and worms from certain trees.”<sup>60</sup>

Lacquer, which had traditionally been applied to gourds in Michoacán, was used to decorate a variety of objects, including *bateas*, boxes of diverse kinds, folding screens, and European-style furniture. Writing in 1673, Diego Basalenque observed that Indigenous arti-

sans had learned to make “very good desks and refined things” from locally abundant wood.<sup>61</sup> In the eighteenth century, the production of sumptuously lacquered desks like the one signed by José Manuel de la Cerda (fig. 4) gave rise to at least one notable attempt to conceptualize the phenomenon of cultural hybridity, or *mestizaje*. The lacquered desks were renowned, according to Matías de Escobar, because they made a “diphthong” of what Native artisans learned from Spanish masters and what they already knew, likening the addition of lacquer and paintings to furniture to a wood graft. The result, he asserted, was akin to “a Spanish figure (*traza*) dressed in Indian clothing.”<sup>62</sup> Escobar’s analogy recognizes what is visually apparent in works like the *Aeneid* tray in The Met: that New Spanish lacquerware is an intensely mediated art, as deeply implicated in local practices as it is in global networks of commerce, empire, and evangelization.

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#### NOTES

- 1 “Hoy florece un célebre pintor, indio noble, llamado don José Manuel de la Cerda, que ha perfeccionado mucho esta facultad, de suerte que excede en primor y lustre a los maques de la China. Vi una docena de bateas grandes de fresno que estaba pintando para la excelentísima señora Marquesa de Cruillas, Virreina de Méjico, dignas de la persona de tan elevado carácter.” Ajofrín 1958–59, 1:220.
- 2 The viceroyalty of New Spain included present-day Mexico.
- 3 Ana Zabía de la Mata (2018, 115) expressed doubt that the *batea* was among the twelve made for the marquesa de Cruillas and maintained that the coat of arms was not hers. Hugo Félix Rocha (2021, 100–101) conjectured that the coat of arms combined those of the marquesa and her husband.
- 4 López Sarrelangue 1999, 166, 240, 256, 260, 263, 272. Tarasco was the name given by the Spanish to the Purépecha people.

- 5 Ibid., 253; Paredes Martínez 1994, 336. He may be the artist responsible for a featherwork image of the Virgin of Sorrows, signed “Juan Bautista,” that belonged to Rudolph II in Prague. See Estrada de Gerlero 2004 and Stanfield-Mazzi 2021, 167.
- 6 Luft 1972; Fernández Castelló 1972; Estrada Jasso 1996, 50–55; Velarde Cruz 2009, 59–66.
- 7 “las hechuras de los Cerdas, cuyo primor en alas de la fama, llegó primero á gozar la estimacion en toda la Europa que los encarecimientos de esta humilde historia.” Rea 1882, 41.
- 8 Mota Padilla 1870, 392; Escobar 1924, 26; Tello 1945, 73; Ornelas 1962, 141–45.
- 9 Amador Marrero 2002; Amador Marrero et al. 2018; Pérez de Castro and Amador Marrero 2020.
- 10 Mateo de la Cerda holds a sheet of paper inscribed: “Retratos de Matheo de la Zerda, y Antonio de la Zerda. Indios Caziques



- dela Ciudad d. Pazquaro, y fundadores desta Iglesia de Cosamaluap.<sup>n</sup>." See López Sarrelangue 1999, 264, and González Vargas 2016.
- 11 Antonio de la Cerda was documented as a painter in Valladolid in 1708; see Velarde Cruz 2018, 217.
  - 12 Toussaint 1990, 177; Velarde Cruz 2018.
  - 13 Pullido Echeveste 2018, 179–80; Velarde Cruz 2006, 54–55.
  - 14 Martínez del Río de Redo 1969, 16, fig. 12; Bargellini 1994; Kornegay 2006. The artist's signature appears on the drop front of the cabinet: Man, de la Zerda [f]ec.
  - 15 The artist's signature appears just below the coat of arms: Ma.<sup>l</sup> dla Zerda Paztq.<sup>o</sup>. This work was first connected with the artist Francisco de Ajofrín called "José Manuel de la Cerda" by Castelló Yturbide and Martínez del Río de Redo 1968.
  - 16 Fernández Castelló 1972, 30–32; Urrechaga 2014, 32, 44–45. The artist's fragmentary signature appears above the galleon in the central roundel: [. . .] Zerda [. . .] Paztquaro.
  - 17 Fraga García 1997, 112–16.
  - 18 Ocaña Ruiz 2019.
  - 19 Castelló Yturbide 1981; Pérez Carrillo 1990; Acuña Castellón 2012; Acosta Ruiz 2013; Coddington 2015, 82–89. The use of chia oil as an artistic material in New Spain is the subject of an ongoing research project at The Met, led by Julie Arslanoglu (principal investigator), José Luis Lazarte, and Ronda Kasl (co-principal investigators). "A Novel Tripartite Approach to Biomolecule Analysis for the Identification of Unknown Artistic Materials Applied to the Use of Chia Oil in Art from New Spain" has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.
  - 20 García Sáiz and Pérez Carrillo 1986.
  - 21 On the representation and emblematic use of Pegasus in New Spain, see Tovar de Teresa 2006.
  - 22 López Sarrelangue 1999, 109–48.
  - 23 Cruilles 1880; Fernández de Béthencourt 1901, 82–83.
  - 24 "Expediente de información y licencia de pasajero a Indias de Joaquín de Montserrat, marqués de Cruillas, virrey de Nueva España (23 June 1760)," Contratación, 5503, N.2, R.17, Archivo General de Indias, Seville.
  - 25 Velázquez Cárdenas y León 1761; Chiva Beltrán 2012, 201–3.
  - 26 Rodríguez Moya 2003, 211.
  - 27 "La magnificencia, autoridad y grandeza de un Virrey es imponderable, y sólo quien lo haya visto y examinado de cerca lo podrá creer." Ajofrín 1958–59, 1:71.
  - 28 Ibid., 1:7; Lorenzen 2013.
  - 29 Ajofrín 1958–59, 1:179–80.
  - 30 "Y puedes añadir para autorizar tu dicho, que admiré y ví unas almohadillas, rodaestrado, y otras piezas maqueadas, presentas á la Exmâ. Señora Virreyna Esposa del Excmô. Señor D. Joaquin de Monserrat, Marqués de Cruillas, que despues que sirvieron de admiracion en esta Nueva España, llenaron la Antigua de ponderaciones; asegurando sus Excelencias muchas veces, que apreciaban en mas aquellos maques, que quantas alhajas de valor poseían, y pudieran adquirir á expensas de gruesas cantidades." Granados y Gálvez 1778, 117.
  - 31 The marqués de Cruillas returned to Valencia in 1771 and died there the same year; his wife remained in Madrid until her death in 1779. Fernández de Béthencourt 1901, 87.
  - 32 See Aguiló Alonso 1990; Montes González 2017; and Sigaut and García Sáiz 2017; Wattenberg García 2020, 16–17.
  - 33 "las cuales no contentas con ser de toda la Nueva España solicitadas por lo curioso, pasan a ser celebradas a España." Escobar 1924, 148.
  - 34 The same shield, along with one belonging to Joaquín de Montserrat, adorns a silver monstrance the couple gave to the parish church of Planes (Valencia). Slight variations and simplifications result from differences of scale and medium. Cots Morató and López Catalá 2008–9, 14, 149, fig. 3; cited by Félix Rocha 2021, 100–101.
  - 35 Castelló Yturbide and Martínez del Río de Redo 1968, 37; García Sáiz 1990; Curiel 1994, 171, 172. For a description of the library and cabinets of natural history and antiquities founded by Cardinal Lorenzana in Toledo, see Ponz 1787–94, 1:127–29, letter 3, paragraphs 9–11; Parro 1857, 2:577–83; and Cabello Carro 1994, 186–88, 192–93.
  - 36 The sale of ivory pagodas and other Chinese objects from the marquesa's estate is described by the naturalist Pedro Franco Dávila in a letter to José Moñino, the Count of Floridablanca (May 20, 1779); see Wattenberg García 2020, 16–17. Franco Dávila was the first director of the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural in Madrid. In the revised third edition of his *Viage de España*, Antonio Ponz declared that Lorenzana's cabinet "features many curiosities and is growing every day." Ponz 1787–94, 1:129: "El gabinete de historia natural consta ya de muchas curiosidades, y cada dia va en aumento." This description does not appear in the first two editions, published in 1772 and 1776. Ponz's remark may also refer to the incorporation of objects from the collections of the Infante Luis María de Borbón y Vallabriga and his father, Luis María de Borbón y Farnesio (brother of Carlos III) after 1785. According to Sisto Ramón Parro (1857, 2:582), Lorenzana "by one means or another, gathered a respectable number of curiosities of different kinds" ("de unas maneras y otras reunió una respetable cantidad de curiosidades de diversos géneros").
  - 37 Deacon 1996.
  - 38 Taylor 1989.
  - 39 The Met and Madrid *bateas* are unusually large, measuring 106.7 cm and 107 cm in diameter, respectively.
  - 40 *Aeneid*, book 9, lines 74–76. I have used the English translation by Robert Fagles (Virgil 2006, 391).
  - 41 Gaskell 1992.
  - 42 On the *Aeneid* in Mexico, see Río Torres-Murciano 2019 and Álvarez Hernández, Leopold, and Weiss 2019.
  - 43 "un hecho troyano." Cortés 2007, 5.
  - 44 Ramírez de Vargas 1664; Maza 1968, 97–99; Chiva Beltrán 2012, 160.
  - 45 Urrutia y Vergara 1756; Maza 1968, 200–203; Rodríguez Moya 2008, 154–57; Chiva Beltrán 2012, 196–97.
  - 46 Escobar 1924, 57.
  - 47 Ibid., 19–21.
  - 48 The designation "Chinese" was used indiscriminately to refer to objects of diverse Asian origin.
  - 49 Ajofrín 1958–59, 1:220. For the full quote, see note 1 above.
  - 50 "En el maque que dan á las maderas, tocan las líneas del asombro, y se hacen inimitables; no habiendo podido el estudio aun de los mas hábiles Españoles, asemejar ni la pieza mas basta. En esta clase maravillosamente se exceden los Indios Tarascos que pueblan los Peribanos, dándole tanta solidez y consistencia á los colores con que matizan el maque, que regularmente es negro, que igualmente se consumen con la misma madera." Granados y Gálvez 1778, 116–17.
  - 51 Escobar 1924, 147.

- 52 Ibid., 26; Granados y Gálvez 1778, 117.
- 53 Russo 2014–15.
- 54 Motolinía 1971, 394.
- 55 “Imágenes, Crucifixos, Medallas, Joyeles, y Collares, y otras muchas cosas de la nuestras, que les hize contrafacer.” Cortés 1770, 99.
- 56 Rea 1882, 37–42. Written in 1639 and first published in 1643, chapter 9 of Alonso de la Rea’s chronicle of the Franciscan province of Michoacán is titled “On the Ingenuity of the Tarascans, the eminence of their works and other things of which they were the first inventors.” Ibid., 37: “Del ingenio del Tarasco, de la eminencia en sus obras y de algunas cosas de que fueron ellos primeros inventores.”
- 57 “en general el ingenio de el Tarasco, excede al de los otros Indios de otras Provincias.” Basalenque 1886, 120.
- 58 “variedad de yerbas, escondidas enteramente a él conocimiento de los más ladinos y curiosos.” Granados y Gálvez 1778, 117.
- 59 “no es más que una poca de tierra en polvo que sobre un aceite que ellos hacen espolvorean.” Escobar 1924, 147.
- 60 “barnices muy fuertes, que hacen de varias frutas, gomas y gusanos de ciertos arboles.” Palomino 1988, 1:130–31.
- 61 “Enseñáronles la carpintería, con la facilidad de las maderas que tenían, . . . hasta hazer muy buenos escritorios y cosas pulidas.” Basalenque 1886, 119–20.
- 62 “Diéronles Maestros carpinteros por tener bastantes maderas en que ejercitarse, y aprendieron tan bien el arte, que tuvieron fama sus escritorios y consiguieron aplausos sus artezones, porque haciendo un diptongo de lo que aprendían de los maestros españoles y de lo que ellos sabían, formaban un nuevo injerto en las maderas sobre las castellanas medidas, gavetas de escritorios, cajas y escribanías, añadían ellos sus maques y sus pinturas, y hacían singular su obra, pues a un mismo tiempo lucía la española traza vestida del ropaje indiano.” Escobar 1924, 147.

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# John Kay's Watercolor Drawing *John Campbell (1782)*

**WENDY MCGLASHAN**

A watercolor drawing of Scotsman John Campbell in The Metropolitan Museum of Art represents a rare early work by John Kay, an Edinburgh barber turned graphic satirist, printmaker, and portrait miniaturist, with no formal art training (fig. 1). Kay published his first satirical etchings in 1784, at which time a wide range of European old master and contemporary British prints might be viewed or purchased in Edinburgh via auction rooms and printsellers like James Sibbald.<sup>1</sup> Interest continued in the graphic works of William Hogarth during this period and in 1783 the Edinburgh-based artist David Allan began engraving what he referred to (in a letter to a patron) as “groups of the manners in Scotland.”<sup>2</sup> Sibbald staged regular public print exhibitions, boasting that “a larger collection of capital modern prints is not to be found in

*fig. 1* John Kay (Scottish, 1742–1826). *John Campbell, Precentor, Conducting Three Braying Asses*, 1782. Watercolor, sheet 5<sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (14.4 × 11.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1917 (17.3.1452)

fig. 2 Daniel Lizars  
(Scottish, 1760–1812) after  
David Allan (Scottish, 1744–  
1796). *John Campbell*,  
undated. Engraving, 6 $\frac{13}{16}$  ×  
5 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (17.3 × 13.3 cm).  
Scottish National Portrait  
Gallery, Edinburgh  
(inv. SP IV 262.1)



any shop in the kingdom, [for in London] printsellers and publishers interest themselves only in the sale of their own publications.”<sup>3</sup> Prints might also be borrowed through his Edinburgh Circulating Library, which offered “a considerable number of choice Prints, by the best masters.”<sup>4</sup> In late eighteenth-century Edinburgh, the study of prints was thus a widespread pursuit, open to elite connoisseurs and middle-rank consumers alike.<sup>5</sup>

Kay is now best known for his monochromatic printed works, as posthumously published by Hugh Paton in *A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Etchings by the Late John Kay* (1837–38).<sup>6</sup> Dated 1782, the watercolor drawing of John Campbell in The Met predates Kay’s first printed portraits by two years, and thus constitutes an important representation of his initial painted work in color.<sup>7</sup>

John Campbell (d. 1795) was born in rural Perthshire, the eldest son of a carpenter. John’s father, finding himself in reduced circumstances following the bankruptcy of the local laird, relocated the family to Edinburgh, where he died shortly thereafter.<sup>8</sup> This left Campbell to provide for his mother, three sisters, and younger brother Alexander (1764–1824), which he initially did by securing work as a sawyer.<sup>9</sup> The Campbell brothers later became pupils of the celebrated Italian castrato Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci. Tenducci was a highly fashionable music teacher who, recognizing John as “a talented boy of limited means,” provided their

lessons at half-price.<sup>10</sup> John was appointed precentor, or leader of Psalm singing, at the Canongate Church in 1775 and Alexander progressed to employment as organist for an Episcopalian chapel.<sup>11</sup> In 1781 a notice in the *Caledonian Mercury* brought the musical brothers to public attention, announcing: “In St. Mary’s Chapel, Niddry’s Wynd, on Tuesday the 20th of March will be performed, J. and A. Campbell’s Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music.”<sup>12</sup> Tickets were priced at three shillings, the price then commanded by Tenducci himself, and the concert was to be followed by a ball.<sup>13</sup>

Although never permanently resident in Edinburgh, Tenducci enjoyed a connection with the prestigious Edinburgh Musical Society from 1768, participating in their concerts and earning high acclaim as a performer of Scottish song.<sup>14</sup> William Tytler, an Edinburgh lawyer, historian, and active member of the Musical Society, noted that no one “could hear with insensibility, or without being moved in the greatest degree, Tenducci sing—I’ll never leave thee,—or *The Braes of Ballendine!*”<sup>15</sup> In July 1781, the Musical Society held a concert “for the benefit of Mr. Tenducci” in St. Celia’s Hall, and Tenducci appears to have left Edinburgh about this time.<sup>16</sup> Before doing so, he per-





fig. 3 James Bretherton (British, ca. 1730–1806) after Henry William Bunbury (British, 1750–1811). *Hyde Park*, 1781. Etching, 28 3/8 × 63 3/8 in. (72 × 161 cm). British Museum, London (inv. J, 6.78; inv. J, 6.78a; inv. J, 6.78b)

suaded John Campbell to “sit to [David] Allan for a portrait,” which he then “had engraved on a small scale” (fig. 2).<sup>17</sup> Campbell stands between a cello and an ornate chamber organ, and is depicted with a large belly, fleshy double chin, and sparse natural hair. He smiles at the viewer and holds the musical score for “The Braes o’ Ballendine” in his hand, one of the Scottish ballads for which Tenducci had previously received accolades.<sup>18</sup> Tenducci then circulated Campbell’s portrait among his elite clientele, recommending his services to members of the nobility and aristocracy, and helping to establish him as a music teacher in the city.<sup>19</sup>

Kay was then spending time at Archerfield, the country seat of William Nisbet of Dirleton, an aristocratic patron who employed Kay’s services as a barber and encouraged his artistic pursuits.<sup>20</sup> Nisbet was also a member of the Edinburgh Musical Society and it thus seems likely that he would have received Campbell’s portrait.<sup>21</sup> In 1781 Campbell also appeared in a half-length etched portrait, published in London by Hannah Humphrey, a successful printseller who worked closely with the British satirical printmaker James Gillray.<sup>22</sup> The likeness compares closely with the Allan portrait, but is turned in profile; Campbell smiles and holds a

musical score in his right hand. Beneath the image is an inscription further promoting Campbell’s status as a vocalist and performer of Scottish song: “Mr. C–m–l. The Jolly Presenter of the Canongate Kirk in Edinburgh, singing the Psalms of a Morning and over a Bowl of Punch Scotch Tunes at Night.”<sup>23</sup>

Alexander Fraser Tytler (William Tytler’s son), an advocate, historian, and professor at the University of Edinburgh, noted about this time that “One Kay [a barber] has now taken up the trade of Collector [of prints], and I have seen him bid more for a single print at an auction than he can make at his business in a week.”<sup>24</sup> Among the new prints advertised by Sibbald in 1781 was Henry William Bunbury’s *Hyde Park* (1781), described as “a very large print, *curious*” (fig. 3).<sup>25</sup>

In reference to Kay’s watercolor drawing of John Campbell, Caroline Karpinski suggests: “Kay began to draw in the manner of [Thomas] Rowlandson, rendering a rotund, three-dimensional figure in a naturalistic atmosphere. But he was unable, because of limited artistic means, or unwilling, to carry this style further.”<sup>26</sup> However, new research shows that the watercolor drawing in *The Met* relates not to Thomas Rowlandson but rather to Henry William Bunbury, with







Kay taking a corpulent male figure selected from the foreground of *Hyde Park* as a direct model, whose physical similarity to Campbell he shrewdly exploits.<sup>27</sup> Kay adapts this model to a local context, forgoing the bustling London park and instead locating Campbell in a rural Scottish landscape, with thistles, rolling hills, and a muted color palette of ochers, earth tones, and soft blues. The scheme echoes contemporary Scottish paintings like Allan's *Highland Dance* (ca. 1780).<sup>28</sup> Bunbury's biting dogs are replaced with braying asses that break comically into the picture plane, making a fool of Campbell, who stands grimacing with his mouth wide open in song, and his disharmonious students.

As a single image Kay's watercolor drawing would have had limited circulation, but in 1784 he began publishing his satirical portraits as etched multiples, permitting their dissemination to a wider audience.<sup>29</sup> The *Catalogue of the Works and Other Genuine Property of the Late Mr. John Kay of Edinburgh* offered for sale in 1836 following the death of Kay's widow, Margaret Scott Kay, lists a single impression of a print titled *Corpulent Man, and Asses Braying*, indicating that Kay subsequently published an etching after his watercolor drawing of Campbell.<sup>30</sup> However, the etching plate for this print had been "bought up" and presumably destroyed, thus preventing the further reproduction and circulation of the image.<sup>31</sup>

Margaret Scott Kay reported that "Alex. Campbell, organist, caricatured Kay for drawing his brother John, the precentor."<sup>32</sup> Though no impressions of Alexander Campbell's caricature of Kay are known to survive, it is described in the aforementioned *Original Portraits* as a "rudely executed" work in which "*John Dow* was represented as dragging him by the ear to the Town Guard, while *Bailie Duff* brought up the rear, in the attitude of administering a forcible admonition with his foot."<sup>33</sup> While Dow was employed as a guardsman in the city, "*Bailie Duff*" was a title mockingly applied to Jamie Duff, a deluded "person of weak intellects" (or "idiot") who aspired to the position of magistrate.<sup>34</sup> In 1784 both Dow and Duff featured in Kay's etched portrait *A Triumvirate*, appearing along with James Robertson of Kincraigie, or the "Daft Highland Laird," a member of the gentry associated with "insanity" and "lunacy," famed for carving wooden caricature heads of those he disliked and displaying them on top of a staff (fig. 4).<sup>35</sup> Robertson is shown at left holding such a staff; Dow is situated in the center, looking Duff in the eye. It thus seems that Alexander Campbell deliberately mobilized Kay's own visual language against him, creating an alternative "triumvirate" in which Kay assumed the



fig. 4 John Kay. *A Triumvirate*, 1784. Etching, sheet  $3\frac{1}{8} \times 4\frac{5}{16}$  in. (8 × 10.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1933 (33.30[3])

fig. 5 John Kay. *A Medley of Musicians*, 1784. Etching and aquatint, sheet  $3\frac{1}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$  in. (9.3 × 10.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1933 (33.30[28])

fig. 6 John Kay. *John Campbell*, ca. 1784. Etching and aquatint, sheet  $2\frac{5}{8} \times 2\frac{1}{8}$  in. (7.4 × 5.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1933 (33.30[26])





fig. 7 William Hogarth (British, 1697–1764). *The Enraged Musician*, 1741. Etching and engraving, plate 14 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 14 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (36 × 36 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1932 (32.35[19])



place of the deranged caricaturist—provoking him to publish *A Medley of Musicians* (1784), described by Margaret Scott Kay as “Another Retaliation” (fig. 5).<sup>36</sup>

*Original Portraits* implies that Alexander’s retaliatory caricature of John Kay was incited by a small half-length etched portrait of his brother John, for which the etching plate did exist (fig. 6).<sup>37</sup> John Campbell is depicted in profile earnestly singing with a song book in hand. The work provided a pendant to an identically sized portrait of Thomas Neil, precentor in the Old Church, whose vocal talents were praised highly by Kay, comically performing as “The Old Wife.”<sup>38</sup> Publisher Hugh Paton chose to separate these portraits in different volumes of *Original Portraits*, instead pairing the John Campbell portrait with *A Medley of Musicians*, neatly linking it with the dispute between Alexander Campbell and John Kay.<sup>39</sup>

Neither the etching *Corpulent Man, and Asses Braying* nor The Met’s watercolor drawing (fig. 1) is referenced in *Original Portraits*. However, Kay’s *A Medley of Musicians* (fig. 5) works in direct dialogue with the image, forming part of the Kay-Campbell exchange.<sup>40</sup> Kay retains the distinctive comedic asses, here inverted by the print process. John Campbell maintains his compositional centrality, his face again grimacing and open-mouthed in song, but Kay now expands the composition to include Alexander

Campbell in the discordant concert, seen turning the handle of the organ strapped to his back.

James Beattie’s *An Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition* (1776) comments that William Hogarth’s *The Enraged Musician* (1741) (fig. 7) is made “more laughable” by the various persons and dissonant sounds “all united in the same place, and for the same purpose, of tormenting the poor fiddler.”<sup>41</sup> To further torment Alexander Campbell, Kay deliberately refers to Hogarth’s well-known work, bringing together a similar variety of cacophonous sounds, including braying asses, barking dogs, and a horn-blowing fish-seller. Hogarth’s knife-grinder, seen wearing spectacles and an upturned hat as he sharpens a meat cleaver, is transformed by Kay into a similarly attired sawyer, who stands in a saw-pit sharpening his saw—a witty reminder of John Campbell’s humble origins.<sup>42</sup> Hogarth’s oboe player is echoed in Kay’s bagpipe-playing Jamie Duff, and whereas Alexander Campbell previously depicted Duff kicking Kay in the rear (in the caricature mentioned above for which no image remains), he now plays opposite the organist in the disharmonious concert, and both are compositionally grouped with the asses.<sup>43</sup>

In 1785 Kay gave up barbering to set up as an independent artist-printmaker, and in that year he represented John Campbell in a second Hogarthian composition: *A Sleepy Congregation*.<sup>44</sup> Taking Hogarth’s



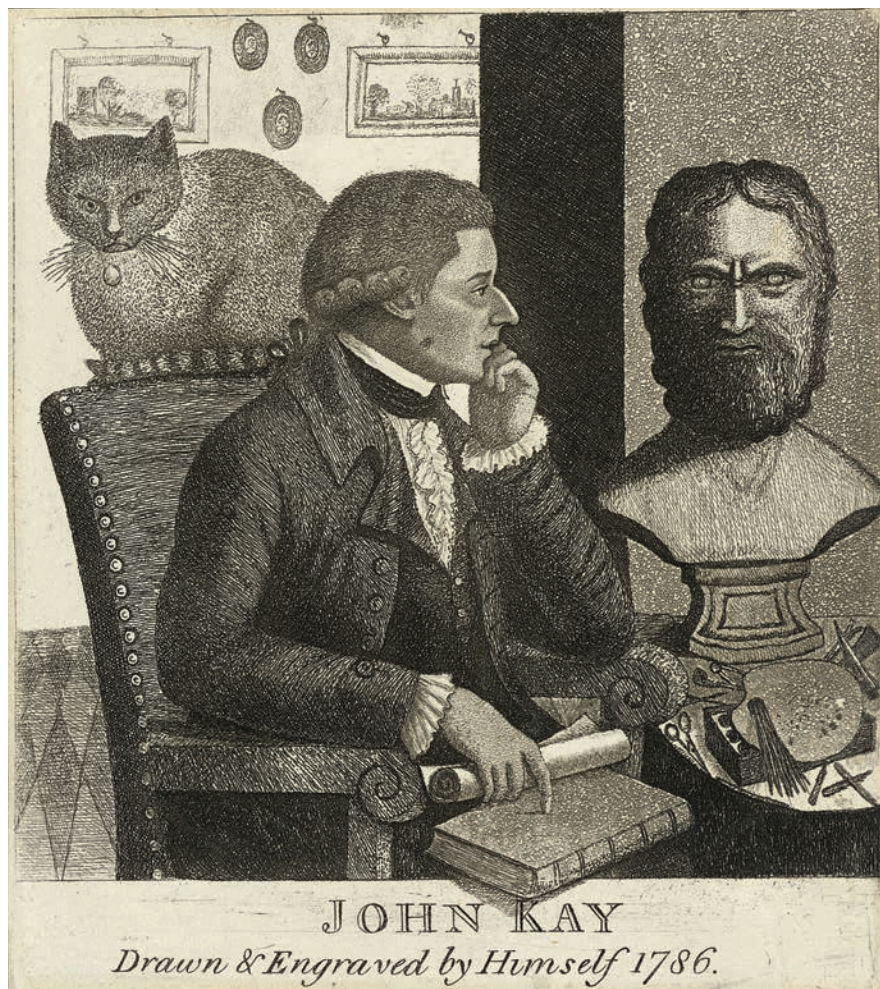


fig. 8 John Kay. *John Kay, Drawn & Engraved by Himself* 1786, 1786. Etching and aquatint, sheet 4 $\frac{5}{16}$  × 3 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (10.9 × 9.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1917 (17.3.756-3219)

*The Sleeping Congregation* (1736) and his multiheaded *Characters and Caricaturas* (1743) as models, Kay depicts the non-attentive congregation of the Tolbooth Church and pictures Campbell asleep at his post in the double-decker pulpit, while the Reverend Alexander Webster delivers his sermon.<sup>45</sup>

The following year Kay confidently celebrated his new status as an artist-printmaker in a self-portrait in which he acknowledged his barbering origins and asserted his artistic affiliation with Hogarth (fig. 8).<sup>46</sup> The inscription boldly states: “John Kay / Drawn & Engraved by Himself 1786.” The wording is an English adaption of the Latin inscription *Gulielmus Hogarth / Se ipse Pinxit et Sculpsit* 1749 engraved beneath Hogarth’s self-portrait with an oversize pug dog.<sup>47</sup> Although Kay replaces the pug with a gargantuan cat, the frontal placement of the artist’s palette, burins, etching tools, and barbering implements, all deliberately angled toward the viewer, strengthens the visual link to Hogarth’s work.

Though no copies of the caricature by Alexander Campbell, as described in *Original Portraits*, are believed to be extant,<sup>48</sup> the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, holds an etching titled

*The Triumph of Genius or Jamie Duff’s Gratitude to His Portrait-Painter* (fig. 9). This formerly unstudied, anonymous and undated caricature is revealed here to be a further anti-Kay satire that adds to the context of the quarrel between Campbell and Kay.

Whereas Alexander Campbell previously depicted John Dow and Jamie Duff forcibly escorting Kay to the town guard (in the caricature mentioned above for which no image remains), here they hold him aloft in a triumphal parade. They are joined by two further lowly characters from Kay’s early etchings: George Pratt, the town crier, who leads the parade with his bell, and George (or Geordie) Cranstoun, a well-known Edinburgh dwarf, who follows behind John Dow.<sup>49</sup> Kay sits in an elevated chair with his son William, also an artist-printmaker, and his enormous cat, a motif that mimics Kay’s printed self-portrait, suggesting a date of about 1786 for this work.<sup>50</sup> Just as Kay ridiculed the physicality of Alexander’s corpulent brother John, Kay’s son William is depicted with an oversize head, while his legs are compared to those of Cranstoun, whose own physical differences were highlighted by Kay in portraits such as *Burns, the Irish Giant and a Number of Characters of His Time* (1784).<sup>51</sup>

Echoing Kay’s portrait etching *Shon Dow* (1784), Dow carries a Lochaber axe in one hand.<sup>52</sup> With the other he holds up an object shaped like an artist’s palette and labeled “Mambrino’s helmet,” a literary reference that links Kay with the deluded character of Miguel de Cervantes’s Don Quixote, who aspired to a “heroic ideal well beyond his actual status and being.”<sup>53</sup> Impassioned by his reading of chivalric romances, Quixote embarked on a quest as a knight-errant, mistaking a barber’s basin for the golden helmet of the mythical knight Mambrino. In *The Triumph of Genius*, Kay’s quixotic delusions are reiterated by the barbering scissors in his hand. James Robertson, one of Kay’s subjects who is not included in this celebratory parade, had previously retaliated against him “by mounting a caricature likeness of the limner on his staff.”<sup>54</sup> In *The Triumph of Genius*, Jamie Duff, who appears in his full magistrate’s regalia, holds such a staff. In doing so, Kay is associated with Duff’s aspirational delusions and with Robertson’s “lunacy” and wooden caricatures. Atop Robertson’s staff sits a “hoolet” or owl, a symbol of “peevishness” and “stupidity.”<sup>55</sup>

A banner at the top of the composition brands Kay “KITE from The Goose DUB.” While “Goose Dub” was the name of an area near the Edinburgh Meadows, the term “goose” may also be applied to a “fool” or a “simpleton,” with “dub” referring to a small murky



pool.<sup>56</sup> The kite was then a despised bird of prey, and the word was used as “a term of abuse or detestation.”<sup>57</sup> Kay utilized the term in this manner in the written inscription beneath his *Cock-Fighting Match* (1785), a composition closely modeled on Hogarth’s *The Cockpit* (1759).<sup>58</sup> The inscription on *Cock-Fighting Match* reads: *Thus we poor Cocks, exert our Skill & Brav’ry / For idle Gulls and Kites, that trade in Knavr’y*. With regard to cockfighting, Kay further noted:

that noblemen and gentlemen, who upon any other occasion will hardly show the smallest degree of condescension to their inferiors, will, in the prosecution of this barbarous amusement, demean themselves so far as to associate with the very lowest characters in society.<sup>59</sup>

fig. 9 Anonymous (possibly by Alexander Campbell). *The Triumph of Genius or Jamie Duff’s Gratitude to His Portrait-Painter*, ca. 1786. Etching, 5¼ × 6½ in. (13.3 × 16.5 cm). National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (inv. SP IV 223.2)

The banner not only presents Kay as a man of low character, but it also derides his efforts to affiliate himself with Hogarth, as evidenced above in *A Medley of Musicians* (fig. 5) and *A Sleepy Congregation*, both associated with the Campbell brothers—mockingly labeling Kay “Scoto-Hogarthian.” Although the authorship of

*The Triumph of Genius* cannot be definitively ascertained, it is beyond question that Alexander Campbell had the motivation to create such a work, and the available evidence convincingly locates it within the context of the Kay-Campbell exchange.

A precedent for the anti-Kay caricatures may be found in a series of vitriolic anti-Hogarth satires made in 1753–54 by Paul Sandby. Sandby was a British landscape painter, pioneer of the aquatint print technique in England, and founding member of the Royal Academy of Arts in London.<sup>60</sup> Prompted by Hogarth’s opposition to the establishment of a continental-style British art academy and the publication of his aesthetic treatise *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), Sandby’s prints branded Hogarth a “Self Conceited Arrogant Dauber” and mocked him through the parody of his visual language.<sup>61</sup> Sandby’s *The Analyst Besh[utte]n: In His Own Taste* (1753), for instance, repurposes imagery from Hogarth’s printed self-portrait with a pug, while *Puggs Graces Etched from His Original Daubing* (1753–54) echoes the composition of Hogarth’s *Analysis of Beauty*, Plate 1.<sup>62</sup> Both mimic Hogarth’s use of a numbered key.<sup>63</sup> The written inscription printed beneath *Puggs Graces* begins: “Behold a Wretch who Nature form’d in Spight, / Scorn’d by the Wise; he gave the Fools Delight” and further declares that “Dunce Connoisseurs extol the Author Pugg.”<sup>64</sup> This theme is echoed in *The Triumph of Genius* (fig. 9) and the textual inscription below similarly opens: “Behold the Triumph, which is Justly due / From Jemy Duff, & warlike Soldier Dow.”

While Alexander Campbell’s decision to satirize Kay was, it seems, in part prompted by a desire to defend his elder brother, who had stepped in to provide for the family following the death of their father, it may also have reflected his artistic ambitions. In 1797, Francis Jukes, an English aquatintist, who learned the technique from Sandby, published a series of four Scottish views after drawings by Alexander Campbell.<sup>65</sup> In 1802, Campbell published *A Journey from Edinburgh through Parts of North Britain: Containing Remarks on Scottish Landscape*. It was embellished with forty-four aquatints executed by Francis Jukes, William Pickett, Thomas Medland, Samuel Alken, and John Walker after drawings of Scottish scenery that Campbell had “sketched on the spot.”<sup>66</sup> Throughout this two-volume work Campbell positions himself as “a skilful painter” with a “practiced eye,” and when he surveys the notable artists and engravers active in Edinburgh, John Kay is conspicuously excluded.<sup>67</sup>

It was Kay’s ambition to publish a collected volume of his etchings, and in 1792 he prepared descriptive





notes relating to the subjects of his prints, with the assistance of James Thomson Callender, an author and political radical who fled to the United States after being indicted for sedition.<sup>68</sup> Callender has been described as a misanthrope with “contempt for the famous and [a] desire to cut them down to size,” and it was his belief that “The laurels which human praise confers are withered and blasted by the unworthiness of those who wear them.”<sup>69</sup> The notes composed by Kay and Callender were purchased by Paton in 1836 and “subsequently suppressed [containing] matters too personal for publication.”<sup>70</sup> Although Kay’s descriptive notes may be lost, the visual evidence suggests that when John Campbell was raised to fame by Tenducci, Kay displayed a similar desire to cut him down to size. He did so by initially mocking John Campbell’s appearance, students, and musical abilities, and later embedding a reminder of Campbell’s humble origins as sawyer within his etching *A Medley of Musicians* (fig. 5).<sup>71</sup> Should Kay’s missing notes be rediscovered, further details of the motivations underlying his satirical attack on John Campbell may then come to light.

The findings presented here identify a new source for the watercolor drawing of John Campbell by John Kay in *The Met*, and provide fresh context for this important early work. Placing the drawing in dialogue with previously unstudied anti-Kay caricatures has revealed a vibrant response in late eighteenth-century Edinburgh to extant British satirical prints. The Met’s watercolor drawing also shows that John Kay chose to pursue a confrontational and personalized form of satirical attack from the very outset of his artistic career.

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#### NOTES

- 1 The range of prints available is attested by newspaper advertisements. See, for example, *Caledonian Mercury*, no. 9552 (1782): 1; no. 9718 (1783): 1; and no. 10,030 (1785): 3.
- 2 David Allan to Sir William Hamilton, November 6, 1780, as quoted in Modeen and Whiting 2017, 23. Between 1781 and 1782, James Sibbald added two new books pertaining to Hogarth to the circulating library in Edinburgh. See Sibbald 1786, 191, 211. Hogarth’s prints were regularly advertised by printsellers and auctioneers. See *Caledonian Mercury*, no. 9653 (1783): 1; no. 9759 (1784): 1; and no. 10,030 (1785): 3. Allan’s Scottish prints are typified by *Highland Dance* (National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, inv. P2765). It was among the new prints advertised by Sibbald in 1783. See *Caledonian Mercury*, no. 9609 (1783): 1.
- 3 *Caledonian Mercury*, no. 9312 (1781): 1, and no. 9552 (1782): 1 (for quote).
- 4 Ibid., no. 9710 (1783): 1.
- 5 See Nenadic 1994, 127, and Nenadic 1997.
- 6 Paton 1837–38. For the impact of Paton’s *A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Etchings by the Late John Kay* (hereafter *Original Portraits*) on Kay’s posthumous reputation, see McGlashan 2020, 33–68.
- 7 The Royal Scottish Academy of Art and Architecture, Edinburgh, holds an album of 134 drawings, watercolors, and prints by Kay (inv. 1994.189). Only four present full-length figures rendered in watercolor in a manner comparable to the work in *The Met*.
- 8 Paton 1837–38, 2:92.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.; Berry 2011, 151. Alexander Campbell notes (1798, 298) that he was a pupil of Tenducci in 1780.
- 11 Paton 1837–38, 2:93. For more on the Campbells, see Watt and Purser 2004 and McAulay 2013, 71–103.
- 12 *Caledonian Mercury*, no. 9288 (1781): 1.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 See Berry 2011, 149–50, and Edwards 2015, 191.
- 15 [Tytler] 1779, 120.
- 16 *Caledonian Mercury*, no. 9340 (1781): 3. After this date, Tenducci only briefly reappears in the *Caledonian Mercury* in July and August 1785.
- 17 Paton 1837–38, 2:93. The engraving originally had the initials “C—p—ll, P—n—r, C—g—e C—h” inscribed beneath.
- 18 [Tytler] 1779, 120; Berry 2011, 150.
- 19 Paton 1837–38, 2:93. In *Williamson’s Directory for the City of Edinburgh* (Williamson 1784, 14), the Campbell brothers are listed as “music masters.” In November 1785, John opened a church-funded school for the teaching of vocal music to local children. See *Caledonian Mercury*, no. 10,027 (1785): 1.
- 20 Paton 1837–38, 1:2.
- 21 Macleod 2001, 52.
- 22 Donald 1996, 4.
- 23 British Museum, London, inv. J.2.72.
- 24 “Commonplace book of Alexander Fraser Tytler,” fol. 12v, ca. 1778–1802, Acc.11737/5, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. I thank Mark McLean for bringing this manuscript to my attention.

- 25 *Caledonian Mercury*, no. 9327 (1781): 1.
- 26 Karpinski 1966, 30–31.
- 27 Kay created two further studies after Bunbury's *Hyde Park*. Both are in the album of Kay's drawings, watercolors, and prints in the Royal Scottish Academy of Art and Architecture (see note 7 above).
- 28 National Galleries of Scotland, inv. D 5185.
- 29 Paton 1837–38, 1:3.
- 30 Kay sale 1836, 4, lot 71.
- 31 Ibid. It seems likely that Alexander Campbell "bought up" this missing plate.
- 32 [Kay] 1836, 6.
- 33 Paton 1837–38, 2:95.
- 34 Ibid., 1:4, 7–8. In 1784, Dow was also depicted in an etched portrait by Isaac Cruikshank in which he holds a Lochaber axe in one hand and a glass of whisky in the other. See British Museum, inv. 1850,0810.215.
- 35 Paton 1837–38, 1:4–5. In 1784, Kay also depicted Robertson and his wood-carved heads in *Laird Robertson* (British Museum, inv. 1861,1012.2463) and *Dr. Glen and Laird Robertson* (British Museum, inv. 1935,0522.13.22).
- 36 [Kay] 1836, 6.
- 37 This was one of 356 copperplates that Paton purchased from Margaret Scott Kay's executors in 1836. See Kay sale 1836, 3.
- 38 Paton 1837–38, 1:230. Kay's portraits of John Campbell and Thomas Neil are listed consecutively in [Kay] 1836, 6. For the Neil portrait, see National Portrait Gallery, London, inv. D16886.
- 39 For John Campbell and *Medley of Musicians*, see Paton 1837–38, 2:92–99. For Thomas Neil, see *ibid.*, 1:230–35.
- 40 Ibid, 2:95.
- 41 Beattie 1776, 354.
- 42 Paton 1837–38, 2:95.
- 43 For more on Hogarth's *The Enraged Musician*, see Riding 2006, 138.
- 44 British Museum, inv. 1937,1108.39.
- 45 MMA 91.1.1 and 32.35(152).
- 46 For further analysis of Kay's printed and painted self-portraits, see McGlashan 2020, chap. 1.
- 47 Royal Collection Trust, United Kingdom, inv. RCIN 811832.
- 48 See note 33 above.
- 49 For images of Pratt and Cranstoun, see Kay, *John Pratt, Town-Crier* (1784), British Museum, inv. 1935,0522.13.4, and *Captain Mingay, with a Porter Carrying Geordie Cranstoun in His Creel* (1784), British Museum, inv. 1935,0522.13.26.
- 50 For an example of William Kay's printed works, see *The Social Pinch*, 1789, British Museum, inv. 1877,0210.406. Examples of his painted works on paper are held in the Royal Scottish Academy of Art and Architecture, Edinburgh; Central Library, Edinburgh; and Perth Museum and Art Gallery.
- 51 British Museum, inv. 1937,1108.45.
- 52 National Portrait Gallery, inv. D16881.
- 53 Paulson 1998, 3.
- 54 Paton 1837–38, 1:5.
- 55 *Dictionary of the Scots Language*, 2004, <https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/hoolet>.
- 56 Ibid., <https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/guse>.
- 57 Ibid., [https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/kyte\\_n\\_2](https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/kyte_n_2).
- 58 British Museum, inv. 1937,1108.8; MMA 32.35(129).
- 59 Paton 1837–38, 1:96. Here Paton directly quotes Kay's own manuscript notes, which he purchased in 1836 (see text and note 70 below).

- 60 For Sandby and aquatint, see Gunn 2015, 39–56, and Hoisington 2021, 86–107. For Sandby's anti-Hogarth satires, see Paulson 1993, 135; Quilley 2009; Gunn 2015, 169–78, 197–206; and Gunn 2017.
- 61 Paulson 1993, 135; Quilley 2009; Gunn 2015, 21–25; and Gunn 2017, 403–4. Hogarth was described as such in *The Vile Ephesian* (1753), British Museum, inv. 1868,0808.3979.
- 62 British Museum, inv. 1904,0819.703. See Hogarth 1753, pl. 1; Paulson 1993, 135; and Quilley 2009, 40.
- 63 Quilley 2009, 40.
- 64 British Museum, inv. Y,4.153.
- 65 British Museum, inv. 1917,1208.3047; inv. 1917,1208.3048; inv. 1917,1208.3049; inv. 1917,1208.2803; for Francis Jukes, see Gunn 2015, 46–47, and Hoisington 2021, 172–89.
- 66 Examples are in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven. See, for example, B1998.14.763.
- 67 Campbell 1802, 1:11, 99, 268, and 2:277.
- 68 Durey 1990, 28, 47. For Kay's involvement with the radical Scottish parliamentary reform movement of the 1790s, see McGlashan 2020, 240–86.
- 69 Durey 1990, 8; Callender 1782, iv.
- 70 James Maidment, editor of *Original Portraits*, quoted in Stevenson 1883, 35. Although largely suppressed, Kay's notes are very sparingly and selectively quoted throughout *Original Portraits*. See, for example, note 59 above.
- 71 Stevenson 1883, 35. Two quarto volumes containing Kay's descriptive notes were purchased by Glasgow booksellers Mr. Kerr and Mr. Richardson on May 4, 1880, from the sale of the Maidment collection. It is currently unknown whether or not these survive.

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# A Tale of Two Chapeaux: Fashion, Revolution, and David's Portrait of the Lavoisiers

**KIMBERLY CHRISMAN-CAMPBELL**

Off with her hat? A conservator, two scientists, and a curator at The Metropolitan Museum of Art recently discovered a fashionable hat hidden under the surface of Jacques Louis David's portrait of Monsieur and Madame Lavoisier, raising a number of questions about the complex interplay of fashion, politics, and portraiture in the ancien régime, and the practice of updating portraits to reflect rapidly changing social and sartorial mores (figs. 1, 2).<sup>\*</sup> An investigation into the origins and reception of Madame Lavoisier's hat—a style known as the chapeau à la Tarare—reveals a powerful partisan message rooted in the turbulent political landscape of pre-Revolutionary France, and a possible explanation for the portrait's alteration, beyond aesthetic or compositional concerns.

OVERLEAF:

**fig. 1** Jacques Louis David (French, 1748–1825). *Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794) and Marie Anne Lavoisier (Marie Anne Pierrette Paulze, 1758–1836)*, 1788. Oil on canvas, 102¼ × 76⅞ in. (259.7 × 194.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman Gift, in honor of Everett Fahy, 1977 (1977.10)

**fig. 2** Combined elemental distribution map of lead (shown in white) and mercury (shown in red) obtained by Macro-X-ray-fluorescence (MA-XRF) in fig. 1. Image: Departments of Scientific Research and Paintings Conservation, MMA











fig. 3 Chapeau à la Tarare, 1787–97. Straw and silk, 8¾ × 13¾ in. (22.5 × 34 cm). Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (inv. 2013.17.4.1)

The chapeau à la Tarare took Paris by storm after the opera for which it was named premiered at the Académie royale de musique on June 8, 1787, only to be hopelessly outmoded less than a year later (figs. 3, 4). What comes into fashion must go out of fashion, and the short life span of the chapeau à la Tarare was not unusual in the fast-paced fashion climate of the late eighteenth century. Today, the hat is one of many colorful footnotes in fashion history, remembered only (if at all) because its distinctive silhouette was preserved in several portraits, genre scenes, and fashion plates.<sup>1</sup> But an investigation into the origins and reception of the chapeau à la Tarare reveals a more complicated tale of history repeated and rewritten.

*Tarare*, with a libretto by Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais and music by Antonio Salieri, was not the only theatrical event to alter the course of French fashion. Several operas, plays, and ballets of the eighteenth century lent their names to articles of dress as the *marchandes de modes* (fashion merchants) of Paris mined popular culture for fashion inspiration. As the baron de Frénilly noted, “new plays were rare.”<sup>2</sup> Parisians accustomed to the standard repertory of Christoph Willibald Gluck and Niccolò Piccinni at the Opéra and Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine, and Molière at the Comédie-Française were delighted by any novelty, whether a new piece or a fresh interpretation of a familiar one. The royal family’s enthusiastic patronage of the performing arts ensured that sartorial tributes to popular plays and performers were doubly fashionable; new productions often premiered at court before transferring to Paris, buoyed by royal applause. “The theater thus set the tone for fashions, and the Court was the first to receive them from the theater,” Paul François Jean Nicolas, vicomte de Barras, remembered.<sup>3</sup>

In some cases, these theatrical fashions imitated the costumes worn on stage. In others, however, the styles had very little to do with individual characters or costumes, but testified to the popularity of the piece as a whole. They might also show loyalty to the author or composer, as in the fierce rivalry between the Gluckistes and Piccinnistes. Stage performances usually inspired women’s hats, headdresses (called *poufs*), and hairstyles, which could respond quickly and relatively inexpensively to trends only to be discarded when the vogue had passed, or the production had closed. Various headgear à l’*Iphigénie* appeared as the perennially popular myth was told and retold on stage. André Ernest Modeste Grétry’s *La caravane du Caire* of 1783 inspired veiled coiffures and chapeaux à la *caravane*, loosely inspired by the opera’s Egyptian setting.<sup>4</sup>

And his 1784 opera *Richard Coeur-de-lion* produced the peaked, plumed bonnet à la *Richard*, a hat imitating the medieval hennin headdresses worn by the cast.

But it was Grétry’s operatic Chinese fantasy *Panurge dans l’île des lanternes* of the following year that fully exploited the range of possibilities for theatrically inspired fashions and fabrics, sparking a brief but widespread vogue for Chinese-style costumes and accessories.<sup>5</sup> According to the baronne d’Oberkirch, *Panurge* was a “spectacle singular for the many and rich Chinese costumes and decorations. . . . In a word its success was due more to the props than to the piece itself.”<sup>6</sup> The *Gallerie des modes et costumes français* illustrated a gauze apron trimmed à la *Panurge*; a chapeau à la *Panurge* appeared in a 1785 collection of fashion plates.<sup>7</sup> Marie Antoinette’s dressmaker, Rose Bertin, designed *Panurge* ball gowns for court masquerades.<sup>8</sup> As late as August 1786, the fashion magazine *Cabinet des modes* reported that men were wearing their hair in Chinese-style queues, or plaited à la *Panurge*.<sup>9</sup> All of these fashions à la *Panurge* vanished within a year of the opera’s premiere.

Occasionally, though, the stage made more enduring contributions to fashion. Tight, wrist-length sleeves were known as amadis sleeves in the eighteenth century, thanks to a production of Jean-Baptiste Lully’s 1684 opera *Amadis* in which they had been worn by a prima donna who, it was alleged, wished to hide her unattractive arms.<sup>10</sup> And the *lévite*—a loose, open gown fastened by a fringed sash—echoed the robes of the Levite priests in Racine’s Old Testament play *Athalie*. Both of these styles were distinct from the mainstream fashions of the time, yet wearable enough to assimilate into everyday dress.

The second half of the eighteenth century saw a movement toward naturalistic acting combined with historically and geographically accurate costumes. Traditionally, performers had worn formal French court dress regardless of the role.<sup>11</sup> As Madame de Genlis explained: “Respect for our kings made us think that no costume could be more majestic and more handsome.”<sup>12</sup> Historical accuracy was neither attempted nor expected. When the actor Lekain performed the role of Orestes in a long black wig, tricorne hat, and three-piece suit of brown velvet, “this costume surprised no one,” the baron de Frénilly testified. “It was the tradition and one would have been scandalized to see him in a toga and brodekins.” Similarly, Mademoiselle Dumesnil played Clytemnestra “in a farthingale . . . and chopines.”<sup>13</sup> Along with this standardized dress, actors employed a monotone voice and fixed, artificial gestures.



fig. 4 François Louis Joseph Watteau (French, 1758–1823). *Galerie des Modes et Costumes Français*. 62e Cahier de Costumes Français, *Habillements à la mode*. xxx.398 “L’aimable Colinette,” 1787. Hand-colored engraving on laid paper, 15¼ × 10 in. (38.7 × 25.4 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection (44.1721)

In 1750, however, Mademoiselle Clairon of the Comédie-Française shocked and delighted audiences when she played Electra in Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon’s *Oreste* wearing realistic Greek slave dress—complete with chains—rather than the sumptuous but stylized hoops and hair powder usually worn by actors, singers, and dancers, whether portraying male or female characters.<sup>14</sup> Her highly emotional declamation was equally shocking; credible costumes were an integral part of this new style of acting. The dramatist Jean-François Marmontel testified:

Paris, like Versailles, recognized in these changes the true tragic accent and the new degree of verisimilitude that well-observed costume gave the theatrical action. Thus from then on, all the actors were forced to abandon those tonlets, those fringed gloves, those voluminous wigs, those

plumed hats, and all that fantastic paraphernalia which for so long had offended the sight of people of taste.<sup>15</sup>

It was a sign of the times that the *Mercure galant*’s critic complained when the Paris Opéra presented Lully’s *Armide* in a rich but historically inaccurate mixture of ancient Greek and medieval dress in 1761.<sup>16</sup> Where theater costumes had once been generically opulent, they were increasingly specific and realistic, and audiences and critics adjusted their expectations accordingly. At the same time, comic plays and operas dealing with the lives of ordinary, modern-day mortals began to eclipse mythological and historical subjects in prestige and popularity. The characters in these plays were much more accessible to audiences, partly because they wore fashionable contemporary dress.

#### FASHIONS À LA FIGARO

These parallel trends converged in Beaumarchais’s 1784 comedy *Le mariage de Figaro*, which represented a turning point in theater and fashion history, as well as a milestone on the road to the French Revolution. The play did not just inspire specific garments, but an entire style of dressing *à la Figaro*. Beaumarchais was instrumental in creating the *Figaro* style; he had specific ideas about what his characters should wear on stage, which he outlined in the illustrated 1785 edition of the play. Among his many careers, the playwright had spied for Louis XV in Spain, and his trio of *Figaro* plays drew upon his knowledge of Spanish culture, customs, and costume.

At the same time, however, Beaumarchais deliberately dressed some of *Figaro*’s characters in modern French fashions. The overall effect was a giddy mix of the familiar and the exotic, the old and the new, which enhanced the playwright’s vision of a society turned upside down, where it is impossible to tell boy from girl or maid from mistress; in other words, it was a society much like the turbulent, transitional France of the 1780s. Beaumarchais set *Figaro* in Spain to distance the controversial subject matter from the court of Louis XVI, but calculated touches of French high fashion anchored it firmly in the playwright’s own Paris. (Government censors were not fooled; the play was suppressed for six years before it could be performed publicly.) If stage costumes based on court dress showed respect for the king, then the new preference for costumes ripped from the pages of fashion magazines signified a corresponding rejection of royal authority, entirely in keeping with the radical themes of the play.

Compared to other theatrical productions of its era, *Figaro* was unique in the quantity and character of the



fashions it spawned, a measure of its immense success as well as its fortuitous timing. The *Cabinet des modes* even credited *la mode* with popularizing *Figaro*, rather than the other way around, asking: “Has it not informed all Europe of the success of *Figaro*?”<sup>17</sup> The inflammatory play was widely banned outside of France, but the fashions it inspired became known across Europe through fashion magazines. Although fashions labeled *à la Figaro* disappeared from their pages after 1785, the play’s sartorial legacy lived on, as short petticoats, jackets, redingotes, detachable sleeves, and other garments inspired by Spanish rural and working-class dress became firmly established in the fashionable woman’s wardrobe, along with the stylish brimless hats (called toques) and *lévites* worn by the female characters. In fashion as in politics, *Figaro* seized the public imagination so successfully that it quickly became difficult to tell whether it was reflecting or directing public opinion. The play’s success on both fronts emboldened Beaumarchais and paved the way for him to conquer the world of fashion once again with his opera *Tarare*.

#### THE CHAPEAU À LA TARARE

Beaumarchais completed *Tarare*’s libretto in 1784 and spent the next three years promoting it while Salieri worked on the score, staging private readings and leaking details of the sets, costumes, and cast to the press. “*Tarare* became the sole subject of all conversations,” the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique* reported. “Never has any of our theaters seen a crowd equal to that which besieged all the avenues of the Opéra, the day of the first performance of *Tarare*; barriers erected for the purpose and defended by a guard of four hundred men could barely contain them.”<sup>18</sup>

But though “the talk of the city” was “excellent before the performance,” according to the *Chroniques de l’œil-de-boeuf*, “the event did not justify these brilliant hopes.”<sup>19</sup> *Tarare* would not match the success of *Figaro*’s one hundred performances; it was performed only thirty-one times between June 1787 and February 1788. Nevertheless, its receipts accounted for about one-quarter of the Opéra’s annual income, and it even inspired a parody, *Lanlaire*.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, *Tarare* was judged to be Salieri’s masterpiece, and its exotic costumes captured the public’s imagination. As the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* observed, “it would have been very astonishing if *Tarare* had not given rise to some new fashion” matching the “glory” of the fashions *à la Figaro*, “being written by the same Author. . . . This astonishment will not take place; *Tarare* has given birth to a hat of the same name.”<sup>21</sup> An accompanying

plate illustrated the chapeau *à la Tarare*, characterized by a tall, cylindrical crown encircled by ribbons and trimmed with a spray of feathers.<sup>22</sup> The hat’s arresting vertical silhouette marked a radical departure from the full, rounded toques and wide, flat hats of the 1780s, and literally changed the shape of French fashion.

The magazine pointed out that the hat should have been called the chapeau *à l’Astasie* after the heroine of the opera, who wore it on stage:

A reproach that we must make here to the authors of fashions, is that they never name the new fashion by the name of the person who wears it in the Play, and that they always give it, on the contrary, a generic name. For example, in *Tarare*, it is the divine Astasie who should have given her name to the hat, since she is the heroine, as, in *Figaro*, it should have been Suzanne, as, in *Les amours de Bayard*, it should have been Madame de Randan. On the contrary, the names are taken from the heroes of the Plays, and given to the fashions; there are hats *à la Tarare*, there are bonnets *à la Figaro*, there are coiffures *à la Bayard*. Have men and heroes ever dared to appear on the stage wearing women’s bonnets or hats? This is an inconsistency that we have always been indignant about.<sup>23</sup>

Fashions inspired by the theater were not necessarily named for the characters who wore them on stage—if they were worn on stage at all. This is especially true of the chapeau *à la Tarare*, which is not only named for a different character, but also strikingly different in appearance from the stage costume that inspired it.

The text—and subtext—of the opera suggests an explanation, and offer clues as to why the eponymous hat achieved unprecedented popularity in the fickle fashion climate of the 1780s. Loosely based on a Persian folktale, *Tarare* is set in the sixteenth-century kingdom of Ormus, or modern-day Iran. Beaumarchais embellished the story with anecdotes drawn from the writings of European travelers to the region, including Jean Chardin’s *Voyage de Paris* of 1686. The opera’s hero, Tarare, is a virtuous general married to the beautiful Astasie; the fact that he has only one wife is cited as evidence of his virtue. The sultan of Ormus, Atar, is the villain of the piece, an unreconstructed tyrant jealous of Tarare’s happiness and popularity, who kidnaps Astasie and tries to seduce her with riches. When that fails, he attempts to kill Tarare, but his soldiers and slaves revolt, demanding Tarare’s release. Tarare intercedes, reminding the soldiers of their oath of allegiance to Atar. But Atar is so humiliated by Tarare’s defense that he commits suicide, allowing the people to crown a somewhat



fig. 5 *Tarare* fan. French, ca. 1787. Hand-colored etching mounted on ivory with metal ornaments, 10<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 19<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (27.4 × 49 cm). British Museum, London (inv. 1891,0713.278)

reluctant Tarare their king—one who reigns because of his noble character rather than an accident of birth.

This was dangerous ground in 1787. The parallels between Atar and Tarare and Louis XVI and the marquis de Lafayette—the French general who heroically defended the American colonies against a British tyrant—were obvious to contemporary audiences. Beaumarchais had been an active supporter of the American Revolution; furthermore, he had openly courted royal displeasure with his equally anti-monarchist play *Figaro*. Beaumarchais later admitted that he deliberately chose a geographically and temporally distant setting for *Tarare* because it gave him creative and political freedom, much as he had attempted to sanitize *Figaro*'s incendiary class warfare by transplanting it to rural Spain.<sup>24</sup>

Typically, eighteenth-century entertainments set in the Middle East exploited the erotic as well as the musical possibilities offered by the harem.<sup>25</sup> But *Tarare* is not concerned with sexual titillation or exotic local color; it is devoid of eunuchs, hookahs, and janissaries. Its model is not Mozart's fanciful "Turkish" opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* of 1782, but Montesquieu's 1721 novel *Lettres Persanes*, a critique of French society dressed up in "Persian" garb. In this context, the

chapeau à la *Tarare* of popular fame was not only a fashion statement, but also a pointed political statement.

But what was its relation, if any, to the stage costume? While many fashion plates and portraits of 1787 and 1788 depict the fashionable version of the hat, images of the hat Astasie wore on stage are vanishingly scarce. The collection *Costumes et annales des grands théâtres de Paris* includes a plate of Astasie's costume in her first scene—act 1, scene 3—when she is enslaved to Atar. She wears a sacrificial white gown with recognizably Asian details such as short oversleeves, an asymmetrically draped petticoat, and a sash.<sup>26</sup> As specified in the libretto, Astasie, played by Mademoiselle Maillard, is "covered with a long black veil, from head to toe," which doubles as a blindfold during her abduction, but she wears no hat.<sup>27</sup>

Astasie is not seen again until act 3, scene 3, when she reappears, according to the libretto, "in the costume of a Sultana," and Atar crowns her with "a diadem of diamonds."<sup>28</sup> A rare French fan in the British Museum, London, depicts this sultana costume; one side is decorated with scenes from *Tarare*, while the reverse bears portraits of Beaumarchais and the title character (fig. 5). Astasie appears to the right of the central text panel. But her curious golden headdress



looks nothing like the chic chapeau that subsequently appeared in fashion magazines. In fact, it is not really a hat at all, but something much more specific and more surprising: a mural crown, a crenellated circlet resembling a walled city.

#### MURAL CROWNS

Mural crowns are traditionally found in depictions of Fortuna, the ancient Greco-Roman goddess of chance, who is variously known as Tyche, Tutela, or Cybele (fig. 6). These goddesses usually personified and protected cities, whether symbolically or physically, as statues placed at city gates. But they also represented fertility, success, and guidance. From the fourth century B.C. through the Middle Ages, Fortuna was worshipped by those who hoped to win her protection

fig. 6 Tyche (Good Fortune). Roman, 1st century A.D. Bronze, H. 4 in. (10.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1913 (13.227.8)



and favor.<sup>29</sup> Crowned a sultana, Astasie becomes something much more, symbolically assuming the power, protective role, and feminine virtues traditionally associated with the goddess.

There is a long tradition of orientalism in French art and theater, ranging from pure fantasy to serious antiquarian research. Claude Gillot, a costume designer for the Paris Opéra in the early eighteenth century, created a Turkish sultana costume for an opera-ballet of 1714 that was a faithful copy of the *Grand' Dame Turcque* from Nicolas de Nicolay's 1576 costume book *Les navigations, pérégrinations et voyages, faicts en la Turquie* (fig. 7).<sup>30</sup> (The same source inspired a tray in *The Met*, with a similarly vertiginous headdress.)<sup>31</sup> It is a very early example of historically and geographically accurate Asian costume in the French theater, and indicates the extent to which primary sources such as eyewitness travelogues and costume books by the likes of Nicolay, Jean-Baptiste Vanmour, and Cesare Vecellio were available to and used by stage designers. Gillot's sultana does not wear a mural crown, but the silhouette of her high, crownlike headdress is close enough that it might suggest just such an idea to an imaginative designer.

The mural crown was common currency in late eighteenth-century art. Louis-Simon Boizot's relief *The Elements Paying Tribute to Friendship* depicts Cybele (representing the element of earth) wearing one.<sup>32</sup> This relief was displayed at the Salon of 1783 at the Louvre, just as Beaumarchais was writing *Tarare*. The monumental *Fountain of Cybele*, conceived by Ventura Rodríguez and sculpted by Francisco Gutiérrez Arribas, had been unveiled the previous year in Madrid, Beaumarchais's home from 1764 to 1765. In an undated drawing, Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre depicted Cybele wearing a low mural crown while transforming ships into sea goddesses.<sup>33</sup> As the technically and historically precise neoclassical style flourished in France in the second half of the eighteenth century under the leadership of Joseph Marie Vien, Jean Antoine Houdon, and David himself, several garments and accessories not seen since antiquity—from cameos to sandals—crossed over from ancient history into modern art, and from art into the fashionable wardrobe.

However, it is possible that the mural crown Astasie wore onstage referenced a civilization even more remote than ancient Greece. As archaeologist Dieter Metzler has shown, the mural crown of classical iconography has its origins in the ancient Near East, and specifically in Persia, the setting of *Tarare*. There, mural crowns were worn by royal women as early as the seventh century B.C.—hundreds of years before the first

fig. 7 Claude Gillot (French 1673–1722). *Standing Woman Dressed in the Costume of a Sultana*, 1714. Black ink, red chalk and red chalk wash on cream antique laid paper, framing lines in brown and black ink, laid down on off-white antique laid paper, 8 × 5½ in. (20.3 × 13.6 cm). The Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Gifts for Special Uses Fund (Henry P. McIlhenny) (1960.163)



known representations of Fortuna in a similar crown.<sup>34</sup> Astasie's headdress, then, may not be merely a striking visual motif or even a coded reference to fickle, formidable Fortuna, but an effort to re-create the real, historical dress of Persian queens. There was considerable antiquarian interest in Persian manuscripts in eighteenth-century France; the prominent collector and scholar Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil supplied Louis XVI with several for the royal library. The noted architect and theatrical designer Pierre-Adrien Paris created *Tarare's* sets, but the costumes remain unattributed. Unsigned costume drawings preserved in the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra depict all of the opera's major characters except Astasie; the drawings correspond closely to the figures depicted on a second *Tarare* fan in the British Museum, particularly a "Grand Prêtre de Brahma."<sup>35</sup> Given their sophistication and specificity, it is tempting to speculate that *Tarare's* costumes are at least partly the work of the multitalented Beaumarchais, who had been so involved in creating the costumes for the *Figaro* plays.

#### PORTRAITS À LA TARARE

Retaining only the elongated silhouette of the mural crown, the *Marchande de modes* of Paris translated the carefully researched historical costume into a

contemporary idiom. *Tarare* may have spawned just one hat in comparison with the multitude of fashions *à la Figaro*, but that hat is disproportionately represented in French portraits, prints, and fashion plates of 1787 and 1788. The novelty, charm, and visual impact of the style—with or without the feathers that further augmented its height—proved irresistible to artists. Pietro Antonio Martini captured its ubiquity in his panoramic engraving the *Exposition au Salon du Louvre en 1787*. The Salon coincided with *Tarare's* run and included Antoine Vestier's portrait of the Chabanel family, whose composition—both the original and Martini's compressed rendering of it—likely inspired David's portrait of the Lavoisiers.<sup>36</sup> But David may have seen the style even closer to home, in his own studio. In a portrait of about 1787–88 attributed to his student Marie Guillemine Benoist, an artist—thought to be another one of his students, Mademoiselle Duchosal—is depicted at her easel, fashionably (if improbably) dressed in a white gown and an exuberantly feathered chapeau *à la Tarare*.<sup>37</sup>

An undated portrait attributed to English painter Richard Cosway depicts a woman presumed to be the artist's wife holding a chapeau *à la Tarare*.<sup>38</sup> Although the identities of both artist and sitter are open to debate, the woman strongly resembles Maria Cosway, who lived in Paris from August to December 1787, at the height of *Tarare's* success.<sup>39</sup> She is dressed completely *à la française* in garments considered to be typically French at the time, including a white muslin chemise gown and gold hoop earrings. Regardless of her identity, then, her hat can be read as a calculated statement of fashionability in a specifically French context, rendering the small-scale portrait as elegant and ephemeral as a fashion plate. With two wide ribbons circling the base and the top of the crown, a large bow filling the space between, and a spray of feathers, the hat closely resembles the one originally worn by Madame Lavoisier (fig. 2).

The life of the chapeau *à la Tarare* was so short that it can be used to pinpoint many heretofore undated portraits, such as Marguerite Gérard's *An Architect and His Family*.<sup>40</sup> The hat is modeled by no less a fashion authority than Marie Antoinette in François Dumont's miniature; a blue satin chapeau *à la Tarare* is prominently displayed in the foreground, at the queen's feet, which are shod in matching slippers.<sup>41</sup> The presence of the chapeau *à la Tarare*—virtually identical to the "simple" satin one trimmed with a "large ribbon" and "five large white feathers" depicted in the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* on January 10, 1788—suggests that the



portrait, delivered in January 1790, was begun (if not completed) much earlier, for the famously stylish queen would never have chosen an outmoded accessory.<sup>42</sup> Though the opera may have been intended as a critique of the monarchy, the *chapeau à la Tarare* undoubtedly owed part of its success to this royal endorsement.

The *chapeau à la Tarare* was soon joined by the *chapeau à la Théodore*, named for a different opera, Giovanni Paisiello's *Le Roi Théodore à Venise*, which made its Paris debut on September 11, 1787.<sup>43</sup> The two were easily confused. The *Magasin des modes nouvelles* admitted:

There are people who still call the chapeaux à la Théodore “à la Tarare”: very evident proof that the chapeaux à la Tarare haven't disappeared yet. This sort of confusion in the names comes, it seems to us, from these two types of hats . . . being almost the only ones to prevail, and neither having a very distinct character, a very different shape, it is almost impossible not to give them both the same name.<sup>44</sup>

Images of the *chapeau à la Théodore* suggest that it had a funnel-shaped brim rather than a flat one, but they are relatively scant.<sup>45</sup> The *Tarare* hat both eclipsed and outlasted its rival; *Théodore* closed December 6, after only thirteen performances at the Académie royale de musique.

Although the term “*chapeau à la Tarare*” disappeared from French fashion magazines around the time *Tarare* closed in February 1788, variations on its extreme vertical silhouette continued to appear in quick succession over the next few years. The late 1780s were notable for the quantity and variety of hats worn by women; fashion magazines even began to publish issues devoted exclusively to hats. As the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* explained, “every year there is a superfetation of these bonnets and hats”—using the medical term for conception during pregnancy to describe fashion's rapid cycle of regeneration. “We submit ourselves to this obligation all the more willingly, since bonnets and hats are the objects of finery for which the Ladies are the most voracious.”<sup>46</sup> As late as March 1789, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* compared new hat styles to the *chapeau à la Tarare*, indicating that it still loomed large in fashion's collective memory.<sup>47</sup> The high-crowned hats and bonnets that became wildly popular in the early 1790s could not have existed without the *chapeau à la Tarare*.

## FASHION AND PORTRAITURE

These frequent changes in fashion—amplified and accelerated by the bimonthly fashion magazines that emerged in France in the late 1770s—created significant problems for artists. Clothing helped to construct a calculated image of style and gentility, but it could also render a portrait hopelessly out of date within a few years. Fashions in hats and hairstyles changed even faster than fashions in clothes, and never more rapidly or radically than between the 1760s and the 1790s. From heavily powdered curls worn close to the head, women's coiffures grew steadily higher, finally reaching their apex in *poufs*, the pneumatic arrangements of flowers, feathers, and ribbons characteristic of the late 1770s. By 1780, however, these “high heads” had lost their novelty, and they were replaced by soft clouds of crimped and frizzed hair, worn low but wide, and topped by enormous hats with similarly topical monikers. These hats and hairstyles were not just elegant, expensive, and eye-catching, but physically imposing; along with wide hoops and high heels, they underscored French women's unprecedented advances in society, politics, and the arts during the reign of Louis XVI. In the painter Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun's famous phrase, “women reigned then, the Revolution dethroned them.”<sup>48</sup> Big hair went out of fashion altogether after 1789; along with other kinds of cosmetics, hair powder, pomade, and wigs were deemed unnatural and even deceitful, as well as inappropriately luxurious. While this new asceticism applied to men as well as women, women had much farther to fall.

It was not unusual to have portraits repainted in the eighteenth century—especially portraits of women. A portrait represented a substantial investment of time and money; even the very wealthy might have one painted only a few times in their lives. Portraits were updated for many reasons: to include new family members and possessions, for example, or to reflect an elevation to or within the peerage or the military.<sup>49</sup> Shifts in fashion were considered perfectly valid reasons for altering a portrait; showing off one's taste and affluence in the form of expensive, fashionable dress was often more important to sitters than achieving a good likeness. More and more of these modifications have come to light in recent years thanks to the development of non-destructive analytical techniques like the Macro-X-ray-fluorescence (MA-XRF) and Raman spectroscopy used on the Lavoisiers' portrait.

The simplest way to update a portrait was to alter the hair. While an eighteenth-century sitter might

*fig. 8* François Hubert Drouais (French, 1727–1775). *Marie Rinteau, Called Mademoiselle de Verrières*, 1761, altered ca. 1775. Oil on canvas, 45½ × 34¾ in. (115.6 × 87.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jules Bache Collection, 1949 (49.7.47)

*fig. 9* After François Hubert Drouais. *Marie Rinteau, Mademoiselle de Verrières*, ca. 1761–65. Gouache on vellum, 1¾ × 1¾ in. (3.5 × 2 cm). Musée Carnavalet on deposit at Musée de la Vie Romantique, Paris (inv. D 89.54)

choose to be painted in uniform, regalia, classical drapery, masquerade costume, or historical dress that would not look outmoded within weeks, it was difficult to avoid fashions in hairstyles and wigs. Much more than the body, the head lent a portrait the desired quality of likeness, while also anchoring it in a narrow time period. Inevitably, many portraits of women were updated in the 1770s and 1780s, whether to attain the extreme silhouette of 1770s hairstyles or to efface it.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes, the alteration was done by another hand many years later. Sir Joshua Reynolds’s 1777 portrait of Lady Henrietta Herbert, for example, was cleverly updated a decade later by an unidentified artist.<sup>51</sup> The sitter’s towering hairstyle was covered by a wide-brimmed hat perched at a jaunty angle—reflecting the fashions for large hats in the 1780s—while her dated dress was softened by a fichu.<sup>52</sup> In the case of the Lavoisiers, however, the canvas was completed and

paid for by December 18, 1788, and there is no evidence that the painting was reworked after that date, or by a different hand.<sup>53</sup> It was updated—substantially—even as it was being finished.

The practice of altering portraits for fashion-related reasons seems to have been more common in England, where it is evident in works by Thomas Gainsborough, Allan Ramsay, and George Romney as well as Reynolds. The French were, presumably, less concerned with timelessness in portraiture, preferring fashionable dress to historicized costumes or uniforms. One French portrait in The Met, François Hubert Drouais’s portrait of Marie Rinteau, has undergone a comparable transformation. The portrait is signed and dated 1761, but the sitter’s hair is dressed in an enormous *pouf* of the mid-1770s (fig. 8). A miniature copy of the 1761 version of the portrait in the Musée Carnavalet, Paris (fig. 9), and a contemporary sketch of it by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin confirm that the hair was originally dressed close to the head, in the fashion of the early 1760s. More than a decade later, the portrait was altered to bring the coiffure up to date, as was a pendant portrait of Marie’s sister, Geneviève. David’s portrait of the Lavoisiers had never undergone in-depth imaging or chemical analyses before the Museum’s recent technical study; indeed, no work by this important artist has been subjected to such scrutiny.<sup>54</sup> David may well have made significant alterations to other paintings, yet to be uncovered.





### REDRESSING THE LAVOISIERS

The hat's discovery provides new context for the yawning void over Madame Lavoisier's head—and Monsieur Lavoisier's bemused side-eye (fig. 1). But the hat was not the only highly finished aspect of the portrait's composition obscured by David's abrupt "about-face."<sup>55</sup> The artist's interventions changed the setting from a library to a laboratory, and transformed the couple from a wealthy *fermier général* (tax collector) and his fashionable wife to a scientist and his collaborator at work—a democratizing agenda belied by the portrait's impressive full-length format. David Pullins has argued that "the late addition of the armchair, shawl, and portfolio . . . insist on Madame Lavoisier as an active participant in this shared scientific pursuit"; this "active" role might well have been rendered unconvincing by a high-maintenance hat.<sup>56</sup>

But Pullins's suggestion that the hat detracted from the "seriousness" of the work is less persuasive.<sup>57</sup> Fashion and frivolity (*légèreté*) did not have the negative associations in eighteenth-century France that we might ascribe to them today. The language of fashion and the language of science overlapped in popular parlance.<sup>58</sup> Frances Crewe, an English visitor to Paris, observed in 1786 that the French

are much more familiar with *Scientific Terms* than we are, and that Expressions which the common People here frequently use, are such as would be thought with us strangely affected and pedantic. For Instance, they are for ever disputing about le *Physique* and la *morale*—then a Milliner will tell you that your Ribband is not *analoque* [*sic*] to your Gown.<sup>59</sup>

In the same year, the October 1 issue of the *Cabinet des modes* asserted:

Fashion, which its Detractors have called slight, inconstant, fickle, frivolous, is, however, fixed in its principles; & we believe, in truth, that there is injustice in treating it . . . so harshly. We see how constant it is in seizing all remarkable events, adapting them, recording them in its annals, IMMORTALIZING them in memory. . . . We flatter ourselves that no one can deny that the *Cabinet des modes* could even become useful to Historians.<sup>60</sup>

With its stylistic and sociopolitical ties to both global history and contemporary French political discourse, the chapeau à la *Tarare* proves this point, and illustrates that, in the 1780s, a hat was rarely just a hat. However, it is likely that Madame Lavoisier's hat was a casualty of

the swift fashion cycle as well as ideological concerns; if fashion was a serious matter, then so was keeping up with it. After *Tarare* closed in February 1788, the hat quickly disappeared from fashion magazines, and, presumably, the portrait.

The hat was not the only thing to go, however. Madame Lavoisier's sash and the ribbons on the virago sleeves of her *robe en chemise* were originally red, to match the ribbons on her black hat. Black, white, and red clothes were part of the vogue for Spanish dress inspired by Beaumarchais's *Le mariage de Figaro*, and they appear in several portraits and fashion plates of the late 1780s, overlapping with the trend for chapeaux à la *Tarare*.<sup>61</sup> But instead of leaving the sash and ribbons alone when he painted over the hat, David made them blue—as they are in many portraits of the 1780s depicting women wearing muslin chemise gowns, including the comtesse de Provence, Madame Du Barry, the princesse de Lamballe, and Marie Antoinette, who first popularized the style in 1783.<sup>62</sup> Intentionally or not, the blue hue gives the gown a more traditional and conventional femininity, as well as allying the portrait with several well-known images of royal and aristocratic women (and distancing it from Beaumarchais's controversial play).

Monsieur Lavoisier's clothes were altered as well. His suit was originally brown with seven gold-colored buttons, instead of black with three buttons, and his jacket slightly longer, with an "aggrandising and *retardataire*" red mantle draped over his shoulders and proper left arm.<sup>63</sup> The mantle, like the hat, was likely removed once the scene shifted from writing letters to the more active, trailblazing pursuits of a scientist. While the matte black suit is less flashy than the gold-buttoned version, it is also more fashion-forward. Black wool suits, previously reserved for mourning in France, came into style in the late 1780s as part of a general vogue for sober, English-style dress. A fashion plate of "Modes Anglaises" that appeared in the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* in November 1786 included a man in a coat of "the color of London chimney soot."<sup>64</sup> In 1787, the baron de Frénilly observed that black suits had replaced colorful silks for men, while women dressed in white, the color of half-mourning—a trend illustrated by the Lavoisiers' portrait. Frénilly correctly surmised that this stark tableau was a "sinister omen," though others considered it democratic.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Lavoisier's head-to-toe black anticipates the plain black suits and black stockings worn by the delegates of the Third Estate when the Estates General opened on May 4, 1789. Lavoisier would serve as an alternate delegate to

fig. 10 A. B. Duhamel  
(French, 1736–after 1800).  
After Jean Florent Defraigne  
(French, b. 1754). “Bonnet à  
la Bastille,” plate 2 from  
*Magasin des modes  
nouvelles, françaises et  
anglaises*, année 4, no. 34  
(December 1, 1789).  
Bibliothèque Nationale de  
France, Paris

the assembly; however, he represented the Second Estate, the nobility, who wore much more splendid suits of gleaming black silk trimmed with gold braid, lavishly accessorized with matching cloaks, fine lace cravats, plumed hats, pristine white stockings, and swords, accoutrements reserved for the aristocracy.

By the time the Salon of 1789 opened in August—just over a month after the Bastille prison was attacked and dismantled by a mob of sansculottes—the Lavoisiers’ ill-gotten wealth rendered them so unpopular that Joseph Marie Vien, director of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, was advised not to exhibit David’s portrait, lest it exacerbate simmering class tensions.<sup>66</sup> Ironically, Madame Lavoisier’s long-gone hat—referencing an opera celebrating a tyrant’s downfall—would have been a less problematic fashion statement than Monsieur Lavoisier’s black suit, which had become heavily politicized in the eight months since the portrait was finished.

#### A REVOLUTIONARY STYLE

Meanwhile, *Tarare* enjoyed an unexpected afterlife as current events proved stranger than operatic fiction. Tellingly, the pro-military, anti-authoritarian opera was revived no fewer than four times between 1790 and 1795. (The reverse of the British Museum fan [fig. 5] is inscribed: “The Soldier mounts the Throne and the Tyrant is Dead.”) In the 1790 edition of the libretto, pointedly published on the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, Beaumarchais added an explicitly republican denouement, clarifying that *Tarare* is anointed a constitutional monarch rather than an absolute monarch. In the preface to the published edition, he asked: “O citizens, do you remember the time when the voice of concerned thinkers, forced to veil their ideas, hid itself in allegories and laboriously plowed the field of revolution?”<sup>67</sup> Certainly, there was an element of self-aggrandizement and self-preservation in this somewhat revisionist history of *Tarare*’s genesis, but it is true that, in 1787, *Tarare*’s radical denouement could only be staged behind an exotic mask. By 1790, Beaumarchais could lift that mask and take a very public bow.

In the same year, the Assemblée nationale bowed to public pressure to recognize the 954 “vainqueurs du Bastille” who had torn down the hated prison. On June 19, 1790, it voted to reward each participant in the attack with, among other benefits, the right to wear a special emblem applied to the left arm or lapel of his coat: a mural crown (*une couronne murale*).<sup>68</sup> The certificate that accompanied this privilege was emblazoned with classical motifs including both a laurel wreath



and a mural crown bearing more than a passing resemblance to the crenellated and turreted facade of the Bastille. (In the end, the sleeve emblem seems to have been abandoned in favor of a gilded bronze medal in the same shape.) By this time, the Bastille was a Revolutionary icon, immortalized in popular culture through prints, souvenir fans, buttons, shoe buckles, miniature models, and, indeed, hats.<sup>69</sup> In December 1789, the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* had illustrated a bonnet à la Bastille, “whose very high & very large crown of white satin represents a crenellated tower . . . with a sort of balustrade below the crenellations, made of a very large black lace, & another row of crenellations at the bottom of this balustrade, made, like those at the top, of white satin.” The imposing edifice was festooned with “a very large knot of ribbons in the national colors”: blue, white, and red (fig. 10).<sup>70</sup>

This modern mural crown inverted the traditional iconography of Tyche, symbolizing destruction rather than protection—or perhaps protection *through* destruction. Though crenellated chapeaux in the shape of the Bastille were a fleeting fashion, high-crowned hats (often accessorized with tricolor cockades) would become a standard component of the female Revolutionary uniform. Charlotte Corday and Théroigne de Méricourt were often portrayed in them, adorned with tricolor ribbons, cockades, or plumes; Méricourt paired hers with her habitual redingote, a gown resembling (and named for) an English-style man’s riding coat and favored by Revolutionary women.<sup>71</sup> The anonymous print





fig. 11 Anonymous. “Miss National Going to See the Ceremony on the Champs Ellysées,” ca. 1788–92. Engraving, 8 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 6 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (22.6 × 17.5 cm). Musée Carnavalet, Paris (inv. G.6.28673)

“Mlle Nationale allant voir l’Exercice aux Champs Elisés” depicts a similar costume (fig. 11). François Watteau gave his *Citoyenne à sa toilette* of circa 1792 a whole wardrobe of high-crowned hats, scattered around her boudoir.<sup>72</sup> The style’s prominence in images of exemplary *amazones* and *citoyennes* suggests that the high-crowned hat—given fresh currency by Revolutionary-era productions of *Tarare*—became visual shorthand for female patriotism.

But not for long. As fashion historian Aileen Ribeiro has pointed out, the Revolutionary government discouraged women from wearing masculine clothing, a hallmark of the English-inspired fashions of the 1780s.<sup>73</sup> Redingotes, cockades, and hats in general had

played a key role in this trend. With the proclamation of the Republic on September 21, 1792, Frenchwomen began to resume traditional gender roles. They discarded their high-crowned hats, only to see them taken up by men. Shallow-brimmed “chapeaux hauts” became the characteristic male accessory of the 1790s. David’s brother-in-law, Pierre Sériziat, wore one in his portrait by the artist of 1795, accessorized with the tricolor cockade that was no longer a spontaneous expression of patriotism, but one required by law (fig. 12).

By the time David exhibited Sériziat’s portrait at the Salon of 1795, Antoine Lavoisier was dead, convicted of treason and executed on May 8, 1794. The Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture had been disbanded. David had been imprisoned (twice) for his support of Maximilien Robespierre, the Jacobin leader who ordered Lavoisier’s arrest, only to follow him to the guillotine weeks later. But loyalties—like fashions—changed fast in those turbulent times. A year and a half after Lavoisier’s execution, the father of modern chemistry was fully exonerated by the French government. Madame Lavoisier survived the Reign of Terror, dying in 1836, David’s portrait still in her possession.<sup>74</sup>

In his lengthy preface to the published edition of *Figaro*, Beaumarchais drew a parallel between fashion and the theater: “Because characters in a play show themselves to be morally vicious, should they be banished from the stage? What should we seek at the Theater? Foibles and absurdities? That’s well worth the trouble of writing about! They are like our fashions; we cannot correct them, we can only change them.”<sup>75</sup> Both fashion and the theater reflected the changing face of French society, holding a mirror to human aspirations, fears, and failings. The two chapeaux of this tale—the ancient mural crown and the ultra-fashionable chapeau à la *Tarare*—were emblems of feminine power, and both were ultimately usurped by men. Long before the conquerors of the Bastille literally wore their politics on their sleeves, the most stylish women in Paris wore them on their heads.

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*fig. 12* Jacques Louis David.  
*Pierre Sériziat* (1757–1847),  
1795. Oil on wood, 50<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> ×  
37<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (129 × 95.5 cm).  
Musée du Louvre, Paris  
(inv. RF 1281)





## NOTES

- \* The scientific study of the evolution of Jacques-Louis David's *Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794) and Marie Anne Lavoisier (Marie Anne Pierrette Paulze, 1758–1836)* is fully described in Centeno et al 2021 and Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021. The identification of the hat was first made in Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021.
- 1 See, for example, Marguerite Gérard, *Portrait of an Architect and His Family*, ca. 1787, Baltimore Museum of Art, 1938.232, and Michel Garnier, *The Poorly Defended Rose*, 1789, Minneapolis Institute of Art, 64.63.1.
  - 2 Frénilly 1987, 39.
  - 3 “le théâtre donnait alors le ton aux modes, et la Cour était la première à les recevoir du théâtre.” Barras 1895, 349.
  - 4 MMA 26.233.24.
  - 5 MMA 27.105.4.
  - 6 “Spectacle singulier par les costumes chinois et les décorations riches et multipliées. . . . en un mot le succès était plutôt dû aux accessoires qu'à la pièce elle-même.” Oberkirch 1989, 594.
  - 7 Engraved by Nicolas Dupin after François Louis Joseph Watteau, “La brillante Raimonde,” *Galerie des modes et costumes français* 47 (1785), pl. ccc.296.
  - 8 Fondation Jacques Doucet, MS I, Rose Bertin, IV.345, fol. 3472, and VI.571, fols. 5392–93.
  - 9 *Cabinet des modes*, no. 19 (August 15, 1786): 146.
  - 10 Blum 1982, xiii. See Louis René Boquet, *Mademoiselle Marie-Jeanne Fesch Chevallier*, MMA 66.91.
  - 11 See Antoine Watteau, *The French Comedians*, ca. 1720, MMA 49.7.54, and Nicolas Lancret, *Scene from the Tragedy Le Comte d'Essex by Thomas Corneille*, 1734, State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, inv. ГЭ-1144.
  - 12 “le respect pour nos rois faisoit penser que nul costume ne pouvoit être plus majestueux et plus beau.” Genlis 1818, 1:100.
  - 13 “Ce costume n'étonnait personne; c'était la tradition et l'on eût été scandalisé de lui voir une toge et des brodequins.” “En vertugadin de deux aunes et souliers à chappins.” Frénilly 1987, 21.
  - 14 Bernier 1981, 76.
  - 15 “Paris, comme Versailles, reconnu dans ces changements le véritable accent tragique et le nouveau degré de vraisemblance que donnait à l'action théâtrale le costume bien observé. Ainsi, dès lors, tous les acteurs furent forcés d'abandonner ces tonnelets, ces gants à franges, ces perruques volumineuses, ces chapeaux à plumets, et tout cet attirail fantasque qui depuis si longtemps choquait la vue des gens de goût.” Marmontel 1999, 177.
  - 16 Jullien 1880, 187.
  - 17 “N'a-t-elle point appris à toute l'Europe le succès de *Figaro*?” *Cabinet des modes*, no. 22 (October 1, 1786): 169.
  - 18 “*Tarare* devint l'unique sujet de toutes les conversations”; “Jamais aucun de nos théâtres n'a vu une foule égale à celle qui assiégeait toutes les avenues de l'Opéra, le jour de la première représentation de *Tarare*; à peine des barrières élevées tout exprès et défendues par une garde de quatre cents hommes l'ont-elles pu contenir.” Grimm et al. 1881, 93, 94.
  - 19 “l'événement n'a pas justifié ces brillantes espérances.” Touchard-Lafosse 1926, 5:481–82.
  - 20 *Mercur de France*, August 4, 1787, 42.
  - 21 “Il eût été très-étonnant que *Tarare* n'eût pas donné lieu à quelque mode nouvelle, & n'eût point eu en cela la gloire de *Figaro*, étant composé par le même Auteur. . . . Cet étonnement n'aura pas lieu; *Tarare* a donné naissance à un chapeau de son nom.” *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 2, no. 27 (August 10, 1787): 209.
  - 22 A. B. Duhamel (French, 1736–after 1800), engraving after a drawing by Jean Florent Defraigne (French, b. 1754), *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 2, no. 27 (August 10, 1787), pl. 1; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. RP-P-2009-1664A.
  - 23 “Un reproche qu'il faut que nous fassions ici aux auteurs des modes, c'est qu'ils ne nomment jamais la mode nouvelle, du nom de la personne qui la porte dans la Pièce, & qu'ils lui donnent toujours, au contraire, un nom générique. Par exemple, dans *Tarare*, c'est la divine Astasie qui devoit avoir donné son nom au chapeau, puisqu'elle est l'héroïne, comme, dans *Figaro*, ç'aurait dû être Susanne, comme, dans les *Amours de Bayard*, ç'aurait dû être Madame de Randan; eh bien, tout au contraire, ce sont les héros des Pièces dont on prend les noms, pour les donner aux modes; ce sont les chapeaux à la *Tarare*, ce sont les bonnets à la *Figaro*, ce sont les coëffures à la *Bayard*. Est-ce que jamais des hommes & des héros ont osé paroître sur la scène avec des bonnets ou des chapeaux de femmes? C'est une inconséquence dont nous nous sommes toujours indignés.” *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 2, no. 27 (August 10, 1787): 209–10.
  - 24 Betzwieser 1994, 92–93.
  - 25 Ibid., 91. Voltaire's *Zaïre* (1732) and Charles-Simon Favart's *Soliman second, ou, Les Trois Sultanes* (1761) were also turned into operas.
  - 26 “Mlle. Maillard, dans *Tarare*,” in Levacher de Charnois 1786–88, année 2, no. 5.
  - 27 “couverte d'un grand voile noir, de la tête aux pieds.” Beaumarchais 1787, 30.
  - 28 “en habit de Sultane”; “Il lui attache au front un diadème de diamans.” Ibid., 71, 76.
  - 29 For further discussion of Tyche, see Borromeo 1987.
  - 30 Nicolay 1576, 98; Tonkovich 2005, 250, fig. 39.
  - 31 Attributed to Carl Wendelin Anreiter von Zierfeld for the Doccia Porcelain Manufactory, Tray (one of a set), 1745–47. Hard-paste porcelain decorated in polychrome enamels, gold. MMA 06.372b.
  - 32 J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003.1.
  - 33 MMA 1981.219.
  - 34 Metzler 1994, 77.
  - 35 British Museum, London, inv. 1891,0713.277; Anon., *Esquisse d'un costume du grand prêtre de Brahma*, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra National de Paris, inv. D216 IX-59.
  - 36 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 788; Pietro-Antonio Martini, *Lauda-Conatum: Exposition au Salon du Louvre en 1787*, 1787. MMA 49.50.244.
  - 37 Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.
  - 38 Attributed to Richard Cosway (British, 1742–1785), *Portrait of a Woman Intending to Represent Maria Cosway*, ca. 1787, Cincinnati Art Museum (1957.213).
  - 39 Barnett 1995, 102–5.
  - 40 Baltimore Museum of Art, 1938.232.
  - 41 Louvre, inv. RF 28719.
  - 42 Pierrette 1994, 116; *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 3, no. 6 (January 10, 1788), pl. 1.
  - 43 *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 2, no. 33 (October 10, 1787): 259; France d'Hézacques 1987, 86.
  - 44 “De plus, il y a des personnes qui nomment encore à la *Tarare* les chapeaux à la Théodore: preuve bien sensible que les chapeaux à la *Tarare* n'ont point disparu. Cette sorte de confusion

dans les noms viennt, ce nous semble, de ce que ces deux espèces de chapeaux . . . étant presque les seules qui règnent, & n'ayant point chacune un cractère bien distinct, une forme bien différente, il est presqu'impossible que l'on ne donne pas à toutes les deux le même nom." *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 2, no. 33 (October 10, 1787): 259–60.

- 45 See, for example, MMA 57.559.6(14r); *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 2, no. 33 (October 10, 1787), pl. 1; and année 3, no. 4 (December 20, 1787), pls. 1–3.
- 46 "Il y a toutes les années une superfétation de bonnets & de chapeaux . . . . Nous nous soumettons à cette obligation d'autant plus volontiers, que les bonnets & les chapeaux sont les objets de parure dont les Dames sont le plus avides." *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 4, no. 9 (February 21, 1789): 65.
- 47 Ibid., année 4, no. 11 (March 11, 1789): 83.
- 48 "Les femmes régnaient alors, la Révolution les a détrônées." Vigée Le Brun 1986, 1:122.
- 49 See, for example, Thomas Gainsborough's portrait *The Byam Family* (The Holburne Museum, Bath, inv. L2001.1), which was altered to include the couple's young daughter and a more fashionable gown and hairstyle for Mrs. Byam.
- 50 Chrisman-Campbell 2013.
- 51 National Trust, Powis Castle, Welshpool, United Kingdom, inv. NT 1181064.
- 52 Graves and Cronin 1899–1901, 2:460.
- 53 Centeno et al. 2021, 9; Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 780.
- 54 Centeno et al. 2021, 1.
- 55 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 789.
- 56 Ibid., 784.
- 57 Ibid., 780.
- 58 Chrisman-Campbell 2015, 6–8.
- 59 "Windham Papers," vol. 85, British Library, Add MS 37926, fol. 47.
- 60 "La Mode, que ses Détracteurs ont appelée légère, inconstante, volage, frivole, est pourtant fixe dans ses principes; & nous croyons, en vérité, qu'il y a de l'injustice à la traiter, . . . avec autant de durété. Nous la voyons constante à saisir tous les événements remarquables, à se les approprier, à les consigner dans ses annales, à les ÉTERNISER dans la mémoire. . . . Nous nous flattons que l'on ne nous resusera pas l'aveu, que le *Cabinet des Modes* peut devenir utile, même aux Historiens." *Cabinet des modes*, no. 22 (October 1, 1786): 169–70.
- 61 See, for example, *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 2, no. 34 (October 20, 1787), pl. 3, and année 2, no. 36 (November 10, 1787), pl. 1.
- 62 See Chrisman-Campbell 2015, 172–99 and 200–215.
- 63 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 784–85.
- 64 "couleur de suie des cheminées de Londres," *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 2, no. 1 (November 20, 1786): 7.
- 65 "un sinistre augure," Frénilly 1987, 41.
- 66 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 789.
- 67 "ô citoyens, souvenez-vous du temps où vos penseurs inquiétés, forcés de voiler leurs idées, s'enveloppaient d'allégories et labouraient péniblement le champ de la Révolution." Quoted in Grimm and Diderot 1813, 503.
- 68 *Collection générale* 1790, 102.
- 69 *Diplôme de Vainqueur de la Bastille*, 1790, Centre historique des Archives nationales, inv. A/II/3641.

- 70 "la calotte de satin blanc très-élevée & très-large représente une tour garnie de crénaux, . . . d'une sorte de balustrade au dessous des crénaux, faite d'une très-large dentelle noire, & d'un autre rang de crénaux au dessous de cette balustrade, faits, comme ceux du faite, de satin blanc"; "très-gros noeud de rubans aux couleurs nationales," *Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises*, année 4, no. 34 (December 1, 1789): 267–68.
- 71 See, for example, Anonymous, *Françaises devenues libres*, 1789, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, inv. Reserve QB-370(10)-FT 4, t. 10.
- 72 François Watteau, *Une Citoyenne à sa Toilette*, ca. 1792, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Arras.
- 73 Ribeiro 1988, 88–89.
- 74 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 791.
- 75 "Mais, parce que les personnages d'une Piece s'y montrent sous des moeurs vicieuses, faut-il les bannir de la Scène? Que poursuivrait-on au Théâtre? les travers & les ridicules? cela vaut bien la peine d'écrire! ils sont chez nous comme les modes; on ne s'en corrige point, on en change." Beaumarchais 1785, vii.

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# Hearing Witness: The Wičhówoyake of Mathó Nážíŋ's Little Bighorn Muslims

**RAMEY MIZE**

Mnikhówožu Lakłóta community leader, warrior, and artist Mathó Nážíŋ (Standing Bear) testified to his experience of the Battle of the Little Bighorn on many occasions, in both words and images.<sup>1</sup> The circa 1920 work by Mathó Nážíŋ in the Charles and Valerie Diker Collection of Native American Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art vividly details the events of June 25, 1876, the day he and other members of Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (Seven Council Fires), along with their Tsistsistas (Northern Cheyenne) and Hinono'ei (Arapaho) allies, defended their families against the illegal attack led by Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and the U.S. Seventh Cavalry (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> This confrontation, dubbed “Custer’s Last Stand” in U.S. popular culture, is referred to by Lakłótas as the Battle of Phežísla Wakpá (the





fig. 1 Matłó Nážin  
(Standing Bear; Mnikhówožu  
Lakłóta, 1859–1933). *The  
Battle of the Little Bighorn*,  
ca. 1920. Pencil, ink, and  
watercolor on muslin,  
36 in. × 8 ft. 9½ in. (91.4 ×  
268 cm). The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, The Charles  
and Valerie Diker Collection  
of Native American Art, Gift  
of Valerie-Charles Diker  
Fund, 2017 (2017.718.2)

Greasy Grass River) where *płehíj hánska kasóta* (the “rubbing out of Custer”) occurred.<sup>3</sup> It is well known for being the most decisive Indigenous victory in both the Black Hills War of 1876 and the wider Plains Wars of the nineteenth century, as well as for fomenting long-lasting controversy and debate.<sup>4</sup> Yet another title—“The Battle of Many Names”—marks the multiplicity of monikers and perspectives related to this event.<sup>5</sup>

Arthur Amiotte, an Oglála Lakłóta artist and great-grandson of Matłó Nážin, notes that his ancestor’s portrayals, in their intricate immediacy, extend “concentrated memory of the event.”<sup>6</sup> Amiotte’s use of a form of the word “concentration,” meaning both “the action or power of focusing one’s attention” and “a close gathering of people or things,” is evocative in its pairing with “memory.”<sup>7</sup> Together, these terms reflect the essential testimonial, relational, and commemorative roles played by images in Lakłóta culture. The

process of Lakłóta image-making occasioned frequent communal gatherings during which paintings and drawings on prepared animal hide, paper, or fabric fostered memory-keeping through intergenerational connection, corroboration, and exchange.<sup>8</sup> As explored in more detail below, drawings provided important touchstones for Lakłótas to share *eháñni wičhówoyake*, a category of oral history reserved for “living history,” or “true stories.”<sup>9</sup>

This article proposes Matłó Nážin’s Little Bighorn muslin at The Met as a form of testimony to Lakłótas’ right to resist Custer’s assault, as well as the larger incursions of U.S. empire. His extraordinary work elides visual and verbal forms of remembrance and demonstrates how testimonial avowal and interpersonal corroboration are socially embedded in Lakłóta images. I begin by establishing the battle’s historical context and the ways in which Lakłóta resistance informs





Matłó Nážíŋ's composition, followed by an analysis of the entwined workings of images and oral history in Lakłóta life. I then conclude with a focus on the muslin's multi-sensory significance as a specific manifestation of Lakłóta material culture known as the *ózanŋ* (dew curtain), underscoring its role as a mnemonic reservoir from which Lakłótas bore witness to personal and collective history. Through the aural/oral, communal dimension of listening activated by the "true stories" concentrated in his images, I suggest that Matłó Nážíŋ's art poses an alternative to Western concepts of the singular, ocular-centric eyewitness, one that instead encapsulates Lakłóta values of relationality and reciprocity.

Importantly, Matłó Nážíŋ intended for his Little Bighorn images to testify to both Native and non-Native audiences. His muslins (including the one in The Met's collection) were likely created for outsiders, their sale necessitated by the restrictions of the reser-

vation system and the imposition of a cash economy.<sup>10</sup> However, the stories projected by these works continued to reverberate in a Lakłóta context. As art historian Jessica Horton has observed, "Notwithstanding their physical departure, artworks remained knit into the cultural fabric of Lakota life through the vestiges of the stories they prompted."<sup>11</sup> At this complex cultural crossroads, Matłó Nážíŋ's art channeled Očhéthi Šakówiŋ vitality and victory within and beyond his community. As elaborated upon below, the muslin in The Met dispels the myth of Custer's heroic martyrdom, which Khulwíchaša (Lower Brulé/Sičhángŋu) Lakłóta historian Nick Estes has aptly linked to the entrenched inversion of United States history "where aggressors become victims and where colonialism looks like self-defense."<sup>12</sup>

Matłó Nážíŋ's visual-verbal testimony echoes through to the present moment, as the muslins now

extend his voice and vision in settler-centric museum frameworks at The Met and other collecting institutions.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing my own position as a White settler scholar living and working in Lenapehoking (unceded homelands of the Lenape in present-day New York), I approach this imperfect inquiry from a place of humility, acknowledging that my words are deeply indebted to the knowledge, labor, and generosity of Indigenous thinkers, notably Amiotte, as well as Carcross/Tagish First Nation curator Candice Hopkins and xwélméxw (Stó:lō) sound studies scholar Dylan Robinson. In order to bring balance to what they have identified as an overemphasis on the visual aspects of Indigenous art, Hopkins and Robinson organized “Soundings: An Exhibition in Five Parts” (2019–22). The exhibition, which began at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, presents creative works, writings, and ancestral belongings as “scores,” highlighting their sonic dimensions in order to amplify Indigenous history, sovereignty, and futurity along broader sensory registers. Hopkins and Robinson have also stressed deep listening—a close attuning of focus—as an essential basis for Indigenous concepts of witnessing, recalling the concentration of memory that Amiotte also notes in relation to Matłó Nážin’s compositions.<sup>14</sup> With this essay, I work to hear the testimonial score layered within Matłó Nážin’s muslin, seeking to offer one possible answer to Hopkins’s question: “How can we reconstitute protocols that animate cultural belongings that have been silenced for so long?”<sup>15</sup>

#### LAKHÓTA VITALITY AND RESISTANCE AT PĤEŽÍSLA WAKPÁ

On a warm summer morning in Wípazukłā Wašté Wí (The Month When Berries Are Good, or June), seventeen-year-old Matłó Nážin woke, took a swim, and was eating breakfast with his grandmother and uncle in the Mnikhówožu camp when the Seventh Cavalry launched their attack.<sup>16</sup> He and his family were among the Lakłótas who followed Oglála leader Tłāšúnke Witkó (Crazy Horse) that summer to hunt in the game-lands of their country.<sup>17</sup> Together with at least five other Lakłóta bands, along with their Tsistsistas and Hinono’ei compatriots, they formed an encampment along the wide ford where Medicine Tail Coulee and Muskrat Creek feed into PĤežísla Wakpá (Greasy Grass River) in Montana Territory, a temporary settlement that grew to house as many as seven thousand people.<sup>18</sup>

This monumental gathering was occasioned not only by the area’s ample hunting grounds, but also by Wí Wanyáng Wačhípi (the Sun Dance). An annual,

mid-summer ceremony, the Sun Dance brought together members of Očhéthi Šakówiŋ in order to renew relationships and alliances as an *oyáte* (nation), as well as to restore equilibrium and spiritual harmony with other-than-human persons, elements, and forces.<sup>19</sup> Húnkpapłā Lakłóta *blotáhunka* (resistance leader) Tłāthánka Iyótanka (Sitting Bull) hosted this particular convening by Rosebud Creek eleven days before Custer’s attack, during which he received a prophetic vision of Custer’s blue-coated soldiers “falling into camp.”<sup>20</sup>

Across the composition in The Met and at least three other panoramic images, Matłó Nážin portrayed the successful defense of Očhéthi Šakówiŋ against the influx of U.S. forces Tłāthánka Iyótanka foresaw, rendering their frenetic multitudes in pencil, ink, and watercolor on stretches of unbleached, loose-weave cotton muslin.<sup>21</sup> In keeping with Lakłóta pictorial conventions, the narrative action in The Met’s muslin proceeds from right to left and follows the sequence of events the artist had experienced there.<sup>22</sup> At right, he depicts the initial repression of additional battalions commanded by Major Marcus Reno and Captain Frederick Benteen near the Lakłóta encampment.<sup>23</sup> Afterward, Matłó Nážin made his way across Muskrat Creek and caught sight of a group of Custer’s men who had dismounted at the crest of a hill. This ragged line of soldiers appears in the top center of the muslin at The Met, where Matłó Nážin also pictures the Lakłóta charge against them. At far left, he shows the chase laid by warriors after loose cavalry horses. Left of center, he includes a scene of troops mired in a ravine; as their ranks were overwhelmed, U.S. soldiers panicked and fled downhill toward this landform, where they were pursued and killed.<sup>24</sup> As Matłó Nážin later described it, the altercation left “horses on top of men and men on top of horses” in a desperate entanglement that his battle imagery echoes.<sup>25</sup>

Only one of Matłó Nážin’s known compositions combines the Sun Dance and the battle into a synoptic six-by-six-foot image—a muslin in the collection of the Foundation for the Preservation of American Indian Art and Culture in Chicago (fig. 2). In this work, Matłó Nážin demarcates the Sun Dance within a vibrant red lodge circle, visible along the muslin’s lower register.<sup>26</sup> Interspersed among these extraordinary spiritual events are other, more day-to-day activities that were also required to sustain the *oyáte*. From courtship to cooking, the artist pictures the intimate corners of camp and Lakłóta life, including couples swathed in bright blue and red trade cloths; dogs and horses





*fig. 2* Mat'ho Názhin, *Events Leading to the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, ca. 1899. Muslin, pencil, and red, blue, yellow, green, and black pigment, 72 × 72 in. (182.9 × 182.9 cm). Foundation for the Preservation of American Indian Art and Culture, St. Augustine's Indian Center, Chicago, Gift of Dorothy C. and L. S. Raisch



fig. 3 Detail of Matĥó Nážin, *Events Leading to the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, ca. 1899 (fig. 2)



lugging travois laden with goods and children; and *thipis* bearing family symbols, as well as women fetching water, drying hides, preparing food, and caring for their children.<sup>27</sup> Matĥó Nážin ensures that the vibrancy of Lakĥóta culture is palpable in his portrayal; in so doing, however, he also makes evident that the onslaught of U.S. forces at the Little Bighorn was not a military encounter exclusively between armed combatants. This was an attack waged by soldiers against both Plains warriors and their families.

As Síčhánġu Lakĥóta historian Joseph M. Marshall III foregrounds in his study of the battle, the first casualties at Pĥežísla Wakpá were in fact the wives and young daughter of Húnkpaĥĥa Lakĥóta battle leader Phizí (Gall).<sup>28</sup> Then President Ulysses S. Grant's "pacification campaign" regularly brutalized unarmed non-combatants, razed landscapes, and destroyed food

sources across the Plains, following the "total war" strategy implemented by Union General William T. Sherman during the U.S. Civil War.<sup>29</sup> Sherman called for a similar annihilation program while acting as General of the Army under Grant during the Plains Wars; another former Union general, Philip Sheridan, served as commander of the Division of the Missouri.<sup>30</sup> Sheridan orchestrated Custer's 1874 military expedition into the Black Hills, which reported findings of valuable resources, including gold. The press seized this information and disseminated it widely, provoking a wave of prospectors to intrude upon Lakĥóta territory.<sup>31</sup> At the precise moment of this sudden inundation, Grant withdrew U.S. troops from the region with the express intention of exacerbating conflict between settler-trespassers and Lakĥótas.<sup>32</sup> The inevitable, ensuing discord provided his administration with the desired



fig. 4 Detail of Matĥó Nážin, *The Battle of the Little Bighorn*, ca. 1920 (fig. 1)



fig. 5 Šúnkawakḥián Šá (Red Horse; Mnikhówožu Lakḥóta, 1822–1907). Untitled from the Red Horse Pictographic Account of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, 1881. Graphite, colored pencil, and ink on paper, 24 × 36 in. (61 × 92 cm). National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (NAA MS 2367A, 085690000)

pretext for the military offensive they would launch in 1876, which fomented the Black Hills War.<sup>33</sup>

Custer regularly carried out Sherman and Sheridan’s genocidal tactics, making them an established feature of the Seventh Cavalry’s campaigns; indeed, they were often the deciding factor behind his so-called military “victories.”<sup>34</sup> Custer (and most other U.S. commanders during the Plains Wars) led surprise attacks, capturing and threatening the vulnerable in order to force the army’s opponents into submission. He adopted this approach during a strike against Black Kettle’s Tsistsistas camp at the Washita River in 1868, descending on them at dawn while they were asleep. There, his soldiers killed, raped, and captured women and children. The memory of this unfathomable loss was fresh in the minds of Tsistsistas warriors who were present alongside Lakḥótas at the Greasy Grass in 1876.<sup>35</sup>

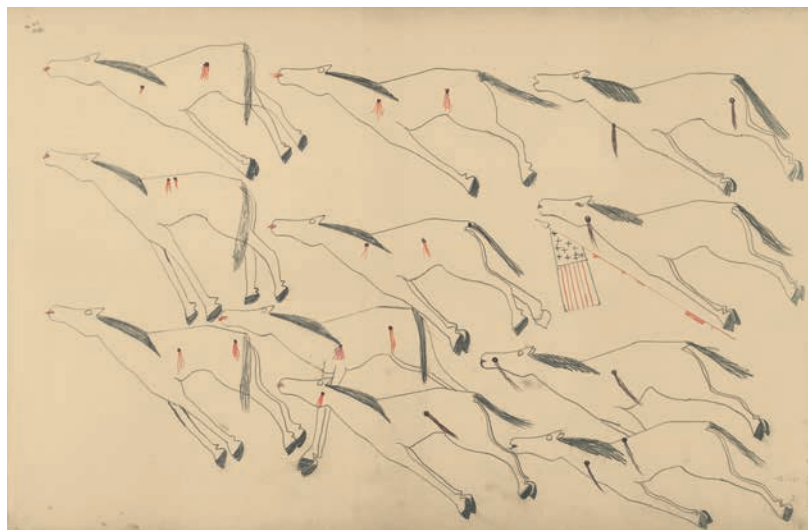
Across each of his four Little Bighorn portrayals, Matḥó Nážiṇ took care to depict the urgent flight of women, children, and the elderly from the encampment upon the Seventh Cavalry’s advance (fig. 3).<sup>36</sup> This specific vignette takes on an even more personal dimension with the knowledge that the veteran-artist’s own first wife and daughter were killed by the Seventh Cavalry at Wounded Knee Creek fourteen years later.<sup>37</sup> While the camp scene in the muslin at The Met is less detailed, it pointedly signals the wider communal context and interpersonal stakes of Custer’s violence (fig. 4). Through the vast scale and swirling scope of this image, Matḥó Nážiṇ conveys the ensuing chaos and cacophony. As he later recalled, “there were so many guns going off that I couldn’t hear them,” and “before the next morning, I couldn’t sleep, because I kept recalling the horrible things I had seen.”<sup>38</sup> The drawings of another Mnikhówožu veteran, Šúnkawakḥián Šá (Red Horse),

enumerate the visceral toll of the fighting, including the many horses slain in the course of battle (fig. 5). In this and four other sketches, their spare and recursive forms seem almost to float, weightless. Washed of any color save red from their wounds, their elegiac columns speak powerfully to the conflict’s carnage and loss.<sup>39</sup>

The gravity of the U.S. Army’s atrocities at the Little Bighorn and elsewhere is further compounded by the fact that they were committed without an official declaration of war by Congress.<sup>40</sup> These actions were extrajudicial crimes against humanity and, in the case of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, violated the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie. This treaty had preserved for Očhéthi Šakówiṇ not only *Ĥesápa* (the Black Hills of present-day South Dakota), but also exclusive hunting and occupation rights in the area north of the North Platte River and east of the Bighorn Mountains—where Custer’s invasion occurred.<sup>41</sup>

It is therefore significant that Matḥó Nážiṇ situates the battle in space with the representation of Pḥežísla Wakpá and a tributary (Muskkrat Creek), winding through the encampment.<sup>42</sup> As Kathleen Ash-Milby (Diné), Joyce Szabo, and other art historians have noted, landscape began to appear as a pictorial subject in the work of Native artists once dispossessed and distanced from their homelands through the imposition of the reservation system.<sup>43</sup> Ash-Milby suggests that “there is no strong tradition of landscape painting among Native people before the twentieth century because it was not needed. The places where these events transpired were familiar to both the artist/story-teller and the intended audience; these representations were created for a community that *shared experience and place*.”<sup>44</sup> In her estimation, place is a pervasive, mutual entity, intimately known and thus imaginatively, if not pictorially, present in pre-Reservation Era images. While Matḥó Nážiṇ may have elaborated the battle’s iconic landmarks as a result of such cultural shifts, it is also possible that his inclusion of these waterways was intended to convey a visual message of Lakḥóta sovereignty in the face of U.S. colonial oppression. In other words, the Little Bighorn River and Muskkrat Creek geographically locate the Seventh Cavalry’s incursion in site-specific terms, and thereby mark this attack within the bounds of unceded Lakḥóta Makḥóche (Lakḥóta Country).

Another important detail may also denote Lakḥóta resistance: the United States guidon, visible in the encampment scene. U.S. flag motifs frequently appear in Lakḥóta art made during the early reservation years, especially in beadwork.<sup>45</sup> A number of scholars contend that these images did not necessarily operate in patriotic







of resources needed for physical survival.”<sup>54</sup> Related to the latter category, military-sponsored extermination campaigns—led by Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan—also resulted in the slaughtering of millions of members of Pté Oyáte (Buffalo Nation) over the course of just two decades, on whom Plains communities depended for both physical and spiritual sustenance.<sup>55</sup> By 1895, fewer than one thousand buffalo survived.<sup>56</sup> Federal authorities openly wielded this anthropogenic extinction as the single most effective tool for starving and forcing Native communities into the reservation system.<sup>57</sup> Matĥó Nážin’s art practice took shape in the aftermath of this unspeakable, state-sanctioned violence, further testament to his resilience in the face of immense upheaval.

#### TESTIMONY THROUGH TRUE STORIES: EHÁŇNI WIĤHÓWOYAKE IN MATĥÓ NÁŽIN’S ART

After surviving the Black Hills War, Matĥó Nážin remained with Tĥášúnke Witkó’s Oglála Lakĥótas until they were forced to settle at Wazí Ahánhanj Oyánke (Pine Ridge Reservation) in southwestern South Dakota.<sup>58</sup> He was recruited by the impresario William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody to perform with the Wild West Show on European tours in 1887, 1889, and 1890.<sup>59</sup> During the last season, he sustained an injury that kept him behind at a hospital in Vienna; around that time, he also heard word of his wife’s and daughter’s deaths at the hands of the U.S. Cavalry at Wounded Knee, along with more than two hundred other Mnikhówožu Lakĥóta men, women, and children.<sup>60</sup> While convalescing and grieving, he formed a bond with his Austrian nurse, Louise Rienek; they later married and returned together to Pine Ridge in 1891. There, they cultivated a living through a combination of farming, cattle-raising, casket-making, midwifery, and art commissions, sharing their bounty with the wider Oglála community in keeping with Lakĥóta principles of generosity and kinship.<sup>61</sup> It was in this hybrid household that Matĥó Nážin grew his art practice. Louise’s fluency in English, German, and Lakĥóta, along with Matĥó Nážin’s community leadership, made their home a vibrant crossroads for travelers and neighbors alike. Evinced in the drawings themselves, this social context meaningfully mediated the artist’s compositions. As Christina (Standing Bear) Mesteth, Matĥó Nážin’s daughter (and Amiotte’s grandmother) recalled, “*Wašícus* [White people] were always coming around and having Standing Bear draw things for them on muslin.”<sup>62</sup> The prevalence of Little Bighorn subject matter in the surviving works bespeaks patrons’ preoccupation with the battle—as

well as the artist’s awareness of and responsiveness to this fact.<sup>63</sup> Though technically produced for sale to White buyers, Matĥó Nážin’s muslins also channeled Oĥéthi Šakówinj vitality and victory for the benefit of Lakĥóta audiences during and after their making.<sup>64</sup>

In 1931, toward the end of his life, Matĥó Nážin again imparted his memories of Pĥežísła Wakpá from his Pine Ridge home—this time, however, to furnish historical context and to vouch for the life narrative and spiritual vision that his friend Heĥáka Sápa (Nicholas Black Elk, an Oglála Lakĥóta *wiĥáša wakĥánj*, or spiritual leader) was sharing with Neihardt.<sup>65</sup> Neihardt compiled and published these testimonies in *Black Elk Speaks*, a 1932 chronicle that also featured illustrations by Matĥó Nážin.<sup>66</sup> Heĥáka Sápa’s son, Benjamin Black Elk, interpreted their accounts in a series of interviews that Neihardt’s daughter Enid recorded stenographically, a painstaking process memorialized in a photograph from her personal scrapbook (fig. 7).<sup>67</sup>

Lakĥóta culture holds that visions, battle trials, and historical incidents alike are to be narrated only by individuals who experience them, to prevent others from inappropriately claiming someone else’s accomplishment or story.<sup>68</sup> Though Heĥáka Sápa had been present, he was too young to fight in the Battle of the Little Bighorn; he thus left this event to the telling by those who had actively taken part: Matĥó Nážin and another veteran, Čhetán Máza (Iron Hawk).<sup>69</sup> These respected confidants served the additional purpose of bearing witness to the truthfulness of Heĥáka Sápa’s story. Following an interview session on May 21, Enid Neihardt attested to this corroborative dynamic in her diary: “We learned a lot from the old men, Black Elk, Iron Hawk, and Standing Bear. They are telling us about the life of Black Elk and how it corresponds to Black Elk’s vision.”<sup>70</sup> As Heĥáka Sápa underscored in the interviews, these various episodes—whether told by him or by his companions—were true experiences, not fictional tales.<sup>71</sup> Heĥáka Sápa drew this distinction by engaging the Lakĥóta verb *wóyakapi*, the third-person form of the verb *wóyaka*, meaning “to tell things, tell a story, relate, speak.”<sup>72</sup> This verb anchors the term *eháŇni wiĥhówoyake*, which Amiotte has described as denoting events that have “taken place within the living memory of the people as Lakota Oyate,” and represents a type of storytelling actively employed by his ancestor during family and community gatherings.<sup>73</sup> *EháŇni wiĥhówoyake* should be understood as distinct from *eháŇni ohúnkakanj*, which instead feature mythic stories and fables drawn from the very distant past.<sup>74</sup> The premise of truth in the recounting of *eháŇni*

fig. 7 From left to right: Enid Neihardt, Heñáka Sápa (Black Elk), Benjamin Black Elk, Matłó Nážiŋ (Standing Bear), and John G. Neihardt during the interview sessions for *Black Elk Speaks* in Manderson, South Dakota, May 1931. Photograph by Hilda Neihardt Petri, from the scrapbook of Enid Neihardt Fink, John G. Neihardt Trust



*wičhówoyake* is of such significance that Dakhóta writer Elizabeth Cook-Lynn stresses its relevance in both Lakłóta spaces of oratory and federal legal testimony, while Estes emphasizes the role of these true stories in calling for the return of stolen lands and addressing histories of genocide.<sup>75</sup>

It is possible that Heñáka Sápa made a point of highlighting the testimonial validity of these tellings due to the doubt settler-interrogators often cast on Indigenous insight. The Battle of the Little Bighorn, which resulted in the death of Custer's entire battalion, represented an especially fraught instance of this pattern. In art historian Janet Catherine Berlo's words, "there were no white survivors and no white eyewitnesses, so there was no 'official' version by the hegemonic culture."<sup>76</sup> Many White officials, soldiers, and writers construed the conflict's outcome as shocking, impossible, and inexplicable, and they pressured Native eyewitnesses to substantiate theories that were, to them, more tolerably aligned with settler-colonial narratives of White supremacy.<sup>77</sup> The causes and conditions of the Seventh Cavalry's demise were detailed by Native American participants to outsiders again and again, frequently under great duress and amid what Dakhóta historian Jeanne M. Oyawin Eder has described as a serious "fear of reprisals"—especially when their version of events did not align favorably with the prevailing mythos around Custer.<sup>78</sup>

Historian Herman J. Viola and others have noted how White interrogators tended to reject Indigenous

responses due to their contradiction of the prevailing assumption that Custer and his men mounted a last stand of heroic martyrdom.<sup>79</sup> This mythic construct cemented into an enduring pictorial trope after the first newspaper illustration of the event was published by William de la Montagne Cary in the New York *Daily Graphic* a few weeks later (fig. 8).<sup>80</sup> In his precedent-setting image, Cary visualized the Seventh Cavalry valiantly holding their ground, Custer front and center. Archaeological findings at the battle site, however, have since confirmed that Native American testimony communicated the fundamental facts from the beginning: Custer fatally misjudged the size, ammunition capacity, martial skill, and resilience of his Lakłóta, Tsistsistas, and Hinono'ei opponents.<sup>81</sup> His dissolution came quickly "in the face of superior firepower," and the ensuing panic prevented troopers from forming any meaningful defense, let alone a "last stand."<sup>82</sup> According to one count, Greasy Grass events appear in paintings and drawings by at least thirty Plains artists, including Matłó Nážiŋ.<sup>83</sup> Together, their works belie the dramatic flourish and cool resolve of "Custer's Last Stand" imagery that characterized compositions by White artists.<sup>84</sup>

When Plains warrior artists depicted the Battle of the Little Bighorn, they did so for many cultural reasons beyond settler demands. The portrayal of war honors—often referred to as *coup* (French for "strokes")—in paintings on hide, muslin, and paper was in keeping with long-standing warrior artistic precedents.<sup>85</sup> In her



study of Dakhóta writing, pictography, and world view, Onondawaga (Seneca) scholar Penelope Myrtle Kelsey highlights how visual representations of war constituted vital historical records that were subject to rigorous protocols of public scrutiny and verification.<sup>86</sup> Amiotte likens autobiographical images of warriors' deeds to military honors, such as ribbons and medals, intended to "record and commemorate . . . acts of valor, sacrifice, and skill."<sup>87</sup> To this end, Plains pictorial arts were historically intended for public display and validation, whether on hide worn as a cloak or stretched across *thípis*.<sup>88</sup> As Tsistsistas leader Ben Nighthorse Campbell has explained, these acts of courage required a separate eyewitness for their visual representation as well as their verbal acknowledgment.<sup>89</sup> Mat'ó Nážin's participation in the Neihardt interviews reflected this protocol, with his presence indicating his personal sanction of Hełáka Sápa's story. As explored below, the *cháŋni wičhówoyake* of the battle he and Čhetán Máza relayed there also echoed the relational, dialogic stance of the drawings he made of the event.

Amid this historical and cultural context, Mat'ó Nážin's muslin emerges as a form of testimony, a material conduit for bearing witness to collective resistance and resilience in the face of trauma—and one that

adamantly refutes the narrative of Indigenous aggression and White innocence that Last Stand images would have viewers believe.<sup>90</sup> Since the late twentieth century and the emergence of fields like witness and holocaust studies, testimony has increasingly been studied as a generative discourse for representing the historical trauma of war, violence, and genocide in ways that expand beyond "legal, religious, or otherwise formal" frameworks.<sup>91</sup> Holocaust survivor and scholar Elie Wiesel construes testimonial discourse as a diverse representational mode that elicits the bearing of witness as a creative process.<sup>92</sup> For survivors of genocide, war, and persecution, witnessing also carries the important role of "sensemaking," the social process of imbuing collective experiences with validity and meaning.<sup>93</sup> In the words of philosophy scholar Kelly Oliver, witnessing "in both senses as addressing and responding, testifying and listening—is a commitment to embracing the responsibility of constituting communities."<sup>94</sup>

Testimony, in consolidating community and effecting the reciprocity of address and response, has been regarded by Indigenous scholars as a remedial practice to the rupturing effects of settler colonialism, as well as a vehicle for cultural preservation and reclamation. Gloria Bird, a poet, scholar, and member of the Spokane Tribe of Washington State, regards witnessing and

fig. 8 William de la Montagne Cary (1840–1922). *The Battle on the Little Big Horn River—The Death Struggle of General Custer*. Engraving in *Daily Graphic* (New York), July 19, 1876, 122



testimony as “viable tools that serve the purposes of decolonization by providing details of individual processing of the complexities of inheritance that living in the aftermath of colonizing provides.”<sup>95</sup> In this vein, Māori professor of Indigenous education Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou, Tuhourangi) claims testimony as a central project of Indigenous researchers and communities. Smith describes testimony as capable of *making space* for the reclamation of history, culture, and self-determination, with a “sense of immediacy.”<sup>96</sup> She writes: “Indigenous testimonies are a way of talking about an extremely painful event or series of events. The formality of testimony provides a structure within which events can be related and feelings expressed. A testimony is also a form through which the voice of a ‘witness’ is accorded space and protection.”<sup>97</sup> Non-Native scholars like Julia Emberley, Carla Taunton, and others have also posited Indigenous storytelling—whether in writing, word, or visual media—as a form of testimony and resistance to violence and oppression.<sup>98</sup> The large-scale drawings made by Matĥó Nážin of the Battle of the Little Bighorn align with this testimonial framework through their role in supplying an essential basis for the veteran-artist to fortify community through the act of bearing witness.

#### WITNESS AS LISTENING AND REFUGE IN THE ÓZAY

For Lakĥótas, pictorial and oral histories are symbiotically related, preserving and affirming cultural memory by virtue of its retelling through visual and verbal means.<sup>99</sup> Historical depictions of *coups*, for instance, carried with them a “verbal parallel.”<sup>100</sup> Images by Plains warrior artists precipitated a structured form of oratory that elaborated their feats; *coup* narratives and *coup* drawings were therefore closely interrelated.<sup>101</sup> Métis scholar and artist Sherry Farrell Racette speaks further to this visual-verbal nexus, one that figures in many Indigenous epistemologies across time: “Oral traditions were never solely oral. Images and objects were a form of visual literacy that through mnemonic practice, supported oral text rather than replaced it. . . . (O)bjects engage individual and collective memory and clear space for story and history, not only of the individuals who visit them, but for the ancestors who created and used them.”<sup>102</sup> Storytelling and images intertwine, aligning past and present, people and objects in reciprocal relationship, and giving rise to various forms of testimony. Like Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Farrell Racette speaks to the ways in which an object—as a material concentration of memory—brings forth and safeguards shared space, or common ground, for those engaging it

to conjure story and reinforce connection to heritage and past events. In this way, the object catalyzes a call-and-response—the call-and-response inherent to a testimonial utterance.

It is through family oral history that we also perceive how Matĥó Nážin’s muslins were themselves a kind of gathering place, how they cleared space for witnessing. Forced acculturation by missionaries and federal officials involved the replacement of the *thípi* with one-room log cabins.<sup>103</sup> The federal government awarded special privileges and rations to those who adopted log houses as their residence; often, however, Native people continued to maintain family *thípis* alongside their cabins.<sup>104</sup> Matĥó Nážin and his family built and resided in a cabin, with a shingled roof, wooden floors, and frame windows, but also kept canvas tents in the summer months.<sup>105</sup> Matĥó Nážin often utilized the plain-woven cotton fabric of muslin yardage for his artistic support, laying long stretches of the cloth across the dining room table until it hung down from the sides.<sup>106</sup> According to family oral history, Amiotte has described the way in which his great-grandfather’s artistic process involved the active congregation of peers and fellow Greasy Grass veterans. To accommodate them all, Louise would remove furniture from the main room of their cabin. Amiotte describes how the dialogue unfolded after a shared meal:

Standing Bear would unroll the unfinished muslin painting, holding it up to show the drawings to his age mates. In turn, they would verify if he had properly portrayed them and the people they knew in the various scenes. Seeing the painted images, the guests inevitably recalled memories. People might talk about other details of the events of scenes portrayed. The discourse continued late into the night and early morning hours. Upon completing the entire painted muslin, Standing Bear would host another feast, and the guests would give their final imprimatur to the work.<sup>107</sup>

The interpersonal mantle of Matĥó Nážin’s artistic output is made vivid through this passage of family memory. His paintings hum with this colloquy and emerge as the calibrated products of group knowledge, care, and contribution—in much the same way he inflected Heĥáka Sápa’s verbal story during the Neihardt interview.

Ihąŋktĥuŋwaŋ (Yankton) Dakĥóta ethnographer Ella Cara Deloria identified the practice of seeing, speaking, and hearing Lakĥóta images as one in keeping with the *ózay* tradition, an aspect of Plains



fig. 9 Richard Albert Throssel (Cree, 1882–1933). Interior of a Crow tipi, Crow Agency, Montana, 1907. University of Wyoming American Heritage Center, Richard Throssel Papers, accession no. 02394, box 39

fig. 10 Wašičun Tħašúnke's (American Horse's) bedroom, Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, 1891. Photograph by Clarence Grant Morledge (1865–1948). Western History Collection, Denver Public Library (X-31435)

material culture that was maintained into and beyond the Reservation Era. In *Speaking of Indians*, she wrote of this “ingenious adaptation”:

At one period they transferred the art decorations of the tipi to the loghouse. Out of G.I. muslin they made very large wall coverings, a carryover from the dew curtain of a tipi and called by the same term, ozan. On these they painted beautiful designs and made lively black and white drawings of historical scenes of hunting or battles or peace-making between tribes, and courtship scenes, games, and suchlike activities of the past. People went visiting just to see one another's pictographs and to hear the stories they preserved (emphasis added).<sup>108</sup>



In Deloria's fluid pairing of both the aural and the visual, the multisensorial dimensions of Lakłóta image-making and image-telling take shape. As she indicates, *ózan*, or dew curtains, bridged not only two distinct dwellings and modes of life for Lakłóta people, but also represent what Amiotte has referred to as the missing link in the “development-evolution of the Lakota painting tradition.”<sup>109</sup> With the decimation of buffalo herds, muslin came to supplant hide out of necessity and was among the annuity goods distributed to Native communities by the U.S. government following treaty obligations established in 1867–68.<sup>110</sup> Like hide, muslin served a dual functional-aesthetic purpose.<sup>111</sup> In log cabins, muslin provided interior adornment and a protective layer for occupants against drafts and loose chinking, and signified one of the hallmarks of a well-kept household. Families with gifted artists—both men and women—filled these broad swaths of cloth with narrative drawings or geometric designs in continuation of the *ózan* tradition, resulting in a form of painting on canvas that was particularly appealing to non-Native collectors. According to Amiotte: “In time, tribal artists, like Standing Bear and Louise, saw the financial benefits of such paintings specifically for sale and no longer as an enhancement of the *ózan*.”<sup>112</sup>

The *ózan* as an embellished *thípi* liner is documented in a 1907 image by Cree photographer Richard Albert Throssel (fig. 9). Suspended along the lower half of the *thípi*'s interior, the *ózan* also provided privacy for those inside. This speaks again to the protective properties of both the liner and the larger *thípi*; in the words of Apsáalooke (Crow) historian Alma Hogan Snell, “The lodge . . . is a place of refuge. It protects you.”<sup>113</sup> The *ózan* would have carried forth vestiges of these safeguarding attributes in its adjustment as a cabin liner; its transitional, unembellished form is evident in the bedroom of Wašičun Tħašúnke (American Horse; Oglála Lakłóta), who lived at Pine Ridge near Matłó Nážin (fig. 10).<sup>114</sup>

Though there is no family record to show that Matłó Nážin ever hung his muslins along the walls of the cabin, the oral process surrounding these works still aligned with what Kelsey calls “the moment of narration” that the *ózan* precipitated—the seeing and hearing of *eháŋni wičhówoyake*, channeled through the images they featured.<sup>115</sup> Amiotte, an artist in his own right, has produced collages that recast this testimonial discourse amid reproductions of family photographs and drawings rendered in his great-grandfather's style. In *When We Gathered* (2002), for instance, Amiotte commingles images of Matłó Nážin and Louise, as well





fig. 11 Arthur Amiotte  
(Oglála Laklǫ́ta, b. 1942).  
*When We Gathered*, 2002.  
Mixed media on paper,  
28 × 22 in. (71.1 × 55.9 cm).  
Private collection

as his grandparents, great-aunts, and others, alongside the family cabin (fig. 11). They are shown congregated beneath a clouded sky in which Amiotte has embedded his own reprisal of a buffalo hunt drawing by Matłó Nážin, copied from another muslin by his ancestor in the Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society. Tucked into the lower left corner is a piece of ledger paper. On it, the artist has written, “When my friends and family gathered we remembered and talked about all the things we did and all that happened to us long ago and now.” Here, Amiotte not only threads throughout the composition a sense of the image- and memory-driven discourse Matłó Nážin and peers engaged in, but also directly inhabits his great-grandfather’s voice. This strategy recurs throughout Amiotte’s collages and underscores the visual-verbal fulcrum of Laklǫ́ta pictorial practice.<sup>116</sup>

The *ózay*’s narration recalls Dylan Robinson’s assertion of the expansive role that listening plays in

Stó:lō and other Indigenous concepts of witnessing, which move beyond the ocular-centric premise of eye-witness testimony. Robinson argues that listening is “a form of attention in which we are attentive not just to sound but to the fullest range of sensory experience that connects us to place.”<sup>117</sup> In making this point, Robinson invokes an installation curated by Jordan Wilson (Musqueam) and Sue Rowley, “*časnałam*, the City Before the City,” which was on view at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, in 2015–16. The exhibition, dedicated to the original Musqueam city in Vancouver, explores this history not through settler-oriented object collection and display culture, but rather through a single darkened room dedicated to surround-sound audio featuring members of the Musqueam nation.<sup>118</sup> The room, incorporating only chairs and a table covered with an oilcloth and several photographs, was enlivened through an immersive audio installation of a conversation between Musqueam leaders sharing memories in their language (fig. 12). Wilson called this installation *sq̓əq̓ip*—*gathered together*, a title that evokes Amiotte’s own homage to community in *When We Gathered*.<sup>119</sup> As Robinson argues, *sq̓əq̓ip* entails an active kind of “listening in relation” that encompasses an idea of the hearing of, in addition to the bearing of, witness. Scholars Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas similarly describe the specific form of address that bearing witness enacts as one that “occurs only in a framework of relationality” between the “survivor-witness and the listener-witness.”<sup>120</sup> Wilson also claims oral history’s role in securing communal cohesion and validation, and clarifies how witnessing is done in recognition of the fact that “knowledge, history, [and] life narratives are dispersed amongst many” and that “gathering together as individuals is akin to bringing together components of a history.”<sup>121</sup>

The Laklǫ́ta notion of witnessing is also aligned with the relational basis of listening. The maxim *mitákuye oyásin* (“I am related to all things,” or “all my relatives”) conveys the fundamental Laklǫ́ta belief that all life forms, human and non-human, are endowed with personhood and united in kinship networks involving “reciprocal obligations, responsibilities, and mutual respect.”<sup>122</sup> This mentality is reinforced by the symbolic valence of ears in Laklǫ́ta rhetorical discourse, referenced with particular frequency in treaty councils.<sup>123</sup> Those with “no ears” were those who refused to listen; conversely, those described as having “open,” or “pierced,” ears were understood as receptive to truth, reciprocity, and responsibility. This metaphor carried



*fig. 12* Jordan Wilson (Musqueam). “*s̓q̓əq̓ip*—gathered together,” 2015. 4-channel audio installation, 25 mins., featuring the voices of Howard E. Grant, Howard J. Grant, Larry Grant, Wendy Grant-John, Johnny Louis, and Mary Roberts. Installed in the exhibition “*čəsnaʔəm*, the City Before the City” (2015–16), Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver



*fig. 13* Infrared reflectogram of *The Battle of the Little Bighorn* (fig. 1). Infrared reflectography completed with an OSIRIS InGaAs near-infrared camera with a 6-element, 150 mm focal length, f/5.6-f/45 lens; 900–1700nm spectral response



special significance in the lead-up to the Battle of the Little Bighorn, when, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, Tłiatłáŋka Iyótanka received a prophetic vision at the Sun Dance. As recounted by a family member, “He [Tłiatłáŋka Iyótanka] heard a voice from above, so he looked there, he said. ‘These have no ears,’ he said, and he looked beneath the sun; like so many grasshoppers, with heads down they came; that is what he saw, he said. ‘These, they will die, but you must take

none of their possessions from them,’ he said.”<sup>124</sup> The abrogation of the Fort Laramie Treaty at the Little Bighorn thus signaled to Lakłhótas that U.S. soldiers had acted in bad faith, or “with no ears”—a willful unhearing perpetuated again through the ultimate rejection of Indigenous survivor testimony.<sup>125</sup> Accordingly, Matłhó Nážin shows in the muslin in *The Met*, U.S. soldiers splayed and tumbling from the battle register above, seemingly toward the encampments—“like so many grasshoppers.”<sup>126</sup> With this visual intonation in mind, it is clear that the gatherings—and listenings—occasioned by Matłhó Nážin’s testimonial muslins served to pierce settler-imposed silence.

The precision with which Matłhó Nážin delineated his composition marks a final, revelatory index of the image’s verbal overtones. An examination of the muslin in *The Met* with infrared reflectography in 2021 uncovered very few corrections or underdrawings, thereby implying how well-practiced the artist was in both the battle’s depiction and diction—conducted again and again, across time, toward the maintenance of history, memory, and relationships (fig. 13). Amiotte speaks to the importance of rhythm and cadence in Lakłhóta oral tradition, emphasizing the crucial role of “repeated listenings and tellings” as an “actual ingredient in the process of absorbing the spoken message.” He concludes, “the capacity to *remember* what one was taught”

represents the “very foundation of the Lakḥóta way of life.”<sup>127</sup> As family oral history relates, these muslins, or *ózan*, served such an intergenerational, didactic purpose in the midst of their production. Though Matḥó Nážin did not explicitly refer to one of these muslins during the Neihardt interviews, the constellation of depicted incidents nevertheless corresponds with the recollection he verbally delivered there. In the syncope of figures across this and other muslins, we can discern a kind of visual cadence that echoes the verbal framework of his *eháñni wičhówoyake*.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, if we allow an awareness of *eháñni wičhówoyake* to animate our understanding of his art, we sense how a composition like this would have aided in visually mapping the stages of Matḥó Nážin’s testimony, enhancing his narration with additional layers of detail. To borrow Deloria’s resonant phrase, we might begin to see and hear this image, to attune ourselves to the multiple perceptive registers it activated.

#### OPENING OUR EARS

Matḥó Nážin’s *ózan* prompted opportunities for bearing and receiving witness in kind, registering multi-vocal contributions at the level of form and function, and acting in contrast to the one-sided accumulation of information engaged by settler-artists. Moreover, the muslin’s materiality reinforced its purpose as a kind of gathering place: the textile’s broad expanse served to physically ground viewers together in space, just as its composition grounded their memories. Shielding, grounding, and fostering testimonial exchange in both image and story, the *ózan* acts as a material and conceptual vehicle for Lakḥótas to bear, and hear, witness through *eháñni wičhówoyake*—to the Greasy Grass, the Sun Dance, and other events considered important by Matḥó Nážin’s community. In this way, Matḥó Nážin’s image occasioned the recitation, reclamation, and preservation of Lakḥóta spiritual and cultural values amid colonialism and cultural genocide, carrying forth a message of resilience that rang throughout his community despite settler attempts to muffle it. This

work, which the veteran-artist conceived to communicate across Native and non-Native space, invites settlers (like me—and perhaps other readers of this article and viewers of his work) to tune into its enduring frequencies. By cultivating an awareness of the vital oral vibrations indelible to Matḥó Nážin’s visual testimony through *eháñni wičhówoyake*, by centering and honoring Lakḥóta language and ways of knowing—by opening our ears—we might work to better hear the sovereign histories these cultural belongings contain and the decolonial resistance they resound.

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## NOTES

- 1 Unless quoted from an original source, the Lakŋóta orthography I use in this article follows the diacritical markings in Ullrich 2011. Wherever possible in this article, I use Lakŋóta or other Indigenous names, as opposed to their English translations. I have had the privilege to begin learning this language, Lakŋótiyapi, thanks to the important work of the Lakŋóta Language Consortium (<https://lakhota.org>).
- 2 Hämäläinen 2019, ix. Očhéthi Šakówin (Seven Council Fires) refers to the confederation of seven Lakŋóta, Dakhóta, and Dakŋóta (sometimes called Nakŋóta) *oyáte* (people or nation), who together compose what is also sometimes called the “Great Sioux Nation.” The term “Lakŋóta” encompasses the seven tribes of the westernmost, or Thítŋunwan (Teton), band of Očhéthi Šakówin: the Oglála (Oglala), Sičhánǵu (Brulé), Húnkpapŋa (Hunkpapa), Mnikhówožu (Minneconjou), Itázipcho (Sans Arc), Oóhenunpa (Two Kettle), and Sihásapa (Blackfeet).
- 3 DeMallie 1984, 184.
- 4 J. Neihardt 2014, 315n9. The wider Plains Wars involved a series of conflicts that took place from the early 1850s through the late 1870s between Native Americans and the United States over control of the Great Plains, the region between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. The Black Hills War is also sometimes called the “Great Sioux War of 1876.”
- 5 Buffalo Bill Center of the West, “Selected, Annotated Bibliography for the Battle of Many Names,” 2021, <https://centerofthewest.org/research/mccracken-research-library/bibliographies/battle-of-many-names/>. As such, Lakŋóta and English battle names will be used interchangeably throughout this essay to reflect this diversity of perspectives.
- 6 Amiotte to the author, June 2, 2020.
- 7 Based on *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “concentration,” accessed 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concentration>.
- 8 Jantzer-White 1996, 51.
- 9 Rice 1989, 3; Gonzalez and Cook-Lynn 1999, 62.
- 10 Horton 2020, 51–52.
- 11 Horton 2018, 84.
- 12 Estes 2017.
- 13 In addition to the work at The Met, Matŋó Nážin created three other known images of the battle between 1891 and 1933, now held in collections at the Foundation for Preservation of American Indian Art and Culture in Chicago, the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the Karl May Museum in Radebeul, Germany. Amiotte, Warren, and Berlo 2014, 23.
- 14 Hopkins 2016, 78; Robinson 2020, 71. Hopkins (2019) notes that the term “deep listening” is often associated with the late composer Pauline Oliveros; see Oliveros 2010.
- 15 Hopkins and Ramírez 2020.
- 16 Matŋó Nážin in DeMallie 1984, 184; Marshall 2007, 1.
- 17 Powell 1993, 81–82.
- 18 Lookingbill 2015, 21.
- 19 Deloria 1998, 17–26; Posthumus 2015, 190.
- 20 DeMallie 1993, 517.
- 21 Torrence 2018, 30.
- 22 Berlo 2000, 15.
- 23 Seven battalions commanded by Major Marcus Reno and Captain Frederick Benteen were also present at the battle. Unlike those under Custer’s command, their forces were able to hold out until reinforcements from General Alfred H. Terry’s column arrived the next day. See Fox 1997, 159.
- 24 Matŋó Nážin would later isolate this incident in a drawing for *Black Elk Speaks* (J. Neihardt 1932).
- 25 Matŋó Nážin in DeMallie 1984, 186–87.
- 26 For an in-depth description of the Animal Dreamers’ Dances along the Rosebud that Matŋó Nážin pictures, see Powell 1993, 84–87.
- 27 Ibid., 87. See also Berlo 2006, 9.
- 28 Marshall 2007, 1.
- 29 Wright 2016, xxxi and 59.
- 30 Lookingbill 2015, 21; Wright 2016, 59.
- 31 *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* 1875, 127.
- 32 Gray 1976, 23–26.
- 33 Ostler 2004, 60–61; Wright 2016, 86.
- 34 Wright 2016, xvii.
- 35 Marshall 2007, 11.
- 36 It is important to note, however, that many women among Plains nations were warriors, and a number also actively fought at the Little Bighorn, such as Tŋašína Máni (Moving Robe Woman). Hardorff 1997, 93; Estes 2019, 114.
- 37 Thomas 2009, 184; Amiotte, Warren, and Berlo 2014, 4, 49.
- 38 Here, I am summarizing the testimony provided by Matŋó Nážin to John Neihardt in 1931; DeMallie 1984, 184–89.
- 39 Berlo 1996, 35; Sagan 2017, 31. Horses hold deep cultural significance for Lakŋótas; for an exploration of this rich relationship, see Horse Capture and Her Many Horses 2006.
- 40 Wright 2016, xiii.
- 41 Ibid., 63 and 55–56. For a longer history of Očhéthi Šakówin resistance, see both Ostler 2004 and Estes 2019.
- 42 Burke 2019.
- 43 Ash-Milby 2007, 23; Szabo 1994, 56.
- 44 Ash-Milby 2007, 22.
- 45 Bad Hand 1993, 11–13; Schmittou and Logan 2002, 560.
- 46 Schmittou and Logan 2002, 579.
- 47 Amiotte in discussion with the author, August 24, 2021.
- 48 See J. Neihardt 1932, 106; DeMallie 1984, 180n20.
- 49 Powell 1993, 81.
- 50 Burns 2019.
- 51 As Matŋó Nážin related during the interview with Neihardt, “I felt that the white men would just simply wipe us out and there would be no Indian nation. I felt this when I was a [boy, old enough to realize].” DeMallie 1984, 106.
- 52 Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, 9, quoted in Estes 2019, 79. See also Ostler 2019, in particular appendix 1, 383–87, and Madley 2016.
- 53 Quoted in Estes 2019, 78.
- 54 Ibid., 78–79.
- 55 Hansen 2013, 39.
- 56 Calloway 2014, 32.
- 57 Posthumus 2016, 278; Amiotte 2018, xvii.
- 58 Sprague 2004, 7.
- 59 Warren 2005, 390–93; see also Burns 2018 and Kasson 2000.
- 60 Estes 2019, 122–31.
- 61 Warren 2014, 5; Horton 2018, 80–81.
- 62 Amiotte 1983, 12.
- 63 Greene 2012, 58.
- 64 Horton 2018, 84.
- 65 Matŋó Nážin in DeMallie 1984, 186–87. Standing Bear’s translated testimony of the Battle of the Little Bighorn also appears in Hammer 1976, 214–15, and Hardorff 1997, 56–60.
- 66 J. Neihardt 1932.
- 67 Photograph by Hilda Neihardt Petri, in the scrapbook of Enid Neihardt Fink, John G. Neihardt Trust, University of Missouri, Columbia.

- 68 Amiotte 1983, 22.
- 69 DeMallie 1984, 32.
- 70 Quoted in *ibid.*, 39.
- 71 Heñáka Sápa (Black Elk) in *ibid.*, 376.
- 72 *Ibid.* These definitions are based on the entry for *wóyaka* as recorded in the *New Lakŕóta Dictionary* (Ullrich 2011).
- 73 Amiotte 1983, 32–33.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 31. See also One Feather 1974, 11.
- 75 Gonzalez and Cook-Lynn 1999, 59 and 62; Estes 2013, 191–92. For more on the “use and acceptance of oral traditions in law cases dealing with Native American protest and consequences based upon treaties,” see Medicine 1976.
- 76 Berlo 1990, 134.
- 77 Viola 1999, 24.
- 78 Eder 1999, 64; Liberty 1996, 128.
- 79 Flores 2010, 87.
- 80 Goetzmann and Goetzmann 1986, 222; Dippie 1996, 213; Viola 1999, 24.
- 81 Viola 1999, 24; Fox 1993; Scott et al. 1989.
- 82 Viola 1999, 24–25.
- 83 Thomas 2009.
- 84 Burnham 2006, 135.
- 85 Medicine Crow 1992, 41–42. As Apsáalooke historian Joseph Medicine Crow explains, the term *coup* was “borrowed from the French frontiersmen,” and the aim of Plains warfare emphasized besting an enemy rather than killing them.
- 86 Kelsey 2008, 28.
- 87 Amiotte, Warren, and Berlo 2014, 25; Szabo 1993, 1.
- 88 Brumble 1988, 51–52, 54; Sagan 2017, 26.
- 89 In Cheyenne leader Ben Nighthorse Campbell’s words: “Coups and battle honors *had* to be confirmed by witnesses.” Kimberly Roppolo Wieser goes on to explain, “Then and only then were they recorded pictographically to aid in their preservation in the oral tradition of the people.” Both in [Wieser] 2007, 541.
- 90 Estes 2017.
- 91 Gelfert 2014, 13.
- 92 Wiesel 1990; Hirsch 2012, 178.
- 93 Gelfert 2014, 17.
- 94 Oliver 2015, 485. See also Felman and Laub 1992.
- 95 Bird 1998, 29.
- 96 Smith 2012, 145.
- 97 *Ibid.*
- 98 Emberley 2014; Taunton 2010.
- 99 Amiotte, Warren, and Berlo 2014, 64. For a sustained analysis of Lakŕóta oral tradition and narrative composition, see Red Shirt 2016.
- 100 Greene 2015, 217–18.
- 101 *Ibid.*, 218.
- 102 Farrell Racette 2011, 41–42.
- 103 Hansen 2011, 53.
- 104 H. Neihardt 1995, 50–51; Amiotte, Warren, and Berlo 2014, 5–6.
- 105 The location of the photograph of the cabin is unknown.
- 106 Berlo and Amiotte (2016, 43–44) note how cloth emerged as a significant trade good on the Great Plains.
- 107 Amiotte, Warren, and Berlo 2014, 13.
- 108 Deloria 1998, 60–61.
- 109 Correspondence with Amiotte, December 9, 2020. See also the brief summary of the *ózan* provided by Albers and Medicine 1983, 125, and Hansen 2011, 54.
- 110 These treaties included the Medicine Lodge Treaty (1867) and the Fort Laramie Treaty (1868); see Rosoff and Zeller 2011, 9.

For a technical analysis of another nineteenth-century Plains drawing on muslin, see Pearlstein, Brostoff, and Trentelman 2009. In it, the authors note that from 1850 to 1930, bleached and unbleached cotton muslin was widely available throughout the United States in a variety of widths and weights.

- 111 Correspondence with Amiotte, December 9, 2020.
- 112 *Ibid.*
- 113 Quoted in Hansen 2011, 45.
- 114 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 115 Kelsey 2008, 42.
- 116 Berlo 2000, 150.
- 117 Robinson 2020, 71.
- 118 *Ibid.*, 68.
- 119 Wilson 2016.
- 120 Guerin and Hallas 2007, 10.
- 121 Wilson quoted in Robinson 2020, 70; Wilson 2016, 482.
- 122 Posthumus 2018, 14. See also Amiotte 1987, 87, and Deloria 1998, 84.
- 123 DeMallie 1993, 517.
- 124 Cecilia One Bull Brown, the daughter of One Bull (Sitting Bull’s nephew); quoted in DeMallie 1993, 519.
- 125 *Ibid.*, 522.
- 126 Horton 2020, 59.
- 127 Amiotte 1983, 22.
- 128 Though no known Lakŕóta transcription of the Neihardt interview exists, the translated telling of this experience is recorded in J. Neihardt 1932.

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# Jacob Lawrence's Work Theme, 1945–46

**CLAIRE ITTNER**

In December 1945, the same month he returned to New York from service in the Coast Guard during World War II, Jacob Lawrence began work on *The Shoemaker*, a water-color and gouache painting of a Black craftsperson in his workshop (fig. 1). Surrounded by the products of his labor—the strappy heels and sleek leather loafers that are heaped and hung around him—the shoemaker is poised to create still more, his massive hands wielding tools that will slice through a waiting piece of yellow leather. Rendered in the bold, unmodulated tones of vermilion red, cadmium yellow, blue-green viridian, cobalt blue, deep black, and earthy ocher associated with the artist's earlier historical cycles, the painting seemed to signal Lawrence's return, his own eagerness to get down to work.<sup>1</sup>





*fig. 1* Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917–2000). *The Shoemaker*, 1945–46. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 22¾ × 31 in. (57.8 × 78.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, George A. Hearn Fund, 1946 (46.73.2)

By all accounts, he did just that. *The Shoemaker* was likely the first in a robust group of paintings that Lawrence would make the following year, all focused on the work and workspaces of Black people across a range of occupations: cabinetmakers and watchmakers, steelworkers and stenographers, lecturers and barbers. Many are close-up images of individual figures at work, rendering them formally different from the dynamic street scenes and cityscapes with which the artist had captured life in Harlem since the mid-1930s. They might also be considered a focusing of that interest, however, as if Lawrence were painting the interior of each workshop on a single Harlem street.<sup>2</sup> The resulting dozen paintings offer a cross-sectional look at Black laborers, craftspeople, technicians, professionals, and other makers—a set of paintings coherent in theme as well as palette.

Despite this coherence, however, these paintings have not previously been considered in relation to one another. Part of the blame rests on the gallery system that was consolidating around Lawrence at the time, redefining his work. Edith Halpert, Lawrence's dealer and director of the Downtown Gallery, sold the paintings individually as they were completed; *The Shoemaker*, for example, entered the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in April 1946, four months after Lawrence first began drafting it. Halpert's approach was distinctly different for Lawrence's historical series, which she made concerted efforts to place with single collectors or museums. She famously negotiated the joint sale of *The Migration Series* (1940–41) to the Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for example.

This article argues that Lawrence's Work paintings should be considered together, as one of the first of the artist's "themes"—a term Lawrence used to distinguish these groups of paintings from his more carefully planned, often historical "series."<sup>3</sup> The Work paintings should be held together, moreover, not despite but because of the way they were made and then sold, as Lawrence was settling into his role as a represented artist in a major commercial gallery. He was adjusting to a set of working conditions different from those he had encountered previously (as a student, a nonprofit-funded fellow, an artist-employee of the Works Progress Administration [WPA], or a combat artist).<sup>4</sup> This was the moment of Lawrence's transformation, as critics later described it, "from teenage prodigy to professional artist," as he was responding to expectations from his gallerist and critics, and to the demands of the emerging art market.<sup>5</sup> Lawrence turned to other Black

workers, in other words, at a transitional stage in his career, in which the scope and nature of his labor as an artist were being reformulated by and within a professionalizing art world.

It would not be the first time Lawrence would make this move; the themes of work and art are deeply entwined in his oeuvre, a touchstone to which he would return over the course of his career.<sup>6</sup> The attributes of labor and craft, and sometimes the Work paintings themselves, frequently appear when Lawrence reflects on himself, often included in the background of his relatively rare studio scenes and self-portraits.<sup>7</sup> He revisited the theme at the end of his life, too—arguably, work is what holds together the racially integrated construction crews that appear throughout the *Builders* images that Lawrence created from the 1970s to the late 1990s.<sup>8</sup> As the starting point in this career-long preoccupation, the Work theme paintings of 1945–46 should be understood as more than genre scenes, occupational types, or one-off works produced between historical cycles. Instead, they mark the start of one of Lawrence's most consistent, sustained, and personal aesthetic investigations. Examining the works individually and in relation to one another allows us to see Lawrence turning his powers of observation on himself, as he meditates on his own work, its scope and its efficacy, especially within a new economic system and organization of labor. They also represent a deliberate shift in his working process, from tightly composed "series" to the more fluid and associative format of the "theme." This looseness is important in understanding how the paintings relate to wider debates around race and labor occurring in the inchoate moment immediately following the end of World War II. Created at this inflection point, Lawrence's Work theme can be seen as a bid for a specific postwar future—one that did not simply include Black workers, craftspeople, and technicians, but in fact depended on the repair and restoration work that they performed.

#### MAKING IN SMALL SPACES: LAWRENCE'S WORK THEME AND CONTAINMENT

A viewer looking at the *The Shoemaker*, very likely the first of the Work images that Lawrence painted, might understandably expect the theme to be a meditation on the limiting conditions often placed on work. Lawrence chose to paint in the ceiling of the room that the shoemaker occupies, for example, a choice that serves to narrow its space and further exaggerate his already large, blocky body. The sharp angle his shoulders make, as he uses his full force to cut through a piece of leather,





fig. 2 Jacob Lawrence. *The Seamstress*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 21 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 29 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (54.9 × 75.9 cm). University Museum, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois

also pierces the band where the blue ceiling and wall meet, as if the room can barely contain him. Art historian Lowery Stokes Sims has argued that Lawrence brings his art to bear on the confinement of Black workers in a wider sense, too—commenting on the limited range of occupations open to Black people at mid-century.<sup>9</sup> He pictures workers in small trades and crafts, reflecting the way that newer trades and many trade unions were largely closed to Black people, forcing them to take the lowest-paying and most physically demanding jobs. He also depicts the kinds of work that his neighbors performed to get by during the Depression and throughout World War II, like taking in tailoring in their apartments. In *Seamstress*, a woman operates a hand-crank sewing machine mostly used by home sewers, and long outdated by 1946 (fig. 2). In this way, Lawrence may be expressing ambivalence about the verdict of the Double V campaign against fascism and racism launched during World War II—

and pointing, as labor organizer A. Philip Randolph had, to the fact that this fight played out in the treatment not only of Black soldiers, but also of Black workers.<sup>10</sup> It is relevant that the months following the end of the war were rife with tensions in the U.S. labor force, resulting in a wave of strikes in 1945 and 1946.<sup>11</sup> The way that the United States would rebuild itself, in short, was far from secure in the minds of many citizens, particularly Black Americans.

While commenting on the status of Black workers at a moment of particular tension, Lawrence also arguably reflects on the containment of his own movement, despite his seemingly full embrace by the professional New York art world. As a 1952 *Life* article made clear, by the beginning of the following decade Lawrence had been fully integrated into the cohort of professional artists associated with Halpert. The article groups him with the established “old-timers” of Halpert’s Downtown Gallery, like Ben Shahn and Charles Sheeler, despite



fig. 3 Jacob Lawrence. *Watchmaker*, 1946. Opaque watercolor and graphite pencil on paper, unframed 29 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 21 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (74.5 × 54.5 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966 (66.2914)

the fact that he was only twenty-eight at the time.<sup>12</sup> What the article does not include, however, is the way that Lawrence was plagued, in the same period, by continued critiques about the “naïve” nature of his work. Writers described the “kindergarten gayety” of his visual sensibility, his use of “crude brilliant colors,” and compositions that arose from the “Negro’s instinct for rhythm.”<sup>13</sup>

The professional status that Lawrence attained did not insulate him from these kinds of racist assumptions, but indeed may have added to them. Halpert’s plan at the time she mounted Lawrence’s first exhibition was to press a number of other galleries to accept one Black artist each into their rosters. Although it would have resulted in a significant increase in gallery representation for Black artists at the time, the plan had its limits;

notably, it imagined equity as the compulsory creation of identity-specific slots within an otherwise unchanged market system.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps more importantly, Halpert’s approach to marketing Lawrence depended on his exceptional status. As art historian John Ott has illuminated, Halpert often used racializing language in her press releases—linking Lawrence’s work to the “traditionally rhythmic work songs of the negro,” for example—in a way that both emphasized and capitalized on Lawrence’s racial difference.<sup>15</sup> Although Halpert’s representation of other artists was similarly informed by the perceived connection between modern art and the so-called folk traditions of an imagined past, Lawrence was particularly uncomfortable with the implicit qualification of his work often embedded in its racialization.<sup>16</sup> Lawrence’s discomfort does not necessarily indict Halpert as malicious or misguided, but it does surface a certain closeness between the structure of the art market at this moment and the logic of exceptionalism, one that worked to continuously circumscribe the work of those on the margins.

We might justifiably look for Lawrence’s response to this narrowing in his art from the same period, perhaps even seeing an equivalence between the confined space of the shoemaker’s workshop and Lawrence’s own boxed-in position in the art market. Close inspection of the *Work* paintings, however, evidences less Lawrence’s attempt to expose his own containment than it does his desire to study and highlight the innovations of other Black makers who created within, and against, small spaces. We notice, for example, the elegance of the dainty shoes on the wall in *The Shoemaker*; the watchmaker’s delicate creations (fig. 3); and the careful choreography of the cabinetmakers’ movements, even within their rather close quarters (fig. 4). Lawrence seems to be celebrating the specialized handwork and knowledge that these figures employ. An atmosphere of absorption pervades the paintings; the makers are deep in their work, eyes trained in concentration in a way that conveys dedication and expertise.

Lawrence seems to make the same claim for his own work. Far from the surfacing of a “naïve” or racial essence that Halpert and other critics had described, his paintings are the products of skill, careful planning, technical knowledge, and labor. Lawrence often explicitly claimed associations with craft, in fact. In the questionnaire he completed at the time *The Met* acquired *The Shoemaker*, for example, he listed his training as an “artist apprentice” at Henry Bannarn and Charles Alston’s studio, known as 306, one of the most important gathering spaces for the art and literary





fig. 4 Jacob Lawrence.  
*Cabinet Makers*, 1946.  
 Opaque watercolor and  
 graphite pencil on paper,  
 framed 30 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 36 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in.  
 (78.4 × 93.8 cm). Hirshhorn  
 Museum and Sculpture  
 Garden, Smithsonian  
 Institution, Washington, DC,  
 Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn,  
 1966 (66.2915)



communities of Harlem in the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> Lawrence's description may be more than analogy, too. While at 306, a massive converted stable on 141st Street, with classrooms, studios, and workshops, Lawrence became acquainted with the Bates brothers, a trio of cabinet-makers whom he cited as inspiration for the 1946 Work painting *Cabinet Makers*.<sup>18</sup> He would later describe Addison, John, and Leonard Bates in terms of the unique proximity of craft and art-making practices at 306: the cabinetmakers were "close to the arts," whose tools ("like sculpture") he had the chance to observe because "we all worked together at the center."<sup>19</sup> In fact, Lawrence's first solo exhibition, at age nineteen, was held in the Bates' workshop-salon.<sup>20</sup> The whole of the Work theme, indeed, could be seen as a reflection on a number of workplaces in Harlem, many of which he would have seen in and around 306—the Bates brothers' workshop, but also the radio repair shop that was located just across the street, and the shoe stores catty-corner to it.<sup>21</sup> Although places not strictly devoted to "fine art" but where many different kinds of making took place, these were the spaces that Lawrence counted as his schools and training grounds, where he learned what it meant to create.

#### **MORE THAN THE POSITIVE IMAGE: MAKING, SELF-MAKING, AND WORLD-MAKING**

Lawrence's Work paintings constitute powerful counterimages to the racist characterizations that Black workers across occupations faced. But they do not function solely as what Michele Wallace calls "positive images," meant simply to offset racist images; nor does Lawrence claim positive image-making for his art.<sup>22</sup> Lawrence's paintings are certainly stirring images celebrating Black makers, but their power is also more expansive than the positive/negative binary allows.

This power, importantly, is not as narrowly "productive" as it might appear on first glance. Although Lawrence focuses attention on the makers and their work, he does not fetishize the finished product. He pictures tools and raw materials, works in progress—the heap of fabric on the seamstress's table, the fiddly screws and gears of the watchmaker's workbench. This emphasis on process allows viewers to focus, in turn, on the bodies of the makers as they engage in work, and especially the way they bend themselves to their tasks: the jutting diagonal of the shoemaker's shoulders, or the leaning and squatting and kneeling of the cabinet-makers. We might say that Lawrence is interested in the

way that work shapes its maker as much as the maker shapes their materials. It is not only that the lecturer makes his body into a vehicle for his instruction, for example, but that his stance resembles the stable architecture of the building that he describes (just as his hand, wielding a pointer, points to the word “pointed”) (fig. 5).

This focus on the repetitive actions of labor and their power to shape the worker’s body might recall arguments about the influence of a Taylorian organization of labor (based on the principles of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s organization of labor) on modernist art, especially on its emphatic optical flatness. Art historian David Joselit’s claim that Jackson Pollock’s drip paintings index “if not quite the codified movements of the factory worker,” then certainly the “disciplinary beat of repetition,” comes to mind. Similarly, Barbara Jaffee’s assertion that Pollock’s “gestures appear not so much spontaneous as mechanical—repetitive marks arrayed diagrammatically” reminds us that modernist art in the United States was “produced under the standardizing imperative of industrialism.”<sup>23</sup> Do Lawrence’s paintings, created only a few years before Pollock’s, also register the alienation of work, or the formation of the workers’ bodies and selves through the repetitive actions of an internalized discipline? It is true that Lawrence’s paintings make no attempt to insert optical depth, remaining emphatically flat; his figures are planes of unmodulated black, often set against backgrounds of a much brighter color. This effect works against the perception of optical depth, forcing the shallow space of the workshops back toward flatness.

fig. 5 Jacob Lawrence. *The Lecture*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 22 × 29½ in. (55.9 × 74.9 cm). Location unknown



Yet Lawrence’s flatness is not the same as Pollock’s; nor does it operate in the way that Joselit or Jaffee describes, even if Lawrence does focus on how that work shapes human bodies. For one thing, Lawrence seems to take each instance of making out of the wider context of capitalist exchange; there are no customers in these images, no currency, bosses, or even—for the most part—completed products. This allows us to consider the possibility that there is more being made in these spaces than commodities. We notice, for example, the way the seamstress’s red thread, on its path from the spool through her machine to the textile she is working on, seems to migrate to her face; there it defines her features, the charged field of her individual subjectivity, in an act we might call self-authorship.

Importantly, though, this is not a subjectivity that requires depth; the seamstress’s features remain on the surface of the painting, her face like a mask.<sup>24</sup> Flatness seems to insist on itself across the Work theme, even where we would most expect depth. The cabinetmakers, for all their focus, remain among the planes and boards of their workshop, which never resolve into full, dimensional cabinets. They stay in a similar two-dimensional space: the painting’s brown ground plane is turned up like a flat wall, the background blocked by the red plane of one of the cabinet’s boards. It is not depth that Lawrence is after here, nor depth that the cabinetmakers create, but instead a surface dynamism, a rhythm that emerges from the cabinetmakers’ careful coordination with each other. Matching diagonals are drawn by their leaning backs and bracing legs, for example; a precise choreography allows one worker’s foot to carefully frame one side of another’s head. This coordination is present in other compositions, too. The steelworkers link their bodies into the piped network they are constructing, not so much in alienated subjection, as Joselit or Jaffee would describe it, but in what appears as something like a dance (fig. 6). *Barber Shop* shows the intimacy between barber and customer in their rhyming postures, which unite each pair into a single, flattened group (fig. 7). The flatness of Lawrence’s paintings, in short, implies not the crushing imposition of an exterior, disciplinary force, but instead a kind of lateral coordination between figures, and between figures and the materials and environments around them. This coordination brings into being nothing short of a world—a world not “flat” in the sense we usually mean, but instead in colorful, rhythmic two dimensions, calling attention to what Fred Moten has called the radical “richness of two-dimensionality.”<sup>25</sup>

This world-making becomes apparent across the Work theme, in which the act of work often seems to



*fig. 6* Jacob Lawrence. *Steelworkers*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 14 × 21 in. (35 × 53.3 cm). Private collection

*fig. 7* Jacob Lawrence. *Barber Shop*, 1946. Gouache on paper, 21½ × 29¾ in. (53.7 × 74.6 cm). Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey (1975.15)





fig. 8 Jacob Lawrence.  
*Radio Repairs*, 1946.  
 Gouache on paper, 23 $\frac{1}{16}$  ×  
 31 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (58.6 × 79.2 cm).  
 Williams College Museum  
 of Art, Williamstown,  
 Massachusetts, Anonymous  
 gift (M.2003.31)



seep outward from the object-maker relationship, into the environmental surround. The radio repairmen work not only on radios, but seemingly within one; their shop is defined by loops and coils, as if within a complicated matrix of wirings and connections (fig. 8). So too does the shoemaker's yellow leather seem to envelop him, while the shape of a shoe sole migrates across the composition to his stool; and the seamstress's background comes to resemble a printed textile. Importantly, these are not simply design devices on Lawrence's part, the repetition of vocational attributes throughout flattened, allegorical portraits. Rather, Lawrence suggests the participation of the workers in the creation of something more than a set of consumable products—their ability to make a world, to shape through their work what Hannah Arendt calls “the objectivity of a world of our own from what nature gives us.”<sup>26</sup>

If the formulation recalls earlier images of work, like Lewis Hine's power-makers and machine-masters, the metalworker of José Clemente Orozco's *Science, Labor and Art* (fig. 9), or Thomas Hart Benton's burly steel or construction workers in *America Today* (fig. 10), it is significant that Lawrence focuses on less muscular kinds of labor, even those that would be societally labeled “feminine.”<sup>27</sup> These smaller, less conventionally heroic forms

of work, Lawrence seems to be saying, have the capacity to build worlds, too. And while Hine, Orozco, and Benton had each attended to the labor of immigrants, indigenous peoples, and ethnic minorities, especially in physically demanding and dangerous jobs—Benton's *City Builders* shows an integrated workforce arguably prefiguring Lawrence's later *Builders* series—it is important that *all* of Lawrence's workers are Black.<sup>28</sup> It is a Black worker at the center of each of the scenes, unattached to White foremen, bosses, employers, or customers—a pointed allusion to the importance of Black ownership and entrepreneurship to the worlds Lawrence is picturing.

In this insistence on the world-making of Black workers, the position Lawrence is staking for himself becomes evident. By 1945 Lawrence had already been described as a consummate storyteller, whose work gave form to the experiences of Black Americans and built spaces in which narratives of Black liberation and creativity could take place. Lawrence repeatedly claimed for his art a purposefulness that correlates with the work of these makers; as he put it in 1945, the year he began the Work theme: “I want to communicate. I want the idea to strike right away.”<sup>29</sup> Some ten years later he elaborated on the motivation behind his desire to “work constructively within our society”:





fig. 9 José Clemente Orozco (Mexican, 1883–1949). *Call to Revolution and Table of Universal Brotherhood (Science, Labor and Art)* from *The New School Mural Cycle*, 1930–31. Fresco, 78 × 174 in. (198.1 × 442 cm). The New School Art Collection, New York

in doing so, I do not think I am being any more intelligent than the farmer, or the bricklayer, or the baker, or the tailor, or the merchant, or the seaman, or the teacher, or the machinist. These tradesmen are as nourishing to me as my fellow artists—for without them, there would be no desire, no drive, there would be no motivating force for me to make pictures.<sup>30</sup>

Lawrence's paintings were not simply commodities for sale, but objects intricately wrought for the use of others. His paintings would not protect one's feet, exactly, but they might help to redefine a person's sense of reality, making it possible to see the impression that even the smallest form of labor leaves on the world.

#### RE-MAKING: MENDING AND REPAIR

Thus far, we have established that in 1945, Lawrence began a series of paintings that achieved the same end as the crafts, labor, and making practices that they depicted. They created more than single products or objects, but in effect made a world. This was a world in which Black expertise was given space and resources, where Black ingenuity was recognized and celebrated.

fig. 10 Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975). *City Building*, one of ten panels from *America Today*, 1930–31. Egg tempera with oil glazing over Permalba on a gesso ground on linen mounted to a wood panel with a honeycomb interior, 92 × 117 in. (233.7 × 297.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of AXA Equitable, 2012 (2012.478i)



The paintings showed abundance for Black people: vibrancy and industry, dancing shoes and delicate watches and the possibility of new construction.

At the same time, there is an argument to be made for the aura of nostalgia suffusing these paintings—the way that Lawrence seems to evince a preference for the artisanal over the industrial, even at a moment often remembered as the peak of U.S. industrial power. If Lawrence rightly points to the importance of ownership to Black communities, he might be questioned for an out-of-touch preference for craft and small-scale labor—his focus on the world-making powers of a previous generation of workers, no longer relevant by the mid-1940s.

There is more at play here, however, not least because the theme depicts a range of occupations beyond the craftsperson, from the academic to the flower vendor. Lawrence's larger aim becomes even clearer, moreover, if we loosen the assumed link between craft practices and the past, making it possible to see his interest in the handmade as part of a specific claim for how a postwar future for Black people could be built. This understanding requires us to see Lawrence's theme as an investigation of work, production, and industry, but also of repair, re-creation, and recovery. The paintings depict places where new products are made, but also where old or broken things are taken to be put back together. In a work like *Radio Repairs*, for example, Lawrence draws attention to the intricate knowledge that is necessary for repair work, which allows the technicians to enter the radios' depths, their heads disappearing into the intricate, wired interiors. The image evokes the "repair-thinking" that information scientist Steven J. Jackson argues is a kind of epistemology, a way of seeing and thinking about the world distinct to the fixer.<sup>31</sup> It is possible to revisit almost all of Lawrence's images of the Work theme through this new lens. The seamstress could as easily be mending a dress as making a new one. The watchmaker is surrounded by clocks that tell different times—more likely the future recipients of his precise attention than the display of his completed work (in some texts, the title is given as *Watch Repairs*, rather than *Watchmaker*). Even the pile of shoes behind the shoemaker, who might as accurately be called a cobbler, seems curiously mismatched, in need of his capable handling to be put right.

Lawrence is attending here to what Arendt calls the "durability" of the worlds that work creates—the ways that they could be broken, thrown out of sync, or undone.<sup>32</sup> Recall that these were the first paintings that Lawrence made upon his return from service in



fig. 11 Jacob Lawrence.  
*Home Chores*, 1945.  
Gouache and graphite on  
paper, 29½ × 21⅞ in. (74.9 ×  
53.5 cm). The Nelson-Atkins  
Museum of Art, Kansas City,  
Missouri, Anonymous gift  
(F69-6)

World War II, a moment shot through with questions about the possibility of reunifying a world riven by unprecedented loss and ongoing tension. Significantly, some chronologies place *Home Chores* (fig. 11), which pictures a woman tackling a pile of dishes at a tenement wash sink, among the first works that Lawrence made after the war, possibly even before *The Shoemaker*.<sup>33</sup> Positioned this way, *Home Chores* seems a likely reflection on the maintenance work that helped sustain the world Lawrence was able to return to. This was the kind of domestic labor that his wife, Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, had performed alone while he was overseas, and that many other women had similarly undertaken, whether or not they were engaged in defense industry jobs (as Black women were less likely to be).<sup>34</sup> In focusing on this rather private, even mundane scene,

Lawrence offers a view of wartime labor starkly different from others focused on battles, bombings, or even muscular, Rosie-the-Riveter-type women. In this view, maintenance work, of the kind that Christina Sharpe might term “ordinary,” is as responsible for the world that emerged from the war as any combat action.<sup>35</sup> Lawrence would make a similar argument when describing the paintings he created while still in the Coast Guard, which centered not only soldiers in combat positions, but also cooks, mechanics, and signalmen:

It's the little things that are *big*. A man may never see combat, but he can be a very important person. The man at the guns, there's glamor there. Men dying, men being shot, they're heroes. But the man bringing up supplies is important too. Take a cook. He just cooks, day in and day out. He never hears a gun fired, except in practice. He's way down below, cooking.<sup>36</sup>

Lawrence's focus on work in 1945–46 amounted to a parallel interpretation of the immediate postwar moment, arguing for the significance of “little things” like repair and maintenance. His Work theme paintings expose the significance of this work, and celebrate the overlooked efforts of the Black workers who perform it. He highlights these practices of care, attention, and resourcefulness as forms of expertise in their own right, tactics with the capacity to build worlds from limited or broken materials—important models for how the world could be rebuilt in the postwar period.

Significantly, this was a vision of the postwar United States starkly different from those that conjured an America ascendant, its wholeness guaranteed by military might and large-scale industrial mobilization. Lawrence's Work theme, by contrast, implied a nation and a world in need of repair—in need, specifically, of the specific knowledge of Black technicians, domestic workers, cobblers, fixers, and seamstresses. They held the vital knowledge of how things could be put back together, and in a way that was better than before. In the process of illuminating their expertise, he offers a glimpse of the type of world that might emerge from the work they do—from the close examination of what is broken; from an intense, if small-scale, focus on reparation and renewal; from a dedication to the restoration of what is already at hand. He pictures the beauty and the vibrancy of a world remade.

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## NOTES

- 1 For the ways that Lawrence's Coast Guard paintings responded to the U.S. military's policies and positions, see Ott 2015.
- 2 The catalogue raisonné is invaluable for tracking the evolution of Lawrence's interest in Harlem, beginning with his 1930s street scenes and interiors, through his 1944–45 Harlem series, to the Work theme; see Nesbett and DuBois 2000a.
- 3 In Lawrence's definition, a "series" had a tighter, often narrative-based, and at times sequential coherence. A "theme," while still a related set of paintings, held together more loosely, without a linear arc. See quotations in Wheat 1986, 143; and transcript of interview by Peter Nesbett and Michelle DuBois, June 7, 1999, 1–2, cited in Sims 2000, 215.
- 4 Lawrence was represented by Halpert beginning in 1941 and had sold works through her gallery as early as that year. December 1945 through fall 1946, however, marks a moment in which Lawrence was for the first time supporting himself not through fellowships, government employment, sales, or a combination thereof, but solely through the work he sold at the Downtown Gallery.
- 5 Berman 1984, 78.
- 6 Lawrence would return to images of work in 1957, in a concentrated period between 1968 and 1972, and consistently throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when he focused primarily on the *Builders*.
- 7 See, for example, *Self-Portrait* (1977), in which a miniature version of *Cabinet Makers* is pictured behind the artist and below a set of tools; or *The Studio* (1977), in which examples of Lawrence's later *Builders* series appear around the artist's workspace.
- 8 For a fuller discussion of the *Builders* series, see Nesbett 1998 and Sims 2000.
- 9 Sims 2000, 212–13.
- 10 Randolph was influential in pressuring Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman to issue two sweeping executive orders in the 1940s that were aimed at integrating the armed forces and securing fair employment in defense industries and government. Randolph (1941) 2014, 297. See also Bynum 2010, 157–84.
- 11 Although strikes led by the United Auto Workers and the United Mine Workers of America are perhaps the best known of this wave, in total more than five million U.S. workers participated in strikes in 1945–46 across a range of industries, from steel to lumber to railroads.
- 12 *Life* 1952, 87.
- 13 Riley 1943, 7; McBride 1941.
- 14 Halpert's 1945 exhibition, "American Negro Art," had as one objective the formation of a "Negro Art Fund," which would place works by Black artists in U.S. museums, as well as convince other gallerists to add Black artists to their rosters. See Shaykin 2019.
- 15 Ott (2015, 80) argues that Lawrence's "branding" not just as a Black artist, but as a "primitive," was established and sustained in part through Halpert's efforts—especially through her choice of words in her press releases, which often shaped the way that the media covered Lawrence's work.
- 16 On the importance of what Halpert called "American ancestors" to a "native" modern art, see Shaykin 2019, especially 87–113. In her 1950 interview with Lawrence, Aline B. Louchheim makes note of Lawrence's concern about the racial qualifiers used to describe him: "he was modestly worried that without the racial adjective he would not be considered a good artist." Louchheim 1950, 36.
- 17 "'The Shoemaker' by Jacob Lawrence," May 7, 1946, MMA Archives.
- 18 For more on the influence of the figures at 306, and the wider Harlem community, on Lawrence's career, see King-Hammond 2000; Turner 2000; Hills 2009; Dickerman 2015; and Wilson 2021. Patricia Hills (2009, 265) argues that Lawrence also depicts Addison Bates (of the Bates brothers) in his 1957 *Cabinet Maker*, arguably the first of several returns to the Work theme.
- 19 Quoted in Wheat 1986, 143.
- 20 Nesbett and DuBois 2000c, 27.
- 21 As of 1940, a radio repair shop was located at 307 West 141st Street, and shoe stores were located at 2654 8th Avenue and 2642 8th Avenue. See New York City Department of Records & Information Services, Manhattan 1940s Tax Photos, [https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/view/search?search=SUBMIT&cat=0&q=Block%3D2043+AND+Lot%3D9&dateRangeStart=&dateRangeEnd=&sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip\\_code&QuickSearchA=QuickSearchA](https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/view/search?search=SUBMIT&cat=0&q=Block%3D2043+AND+Lot%3D9&dateRangeStart=&dateRangeEnd=&sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip_code&QuickSearchA=QuickSearchA;); [https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/NYCMA~5~5~173897~537991:2654-8-Avenue?sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip\\_code&qvq=q:Block%3D2027%20AND%20Lot%3D1;sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip\\_code;lc:NYCMA~5~5&mi=0&trs=1](https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/NYCMA~5~5~173897~537991:2654-8-Avenue?sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip_code&qvq=q:Block%3D2027%20AND%20Lot%3D1;sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip_code;lc:NYCMA~5~5&mi=0&trs=1); [https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/NYCMA~5~5~173889~538142:2642-8-Avenue?sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip\\_code&qvq=q:Block%3D2026%20AND%20Lot%3D3;sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip\\_code&mi=1&trs=2](https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/NYCMA~5~5~173889~538142:2642-8-Avenue?sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip_code&qvq=q:Block%3D2026%20AND%20Lot%3D3;sort=borough%2Cblock%2Cplot%2Czip_code&mi=1&trs=2).
- 22 See Wallace 1990, 1–5, and Mercer 1990.
- 23 Joselit 2000, 24; Jaffee 2004, 78, 79. Both Joselit and Jaffee resist Meyer Schapiro's reading of modernist art as a last refuge from the instrumentality implied by capitalism and industrial labor, wherein the flatness of Pollock's drip paintings implies spontaneity of movement; see Schapiro 1957. For Joselit, Pollock's painting is an anxious attempt to stave off the emptying-out of the notion of individual selfhood via what Joselit (drawing on Michel Foucault) calls "disciplinary regimes"—of which industrial forms of labor are a primary example. This emptying-out all but guarantees flatness in art; Joselit 2000, 22, 24. See also Greenberg (1948) 1986; Greenberg (1952) 1993a; Greenberg (1955) 1993b, 226. Jaffee makes the case that the technical design curricula that many artists received in the early twentieth century helped to "standardize" artistic work in much the same way that Taylorian systems standardized other kinds of labor—an analogy that authorizes her reading of Pollock's gestures as repetitive and mechanical. For more on the ties between modernist painting's formal qualities and labor in the postwar moment, see Jones 1996; Molesworth 2003; and Bryan-Wilson 2010.
- 24 Richard Powell's essay on Lawrence's work in the late 1940s and early 1950s analyzes the artist's mode of abstraction, including the two-dimensionality of his compositions examining performance and self-presentation; masks appear as a crucial motif in these investigations of superficiality and depth. See Powell 2000. See also Turner 2019.
- 25 See Moten and O'Meally 2022.
- 26 Arendt 1998, 137.
- 27 See Hine 1921. Hine's work strikes a formal chord with Lawrence's, given its focus on singular workers in close physical intimacy with the tools or machines they manipulate; see Lowery Stokes Sims's comparison of Lawrence's and Hine's work: Sims

2000, 210. It is important to note that Lawrence cited Orozco as a direct influence. Having met Orozco as he was working on his mural *Science, Labor and Art* at the New School for Social Research in New York in the early 1930s, Lawrence would have been able to observe firsthand Orozco's allegorical depiction of manual, intellectual, and artistic labor. He might also have observed that Black figures were at the center of Orozco's strategy for his wider New School mural suite.

- 28 See Griffey and Kornhauser 2015; in the same volume, see also Stephanie Herdrich's catalogue entries for "Deep South," 26–27, "Steel," 34–35, and "City-Building," 36–37.
- 29 Quoted in McCausland 1945, 251.
- 30 Jacob Lawrence, typed speech, delivered to Columbia University Teachers' Convention, 1954; Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight Papers, box 14, folder 13, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
- 31 Jackson 2014.
- 32 Arendt 1998, 136.
- 33 The catalogue raisonné dates *Home Chores* to 1945 with greater certainty than *The Shoemaker*, which Lawrence probably painted in 1945, but only inscribed on the verso in early 1946. *Home Chores* features a date in the upper right corner and its date was later confirmed through consultation with the artist and his wife. This information makes it possible to imagine *Home Chores* as the start of the Work theme. See Nesbett and DuBois 2000b, 88–89; and Chris Bruce to Henry Adams, May 11, 1992, *Home Chores* object file, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. I thank Stephanie Fox Knappe at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City for her generous help in facilitating my access to these materials.
- 34 See Honey 1999 and DuBois and Dumenil 2016, 497–98.
- 35 Sharpe (2016, 131–32) calls for "ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention)," and specifically for practices of care that are "ordinary," in order to meet the ordinariness of the "weather" of antiblackness.
- 36 McCausland 1945, 251.

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# New Insights into Filippo Lippi's Alessandri Altarpiece

**SANDRA CARDARELLI**

The cult of saints-physicians Cosmas and Damian in Florence has been strongly associated with the Medici family, especially Cosimo the Elder. However, while Medici commissions for private and public display featuring these saints revealed much about the family's devotional proclivities, the extent of, and responses to, this veneration in the context of the city's political and social milieu remains understudied. The altarpiece *Saint Lawrence Enthroned with Saints Cosmas and Damian and Donors*, also known as the Alessandri altarpiece, is now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is indicative of a complex set of relationships within the civic and religious life of Florence that resulted in the veneration for Saints Cosmas and Damian being more deeply interwoven in the city's cultural and devotional



life than has previously been suggested. Thanks to a corpus of documents housed in the Archives of the Opera del Duomo in Florence, this research note brings to the fore an expanded understanding of Alessandro Alessandri's influence as an art patron. It further sheds light on the substantial role of the Medici and coeval Florentine culture in forming Alessandri's sensitivity and piety for the saints-physicians in the first half of the quattrocento, and specifically during the years of the construction of Filippo Brunelleschi's dome. In doing so it provides context for the commission of the Alessandri altarpiece and elucidates the significance of the painting for the family.

Connecting the Alessandri family history with contemporary devotional practices in Florence allows for a new hypothesis that the saint depicted to the right of Saint Lawrence is Saint John Gualbert, not Saint Benedict. Saint John Gualbert was likely the onomastic saint of Alessandri's first son, Giovanni.

#### THE ALESSANDRI, THE MEDICI, AND FLORENCE

A close look at the political career of Alessandro di Ugo Alessandri (1391–1460) prompts new insights into his patronage. He served in the Signoria in 1431, 1441, and 1448. He was *priore delle arti* (1431) and *console* of the *arte della Lana*, the powerful wool guild (1438 and 1441), and *gonfaloniere di Giustizia* (1441; 1448). Further, he served as *capitano* in several outposts of the *contado*, and was ambassador to Venice on behalf of Pope Eugene IV (1435).<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the Alessandri were the owners of lucrative businesses in the wool trade and were members of three of the major *arti* (guilds) of the city: the *arte della Lana*, the *arte di Calimala*, and the *arte della Seta*. The Catasto of 1427 indicates that Alessandro and his brother Niccolò were in the sixteen top contributors to the Catasto for the quarter of San Giovanni, with 14,868 florins.<sup>2</sup> The Alessandri owned multiple properties, including a palazzo in the heart of the city in Borgo degli Albizzi,<sup>3</sup> and a castle in Vincigliata, in the hills of Florence.<sup>4</sup> The family belonged to the *consorteria* of the Albizzi, but in 1372 due to political acrimony changed their name to Alessandri, which was recorded in the *Prestanze* of 1375.<sup>5</sup>

Alessandro held the important role of *operaio* of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence in 1430–31, during the years when the cathedral's dome was built by the Opera under Brunelleschi's direction.<sup>6</sup> Six *operai* were drawn from among the eligible members of the powerful *arte della Lana*, and they oversaw the planning, management of resources, and

expenditure of the Opera.<sup>7</sup> Cosimo de' Medici also held various roles.<sup>8</sup> However, the cathedral's Opera was not where the Alessandri and the Medici met for the first time: Cosimo the Elder and Alessandro Alessandri were acquainted with each other from their student years in the humanist circle of Roberto de' Rossi.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Alessandro Alessandri was acknowledged as a supporter of the Medici during the construction of the dome, between 1420 and the 1430s, and when Cosimo the Elder was exiled.<sup>10</sup>

Although they have not been exhaustively researched, the Alessandri was a renowned family among elite Florentine international merchants. According to Natalie R. Tomas, Alessandri's support of Cosimo at the time of his exile in September 1433 was the beginning of a closer allegiance that would later be sealed with the marriage between Cosimo's second son, Giovanni, and Alessandro's niece Ginevra, the youngest daughter of his brother Niccolò.<sup>11</sup>

The Alessandri family also owned quarries in Vincigliata and Fiesole, and profited from business transactions concerning the cathedral's Opera.<sup>12</sup> Documents show that in 1422, the Opera paid rent to Alessandro and his brothers Niccolò and Bartolomeo for the use of the quarry at Trassinaia, near Vincigliata.<sup>13</sup> Documents dated 1428, 1429, and 1430 record further payments to Alessandro and his brothers for the same purpose.<sup>14</sup> In this period the Alessandri established their identity as prominent citizens and patrons of the arts.

#### AN ALTARPIECE IN CELEBRATION OF THE FAMILY

About 1439–40, when Filippo Lippi received the commission for the altarpiece intended for the church of Santa Maria in Vincigliata and now in The Met, the Alessandri were already established as influential patrons in the region.<sup>15</sup> They held the right of patronage to a family chapel in the Florentine church of San Pier Maggiore (it was demolished at the end of the eighteenth century). The chapel was known as Cappellone degli Alessandri and featured an altarpiece by Lippo di Benivieni (ca. 1310–20) now in the Galleria degli Uffizi. The central panel with the Madonna and Child was flanked by Saints Zenobius and Peter, at the right of the Madonna, and Saints Paul and Benedict at her left. Predella panels were commissioned from Benozzo Gozzoli in the 1460s,<sup>16</sup> and are also in The Met (fig. 1).<sup>17</sup> The panels show Saint Peter and the Fall of Simon Magus, Saint Zenobius Resuscitating a Dead Child, the Conversion of Saint Paul, and Totila before Saint Benedict. The connection of the Alessandri family with



fig. 1 Reconstruction of the altarpiece commissioned for the Alessandri chapel in San Pier Maggiore, Florence, ca. 1460s. Top: Lippo di Benivieni (Italian, act. 1296–1327), *The Virgin and Child with Saint Zenobius, Saint Peter, Saint Paul and Saint Benedict*, ca. 1310–20. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Bottom: Predella panels by Benozzo Gozzoli (Italian, ca. 1421–1497), *Saint Peter and the Fall of Simon Magus*, *Saint Zenobius Resuscitating a Dead Child*, *Conversion of Saint Paul*, and *Totila before Saint Benedict*, 1460s. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1915 (15.106.1)

the church of San Pier Maggiore was long-standing, not only by virtue of their residence in the area, but also because four members of the family became nuns in the attached female monastery.<sup>18</sup>

The Alessandri altarpiece by Lippi differs substantially from the commission for San Pier Maggiore. Here, the presence of the patron and two of his sons, as well as the choice of saints represented, reveals a self-celebratory theme for the panel (fig. 2). The saints depicted are either onomastic saints connected with a member of the family or symbolic of the family's devotional preferences and cultural traditions. Since the early Middle Ages, territories and landmarks had become associated with certain saints and their hagiographies. After the rise of the communes, large cities and smaller communities placed themselves under the protection of patron saints, and their names were invoked in official documents and civic statutes.

The records of the Opera of the cathedral of Florence indicate that the quarry in Trassinaia had to be leased except for the share that belonged to the Alessandri. The area was designated as “the whole hill-ock of Vincigliata, in the district of Florence, among the people of St Lawrence of Vincigliata.”<sup>19</sup> The family and territory were strictly connected with the patron saint of their community, Saint Lawrence. Devotion to the saints-protectors of the community was fostered by individuals and families.<sup>20</sup>

The figure of Saint Lawrence is the central focus of the Alessandri altarpiece. In fact, the church of Santa Maria in Vincigliata housed a chapel dedicated to him that later became part of the dedication of the church.<sup>21</sup> Scholars have debated whether the altarpiece was originally intended for the family chapel in the castle or for the church of Santa Maria in Vincigliata. Discrepancies in Giorgio Vasari's ambiguously worded vite of 1550 and 1568 do not clarify the issue.<sup>22</sup> The pastoral visitation by Bishop Roberto Folchi in 1493 records that the Alessandri altarpiece was then displayed on the main altar of Santa Maria.<sup>23</sup> Although Folchi's documents date from about fifty years after the completion of the painting, the large size of the altarpiece, the saints represented, and the portraits of prominent male members of the family suggest that this image was commissioned to be displayed in a public setting and viewed by a wide audience.

Technical analysis determined that the central panel was extended on three sides and that the side panels with Saint Anthony Abbot and the saint identified as Saint Benedict were originally part of a single image whose commission was described by Vasari in his biography of Filippo Lippi.<sup>24</sup> In enlarged images of the bottom left and right corners of the central panel, details of the saints' shafts—likely the bottom part of the crozier, or processional Crucifix, on the left and of the crutch on the right—are recognizable behind the feet of Alessandri's sons on the left, and behind the leg





fig. 2 Filippo Lippi (Italian, ca. 1406–1469). *Saint Lawrence Enthroned with Saints Cosmas and Damian and Donors*, known as the Alessandri altarpiece, ca. 1440s. Tempera on wood, gold ground, 47¾ × 45½ in. (121.3 × 115.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1935 (35.31.1a–c)



fig. 3 Details of the Alessandri altarpiece (fig. 2). Left: bottom part of the crozier. Right: crutch



of Saint Damian on the right (fig. 3).<sup>25</sup> Despite later extensions of about three inches along all sides of the central panel, a reasonably accurate reconstruction of the position of the lateral saints can be attempted on the basis of the remaining portions of their iconographic attributes.

The original form of the Alessandri altarpiece was likely a *tavola quadrata* (rectangular altarpiece), one of the artist's first examples of this novel type of unified scene, and a departure from the old-fashioned multipaneled altarpiece. Lippi experimented with the new format in the 1440s, exemplified by the Novitiate altarpiece (ca. 1440–45). As noted by Megan Holmes, in this *sacra conversazione* with Saints Francis, Damian, Cosmas, and Anthony of Padua, Lippi places the saints in an elaborate architectural setting with a central vanishing point, a rendering of space that he had already adopted in the Barbadori altarpiece (1438).<sup>26</sup> In the Alessandri altarpiece, Lippi limited his attempt to reproduce three-dimensional space to the central perspective of the floor plane, the solid structure of Saint Lawrence's throne, and the foreshortening of Saint Cosma's lozenge box. The solid modeling of the figures stands out against the lavish golden background, an outmoded choice that is strikingly revealing of the patron's attitude to devotion, social status, and family values. He was concerned with the visual manifestation of piety and spirituality, but also, very explicitly, of the self. The copious use of pseudo-Kufic decorations that later progressively disappeared

from Lippi's decorative repertoire is visible in Saint Lawrence's dalmatic and in the robes and capes of Saints Cosmas and Damian. They help determine the time span for the commission of the Alessandri painting to 1439–40.

The portraits of Alessandro Alessandri and two of his sons suggest that the altarpiece was intended as a celebratory image of the family and their patron saints, underscoring devotional traditions and continuity of family lineage under the watchful eyes of their protective saints (figs. 4, 5). Despite the damage that the lateral panels have sustained, it is evident that Saint Anthony and the saint formerly believed to be Saint Benedict are depicted kneeling, as if in the act of presenting the donors to Saint Lawrence. The complete altarpiece may also have included the family coat of arms and perhaps a predella. Although the early history of the panel is uncertain, it can safely be argued that the choice of subject and iconography provides circumstantial evidence of the family's wealth, role, and social connections in Florence.<sup>27</sup>

The representation of Saints Cosmas and Damian aligns with the great devotion for the saints-physicians that became synonymous with Cosimo the Elder and subsequent members of the Medici family in Florence. Medici patronage of chapels and altarpieces with this dedication included the following: an altarpiece recorded in 1418 in the family palace that belonged to Cosimo's father, Giovanni di Bicci, in Via Larga; a chapel in Santa Croce; a family chapel in San Lorenzo;





*fig. 4* Filippo Lippi. Possibly Saint John Gualbert, side panel from the Alessandri altarpiece, 28½ × 15½ in. (72.4 × 39.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1935 (35.31.1c)

*fig. 5* Filippo Lippi. *Saint Anthony Abbot*, side panel from the Alessandri altarpiece, 28½ × 15½ in. (72.4 × 39.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1935 (35.31.1b)



fig. 6 Coat of arms of the Alessandri family. MS 471, Armi di Firenze, Città, Terre e Castelli, e Famiglie fiorentine, sec. XVIII, A72, ASF



the convent of San Marco, which also held a dedication to these saints; involvement in the confraternity of the Buonomini of San Martino that also held an ancient dedication to these saints; and altarpieces depicting these saints for the convents of Bosco ai Frati and San Vincenzo d'Annalena.

There was more to the Alessandris' devotion for these saints than political allegiance and family friendship.<sup>28</sup> Cosmas and Damian were also patron saints of physicians and appear in related commissions.<sup>29</sup> Further, they served as saints-protectors of the *divettini*, the wool finishers, whose *compagnia* owned images of their patron saints until their suppression at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup> The case for the painting commissioned for a pilaster of the Cathedral of Santa Maria Novella by Antonio di Ghezzo della Casa in 1429 suggests a close connection between the wool guild and the veneration for Saints Cosmas and Damian.<sup>31</sup> Although the Catasto of 1427 does not mention Antonio's trade, the records of the Opera del Duomo acknowledge him as one of the elected *operai* in 1433/34, thus indicating that he was likely a member of the *arte della Lana*, the guild from which these officers were drawn.<sup>32</sup> Antonio di Ghezzo's association with the *arte della Lana* probably granted him authorization to display the panel with Saints Cosmas and Damian on one of the piers of the cathedral.<sup>33</sup> The commission was completed shortly before Alessandro Alessandri became an *operaio* in the cathedral in 1430.<sup>34</sup>

Guild membership was a critical part of the identity of its members and their families. As prominent affiliates of the *arte della Lana*, the Alessandri were allowed to use the image of a lamb in their coat of arms, but with two heads to distinguish it from the coat of arms of the guild (fig. 6).<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Saints Cosmas and Damian reveal the political alliance with the Medici family, but also represent the family business and symbolize their association with the guild. Moreover, archival records show that Alessandro's firstborn son, Giovanni (1415–1439), was elected as a member of the confraternity of the Buonomini di San Martino in 1436. The oratory of the Buonomini, a charitable institution largely subsidized by Cosimo the Elder and other wealthy families of Florence, also held an ancient dedication to Saints Cosmas and Damian.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the Alessandri held a number of motivations for showing piety toward the saints-physicians.

#### SAINTS, SONS, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

As Catherine Lawless has perceptively argued, associating offspring with their onomastic saint was key to the construction of family identity, and in calling upon the patron saint to protect that member of the family.<sup>37</sup> The choice of the onomastic saint was often linked to the family's devotional proclivity and current devotional trends, as well as political ties and business relationships. Lawless makes a case for such a complex network of relationships in the choice of Saint Peter Martyr as the patron saint of Cosimo's son Piero di Cosimo de' Medici (1416–1469). She identifies the first known visual record of this connection in Fra Angelico's Annalena altarpiece from about 1434–35 (fig. 7).<sup>38</sup>

The saints represented in the side panels of the Alessandri altarpiece correspond to the same cultural traditions. Therefore, Saint Anthony Abbot takes his place to the left of Saint Lawrence as the onomastic saint of Alessandri's son Antonio, who became prominent in the family's political and business activities after the death of his older brother Giovanni. Saint Anthony Abbot is also a saint traditionally represented alongside Saint John Gualbert, the founder of the Vallombrosan Order, and he is likely the saint at the right of Saint Lawrence rather than Saint Benedict, as previously suggested.

There is a body of evidence that supports the identity of Saint John Gualbert as the patron saint of Alessandri's first son, Giovanni.<sup>39</sup> Giovanni Alessandri died in 1439 at the age of twenty-four, but by the age of fifteen had already been included in the records of the Opera del Duomo alongside his father, Alessandro,





fig. 7 Fra Angelico (Italian, ca. 1395–1455). *Madonna and Child with Saints Peter Martyr, Damian and Cosmas, John the Evangelist, Lawrence, and Francis*, known as the Annalena altarpiece, 1434–35. Tempera and gold on wood, 70½ × 79½ in. (180 × 202 cm). San Marco Museum, Florence





fig. 8 Bicci di Lorenzo (Italian, 1373–1452), assisted by Stefano d'Antonio (Italian, 1405–1483). *The Virgin and Child with Saints Anthony Abbot, John Gualbert, John the Baptist, and Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, 1434. Tempera on wood, 81½ × 117⅞ in. (207 × 299.4 cm). Originally in the Compagni chapel in Santa Trinita, Florence. Westminster Abbey, London (inv. WA 0045)

in various transactions. These include the sale of spruce planks, likely used for the refurbishment of the pope's apartments in Santa Maria Novella in 1434.<sup>40</sup> Pope Eugene IV had left Rome following hostilities with relatives of the previous pope, Martin V, but also due to his inability to effectively manage the financial affairs of the Papal State.<sup>41</sup> The Alessandri must have acquainted themselves with the pope during his Florentine years as Giovanni was recorded as a cleric of the apostolic camera.<sup>42</sup> Pope Eugene IV was involved in the reformation of Benedictine congregations in Florence, Fiesole, and Pistoia. One of them was the Monastic Order at Vallombrosa, which was founded by John Gualbert about 1038, and followed the Benedictine rule.<sup>43</sup>

Devotion for Saint John Gualbert surged in quattrocento Florence, as attested by a number of images commissioned by both lay individuals and religious organizations. These included an altarpiece by Bicci di Lorenzo for the Compagni chapel in the church of Santa Trinita, Florence (1434, and now in Westminster Abbey,

London) (fig. 8),<sup>44</sup> and a fresco image by Neri di Bicci dated 1455 currently in the church of Santa Trinita, but originally in the cloister of the convent of San Pancrazio.<sup>45</sup>

Jesuit historian Giuseppe Richa noted that it was Eugene IV who called the General Chapter of the Order in the Vallombrosan church of Santa Trinita in 1435.<sup>46</sup> Richa also details that the feast day of Saint John Gualbert had been celebrated by the Florentine Republic on July 12 each year since 1415, the year when Giovanni Alessandri was born.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, historian Giovanni Baroni vividly describes fresco images of Saint John Gualbert in the Castle of Vincigliata, therefore underscoring a tradition for the devotion of this saint by the family.<sup>48</sup>

It is likely that Saint John Gualbert was represented in the altarpiece as the onomastic saint of Alessandro Alessandri's son Giovanni in the wake of the renewed devotion for the saint that was promoted by the Signoria. Although it is impossible to confirm that the



altarpiece was completed before Giovanni Alessandri's death on October 18, 1439, this date might provide the terminus ad quem for the commission of the Alessandri altarpiece, shortly after the completion of the Barbadori altarpiece now at the Louvre.<sup>49</sup> By associating himself with Saint John Gualbert, Giovanni Alessandri differentiated his identity from that of members of the Medici family, namely Giovanni di Bicci, whose patron saint was Saint John the Evangelist, and from Saint John the Baptist, the patron saint of Florence. Scholar Dillian Gordon proposes that this was also the case for the son of Cante Compagni, the patron of Bicci di Lorenzo's altarpiece now in Westminster. Gordon has effectively argued that since Cante's father's name and that of one of his sons was Giovanni, Saint John Gualbert would have been the most suitable choice of patron saint.<sup>50</sup>

The Alessandri altarpiece shows Saint John Gualbert tonsured. This iconographic element originates from hagiographic accounts that describe how John Gualbert put on the monastic garb at the altar and tonsured himself in order to convince his father of his unwavering intention to join the Benedictine Monastery of San Miniato Al Monte.<sup>51</sup> The panel with this saint is severely damaged, and the bottom part of the figure is completely missing. The remaining part shows that the iconography in the Alessandri panel is reduced to a minimum, but both are attributes of St. John Gualbert: the bishop's cope, which abbots were allowed to use as head of a monastery, worn over the monastic cowl; and the remnant part of what was probably the bishop's crozier or a processional Crucifix.<sup>52</sup> Lippi had already used the iconographic expedient of the bishop's cope worn over the monastic habit and the bare, tonsured head in the representation of Saint Augustine in the Barbadori altarpiece (ca. 1438), originally intended for the family chapel in Santo Spirito, Florence.<sup>53</sup>

Art historian Cordelia Warr has argued for the evolution in the color of the Vallombrosan garb over the Middle Ages and the Renaissance through the shades of brown and gray, to the final black garb.<sup>54</sup> Other studies have provided valuable insight into the challenges posed by the ambiguous use of some iconographic elements.<sup>55</sup> The similarities between Saint John Gualbert in the Alessandri panel and in the representation in the Westminster altarpiece suggest that Lippi or his patrons must have been acquainted with this earlier rendition of the saint and deliberately chose to present him

wearing the bishop's cope with an elaborate border of gold embroidery. As mentioned earlier, the Westminster altarpiece was intended to furnish the personal family chapel commissioned by Cante Compagni, which was also the chapel dedicated to Saint John Gualbert, and featured fresco scenes of the Saint's vita attributed to Bonaiuto di Giovanni. About 1452, another cycle was commissioned to decorate the adjacent Spini chapel from Neri di Bicci.<sup>56</sup>

The cult of Saint John Gualbert manifested in manifold ways and long-standing traditions that involved both the lay and religious realms. Chronicles of the rituals and processions that occurred in Florence in March 1387 show that the relic of the head of Saint John Gualbert was brought into procession alongside the miraculous image of the Madonna dell'Impruneta, an event that was attended by the ambassador of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan. The icon and relic of Saint John Gualbert were received by the bishop at the city gate of San Piero and brought to the Duomo, a further indication of the importance that Saint John Gualbert held in the devotional and political life of the city.<sup>57</sup>

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Previously neglected documents and visual evidence help us to better define the Alessandri family as wealthy and influential art patrons in quattrocento Florence. Contemporary imagery depicting the much-venerated founder of the Vallombrosan Order, Saint John Gualbert, as well as contemporary historic accounts, suggest that he is the saint depicted in the lateral panel of the Alessandri altarpiece. The placement highlights the practice of representing the onomastic patron saint of donors in altarpieces. As a namesake of Alessandro Alessandri's firstborn son, Giovanni, Saint John Gualbert would have been a suitable choice for this role and would have helped to distinguish his identity from that of other patrons. While some uncertainties remain about the original form of the Alessandri altarpiece and its exact date of completion, the premature death of Giovanni and the subsequent rise of his younger brothers, Jacopo and Antonio, in Florentine politics and social circles may suggest that the altarpiece was dismembered not long after its completion, possibly after the death of the head of the family, Alessandro Alessandri.

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## NOTES

- Documents from the Archivio dell'Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore (AOSMF) that are cited in the article have been recorded in both their archival collection and their website link. When too many records for a specific instance are present, only one example has been cited.
- 1 Alessandro Alessandri's political career is well outlined in Martines 2011, 104, 176, 181, 186, 196, 256, 261n, 268, 278, 304, 329–30.
  - 2 Ibid., app. II, 369.
  - 3 Documents show that in February 1419, Palazzo Alessandri hosted important visitors including Niccolò Trincia Trinci, Lord of Foligno, Braccio da Montone, and Guidantonio da Montefeltro for a conciliatory meeting of condottieri and lords of the lands that were part of the Papal State. Mori 2013, 141–42, 286.
  - 4 For an in-depth history of the family homes of the Alessandri, see Vigotti 2019 and 2020.
  - 5 In the financial system of the Florentine republic, the *prestanze* were forced loans imposed by the commune on its citizens in addition to ordinary taxation.
  - 6 The Opera was the institution that built and decorated the cathedral. For the oath of Alessandro Alessandri as one of the elected *operai*, on January 3, 1430, see Risoluzioni, II 2 1 c. 135, AOSMF, <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ENG/HTML/S021/C253/T002/TBLOCK00.HTM>. There is a series of documents in the Archives of the Opera del Duomo that sheds light on the role and influence of Alessandro Alessandri and his family in this institution. One entry records that a property of the Alessandri was chosen as the location for meetings by Brunelleschi and officials of the Opera, as well as the audience hall for the *operai* and the *provveditori*'s and as the notary's office: Ricordi, II 4 4, c. 15 [December 9, 1432], AOSMF, <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ENG/HTML/S022/C025/T003/TBLOCK00.HTM>.
  - 7 See Haines and Riccetti 1996, 320.
  - 8 Malleverie, II 1 74, c. 51 [September 23, 1418], AOSMF, <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ITA/HTML/S008/C091/T001/TBLOCK00.HTM>, and Deliberazioni, II 2 1, c. 250v [March 14, 1435/6], AOSMF, <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ITA/HTML/S021/C471/T003/TBLOCK00.HTM>.
  - 9 Kent 2000, 23–24.
  - 10 Ibid., 24; Kent 2009, 36. Cosimo was arrested in September 1433; his exile ended a year later.
  - 11 Tomas 2003, 17. Ginevra and Giovanni di Cosimo's only son Cosimino died in childhood.
  - 12 This profitable connection with the Opera del Duomo is evident in several records of lease and rent of the quarries of Trassinaia and Vincigliata to the Opera from at least March 11, 1421/22. For example, "That Ugo di Bartolomeo Alessandri should receive for the rent of the quarry on the hillock of Vincigliata for sandstone for the dome"; Stanziamenti, II 1 80 c. 66v, AOSMF: "Ugoni Bartholomey de Alexandris quos recipere debet pro affectu cave podii Vincigliate pro macignis habendis pro cupola"; <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ENG/HTML/S014/C081/T005/TBLOCK00.HTM>.
  - 13 For example, "Allocation to the sons of Ugo Alessandri and wages they must have from the Trassinaia quarry for the year 1422"; Ricordi, II 4 11, c. 8v, [March 9, 1422/23], AOSMF: "Stanziaro a' figliuoli d'Ugho Alesandri e- salaro debono avere della chava di Trasinaia per l'anno 1422"; <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ITA/HTML/S025/C011/T012/TBLOCK00.HTM>; see also Stanziamenti, II 4 9 c. 98v [March 9, 1424/25], AOSMF, <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ITA/HTML/S024/C190/T003/TBLOCK00.HTM>.
  - 14 "Niccolò di Ugo Alessandri and brothers must have 100 lire granted to them as the remaining part of the payment of all the money they must have from the Opera for all the time that [the quarry] was held, and for compensation and for all damage"; Stanziamenti, II 4 12, c. 71 [March 29, 1428], AOSMF: "Nicholaio d'Ugho degli Alessandri e frategli deono avere lire cento p. a-loro chonceduti per resto di paghamento di tuti ' danari debono avere dall'Opera per tuto el tempo che-lla se n'è tenuta e per ristoro e ongni danno"; <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ITA/HTML/S026/C121/T004/TBLOCK00.HTM>.
  - 15 Although current scholarship generally agrees on a date of production about the mid-1440s, other hypotheses were previously made. See Ruda 1993, 429–31, for a summary.
  - 16 Diane Cole Ahl (1996, 235) gives an earlier dating for the Gozzoli panels, about 1442–44.
  - 17 Giorgio Vasari erroneously credited this commission to the painter Francesco di Pesello. Vasari 1966, 182. At the time of the commission for the predella panels, Gozzoli was busy completing other commissions in Florence. Michelle O'Malley (2005, 109) pointed out that in 1461, Gozzoli signed a contract with the *compagnia* of Purification and Saint Zenobius. This was about the time of the completion of the fresco cycle in the Chapel of the Magi in the Medici palace in Via Larga.
  - 18 Among them was Alessandro Alessandri's daughter Maria, who was abbess of San Pier Maggiore with the name of Francesca. Litta 1876, table XXV.
  - 19 "videlicet totum podium Vincigliate positum in comitatu Florentie in populo Sancti Laurentii de Vincigliata"; Deliberazioni, II 2 1 c. 4 [July 30, 1425], AOSMF, <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ITA/HTML/S021/C006/T002/TBLOCK00.HTM>.
  - 20 Civic appropriation of religious cults is evident in the incipits of cities' civic and guild statutes. For an overview of the large bibliography on this topic, see Vauchez 1986 and Benvenuti 1995. Records of individual and family devotional preferences can be traced in last wills, contracts, and domestic material culture. See Brundin, Howard, and Laven 2018.
  - 21 Brucker 2007, 63.
  - 22 Vasari's wording is somewhat garbled. I have a slightly different reading from other published translations and I suggest that he intended as follows: "it is said that Messer Alessandro degli Alessandri, a knight of that time[,] acquaintance and friend of [Filippo Lippi], had him make in his villa for his church at Vincigliata, on the hill of Fiesole a panel with a Saint Lawrence and other Saints, in which he portrayed him and two of his children." Vasari 1966, 338: "dicesi che Messer Alessandro degli Alessandri allora cavaliere[,], domestico et amico suo, gli fece per in villa fare per la sua chiesa a Vincigliata, nel Poggio di Fiesole una tavola con un Sancto Lorenzo et altri Santi, nella quale ritrasse lui e due suoi figliuoli." Another important document that records the location of the painting in the church in the seventeenth century is contained in the inventory published in [Baroni] 1871, 50–52.
  - 23 Brucker 2007, 71–76 (appendix).
  - 24 See Ruda 1993, 429–30, no. 39.
  - 25 The removal of the pictorial additions of 1955 revealed that the crozier, or processional Crucifix, was originally painted on an incline, not vertically. This configuration is confirmed by the remains of the bottom part of this object in the central panel and a faint but visible shadow in the damaged gold background of the side panel.
  - 26 Holmes 1999, 113–14.



- 27 The cost and details of the commission for this altarpiece are undocumented, but the cost may be approximated by comparing it with other commissions by the artist in the same years. O'Malley (2005, 44, 114, 156–57) has persuasively discussed how Lippi secured high fees of 350–400 florins for his commissions in 1439 and 1455, and more specifically for the Coronation of the Virgin also known as the Sant'Ambrogio altarpiece. In doing so, Lippi joined a restricted group of highly sought-after painters such as Sassetta and Perugino, who produced some of the most expensive altarpieces in central Italy.
- 28 Holmes (1999, 155) argued that the veneration for the saints-physicians was also a sign of Alessandri's personal devotional preferences.
- 29 Harrold 2009.
- 30 Francesconi 1739, 114; Giannarelli 2002, 97.
- 31 George Bent (2016, 200) suggested that Antonio di Ghezzo was a medic and had adopted the saints-physicians as his saints-protectors for this reason, but Antonio's role in the Opera implies that he was active in the wool trade. See note 32 below.
- 32 Martines 2011, 370. For further details on Antonio di Ghezzo della Casa in the Catasto of 1427 and for his position in the Opera, see *Deliberazioni*, II 2 1 c. 209v [January 4, 1433/34]; c. 210v [February 3, 1433/34]; c. 214v [April 20, 1434]; and c. 215 [April 22, 1434]; all AOSMF, <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ENG/IN/INlist800S0.HTM>. See also Herlihy et al. 2002.
- 33 "Likewise, the aforesaid *operai*, having heard a certain request made by Antonio di Ghezzo della Casa, by which Antonio himself, in perpetuity, out of reverence for God and for the Saints Cosmas and Damian, appointed a chaplain in the main church of Florence to officiate in the said church; and that because of his reverence for the said saints he wished to place on a certain pilaster of the said church a painted image of the aforementioned saints on one of the pilasters of the said church facing the pulpit"; *Deliberazioni*, II 2 1 c. 128v [June 22, 1430], AOSMF: "Item prefati operarii audita quadam postulatione facta per Antonium Ghezi della Casa per quam dixit ipsum Antonium perpetuis temporibus ab reverentiam Dei et sanctorum Cosimi et Damiani deputasse in maiori ecclesia florentina unum cappellanium ad offitandum in dicta ecclesia et quod ob reverentiam dictorum sanctorum vellet apponi facere in quodam pilastro dicte ecclesie unam tabulam pitture sanctorum prefatorum in uno ex pilastris dicte ecclesie existentibus versus pergamum predicationis"; <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ITA/HTML/S021/C241/T011/TBLOCK00.HTM>. See also Poggi 1988, 2:138–39 (doc. 2113).
- 34 Like the Alessandri and the Medici families, the Della Casa also resided in the San Giovanni quarter, in a palazzo across from the Medici Palace, in Via Larga. Alessandro Alessandri was one of the elected *operai* at the time when the altarpiece commissioned by Della Casa was installed in the cathedral.
- 35 Stemma Alessandri, MS 471, Armi di Firenze, Città, Terre e Castelli, e Famiglie fiorentine, sec. XVIII, A72, ASF; <https://www.archiviodistato.firenze.it/ceramellipapiani/index.php?page=Famiglia&id=120>.
- 36 Kent 1992, 51.
- 37 Lawless 2005.
- 38 The altarpiece shows Saint Cosmas for Cosimo, Saint John the Evangelist for Cosimo's father, Giovanni di Bicci, Saint Peter Martyr for Piero di Cosimo de' Medici, son of Cosimo, and Saint Lawrence for Cosimo's brother Lorenzo.
- 39 Litta 1876, table XXV.
- 40 The Archivio dell'Opera has documents from 1434–35 recording these cash accounts: "Alessandro degli Alessandri must give by November 20 one hundred and fifty *grossi* for me from Neri Bartolini, in credit here at fol. 89 (l. 41 s. 10); Ditto on January 4 thirty gold *grossi*, were brought by his son Giovanni (l. 8 s. 6); Ditto on 19 of the said [month] sixteen *lire* ten *soldi* for me from Neri Bartolini, here at fol. 100 (l. 16 s. 10; 66. 6. 0). On January 15 Alessandro Alessandri should have thirty-eight *lire* ten *soldi* recorded for him as a payment at fol. 55 for 140 pieces of fir plank given to the Opera (l. 38 s. 10)." AOSMF, VIII 1 1, cc. 87v–88r a cassa: "Allesandro degli Allesandri de' dare insino a di 20 di novembre grossi centtocinquanta per me da Neri Bartolini, posto debi avere in questo a c. 89 (l. 41 s. 10); E a di IIII di genajo grossi trentta d'oro, portò Giovanni suo figliolo (l. 8 s. 6); E a di XVIII decto lire sedici soldi X per me da Neri Bartolini, in questo a c. 100 (l. 16 s. 10; 66. 6. 0). Allesandro degli Allesandri de' avere a di XV di genajo lire trentta otto soldi X, mesi a lui a uscita a c. 55, per 140 pezi d'asse d'abetto dato a l'Opera" (l. 38 s. 10); <http://archivio.operaduomo.fi.it/cupola/ITA/HTML/S029/C086/T001/TBLOCK00.HTM>. Compare with Haines 1979.
- 41 Plebani 2012.
- 42 Litta 1876, table XXV.
- 43 Salvestrini 2012a.
- 44 The altarpiece was bequeathed by Viscount Lee of Fareham to the abbey in 1947. See Gordon 2019.
- 45 Berenson 1963, 155; Neri di Bicci 1976, 26–27.
- 46 Richa 1755, 150.
- 47 "At all times in perpetuity in the city of Florence is celebrated the feast of Saint John Gualbert's head, and founder of the Vallombrosan Order. He was from the region of Val d'Elsa. July 12." Ibid.: "Omni tempore in perpetuum celebretur in Civitate Flor. festum S. Iohannis Gualberti Capitis, & Principis Ordinis Vallisumb. Qui fuit de partibus Vallis Else 12. Iulii." This was an addendum to the deliberation by the Florentine Signoria of 1396 about the participation of all civic officials in the celebration of the St. Trinità in that church.
- 48 "Those [paintings] in the line below are almost lost and there remains only a figure of St. John Gualbert and, in another space, two people in the act of praying in front of the aforementioned tomb to heal from infirmities, with other spectators of the grace that he bestows to them. . . . In the vault countess Matilde, Pasquale II, Urban II and St John Gualbert are portrayed in good fresco." [Baroni] 1871, 28: "Quelle [pitture] della linea sottostante sono quasi perdute e non ci rimane che una figura di S. Giovanni Gualberto e, in altro spartito, due persone in atto di pregare avanti la mentovata tomba per guarire da infermità, con altri spettatori della grazia che egli loro comparte. . . . Nella volta sono stati effigiati a buon fresco la contessa Matilde, Pasquale II, Urbano II e S. Gio. Gualberto."
- 49 The Barbadori altarpiece was commissioned to decorate a chapel dedicated to Saint Fridianus in the church of Santo Spirito with money bestowed by Gherardo di Bartolomeo Barbadori for this purpose to the confraternity of Orsanmichele of which he had been a *capitano*. The commission from Lippi took place several years after Barbadori's death, which had occurred in 1429.
- 50 Gordon 2019, 42n55.
- 51 Quilici 1941, 40. This is recorded in the vita of Saint John Gualbert written by the saint's hagiographers Andrea di Strumi and Bishop Atto of Pistoia. For the Latin hagiographies of John Gualbert, see *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* 1898–99,

651–52, sections 4397–4406. For Andrea di Strumi and Atto, see Andreas Strumensis 1934, 1080–1104, and Atto Pistoriensis Episcopo 1853, cols. 671–706.

- 52 According to the saint's vita, the Crucifix of the Monastery of San Miniato bowed to him in recognition of John Gualbert's act of mercy, when on the chance encounter of his brother's murderer on Good Friday, he accepted his pledge to be forgiven in the name of Jesus. From the fourteenth century the Crucifix became one of the attributes of Saint John Gualbert. See Padoa Rizzo 2002, 7ff. On this episode in the saint's vita, see Jansen 2005, 203–27 and n14.
- 53 The main panel is in the Musée du Louvre, Paris. The predella panels are in the Galleria degli Uffizi. On this altarpiece see Shell 1961, 197–209. The warm hue of moss green that Lippi used for the cope of Saint Augustine in the Barbadori altarpiece is replicated in the mantle of Saint Lawrence in the Alessandri altarpiece. This was not the most obvious choice, as contemporary iconography represented Lawrence with the red dalmatic of the deacon-martyr.
- 54 Warr 1994, 109.
- 55 Salvestrini 2012b, 1143–85; Argenziano 2011.
- 56 Gordon 2019, 36 and n2.
- 57 Chronicle of Naddo da Montecatini (1387–89) reported in Mori 2013, 162–63.

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AOSMF Archivio dell'Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore

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# A Monumental-Scale Crimson Velvet Cloth of Gold in The Met: Historical, Technical, and Materials Analysis

**GIULIA CHIOSTRINI, ELIZABETH CLELAND, NOBUKO SHIBAYAMA, FEDERICO CARÒ**

Brilliant with kingly pomp, . . . The walls are everywhere cloaked with golden hangings, . . . With cloth of silk in lattice work, interspersed with golden rivets, the inner chambers of the English palace are magnificent.

Thus, the French humanist and poet Jacques Dubois described the temporary palace of Henry VIII erected at the massive, northern French site of the diplomatic meeting between the English king and Francis I in June 1520.<sup>1</sup> Memorably coined by contemporaries as the “Field of the Cloth of Gold” in recognition of the copious amounts of velvet fabrics on view in both royal enclosures, this moniker is just one reminder of the preeminent role of expensive, sumptuous textiles as conspicuous, competitive signifiers of royal pomp and splendor in Renaissance Europe.

The exhibition “The Tudors: Art and Majesty in Renaissance England,” organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art (2022–23), explores the interplay

*fig. 1* Furnishing textile of crimson velvet cloth of gold. Attributed to Florence, late 15th–mid-16th century. Silk and gilt silver-metal-wrapped thread, 10 ft. 5½ in. × 5 ft. 8 in. (318.8 × 172.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Susan Dwight Bliss, 1966 (67.55.101)







between the decorative and the visual arts at the English royal courts during the long sixteenth century. Although posterity lingers on the material extravagances of Henry VIII, it was his father, Henry VII, founder of the Tudor monarchy, who first realized the extent to which visual majesty could bolster the family's tenuous claims to the crown. Certainly, despite the posthumous reputation of Henry VII for fiscal sobriety, account books reveal his prodigious spending on Italian luxury velvets. The court of Henry VII was copiously furnished with textiles to create awe-inspiring displays of regal magnificence, surpassing any acquisitions in this field practiced by the usurped preceding Yorkist dynasty.<sup>2</sup> In one year, Henry VII spent well over £1,300 only on black, purple, and crimson velvets from Lucchese and Florentine merchants.<sup>3</sup> Most evocative of all is the Henry VII Cope (formerly known as the Stonyhurst Cope), now in the collection of the Jesuits in Britain, part of a set of more than thirty-two such vestments and accompanying hangings commissioned by Henry VII for use in Westminster Abbey, for which he paid about £100,000.<sup>4</sup> The velvets were designed from scratch, featuring Tudor roses and Lancastrian double Ss, with the portcullis of his mother's family, the Beauforts. Using the agency of merchants Antonio Corsi and Lorenzo and Ieronimo Buonvisi, the customized velvets were woven to shape simultaneously in two esteemed weaving centers, Lucca and Florence. Henry VIII shared his father's taste for Italian velvet, and likewise appreciated its regal exclusivity. This conviction was codified in the Acts of Apparel, sumptuary laws restricting the wearing of "cloth of gold of tissue" (the most expensive cloth of gold, distinguished by its gold loops) to the royal family and their close circle. Such was Henry VIII's interest that he requested his lord high



chancellor, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, to provide him with a draft of the 1515 statutes and an abstract to annotate before they were passed.<sup>5</sup>

Seen through the lens of today's different hierarchies of worth, it can be difficult to grasp exactly why the Tudors, like the Valois, the Habsburgs, and the Ottomans, valued these velvets so much, prepared to spend outrageously on them, and attempted to monopolize their use. Such is the depleted state of surviving textiles that verbal eyewitness descriptions like that of Dubois, quoted above, are almost invariably the most effective means to envision the material splendor of royal interiors in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. We must engage our imaginations to match surviving fragments with painted evocations by the likes of Mantegna, Jan van Eyck, and Piero della Francesca.<sup>6</sup> The Met is fortunate to own a rare survival: a furnishing textile of crimson velvet cloth of gold of near-unique scale (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup>

This velvet hanging is, in comparison with most of the surviving record, enormous. It spans three loom widths; the selvages (sealing the edges of each of these loom widths) are intact; and the hanging is so tall that it accommodates three vertical repeats of its distinctive, asymmetrical pattern. As such, this velvet's size enables us to experience the phenomenon of the floor-to-ceiling cloths of gold that so awed Dubois and his contemporaries. Designed to make an impact and be legible from a distance, it is clearly a furnishing velvet, its pattern bolder and motifs bulkier than finer, more minutely detailed dress velvets. Thickly sinuous

*fig. 2* Detail of furnishing textile of crimson velvet cloth of gold shown in fig. 1

*fig. 3* Patched panel of crimson velvet cloth of gold. Attributed to Florence, late 15th- to mid-16th century. Silk and gilt silver-metal-wrapped thread, 60 1/2 in. × 46 1/2 in. (153.7 × 118.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Samuel H. Kress, 1946 (46.109.26)





*fig. 4* Cope. Italian, late 15th-century velvet with early 17th-century orphrey, assembled after ca. 1625. Silk and metal-wrapped thread, W. 52½ in. (133.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of The Rembrandt Club, 1911 (2009.300.3409)



vertical golden branches meander above and below large, stylized golden pomegranates. Particular to this design, the branches bend to the right about halfway between the pomegranate motifs to accommodate a pattern of tumbling rosebuds (fig. 2). Two of these roses in each repeat are fully opened: five-petaled, bipartite roses with red centers and “plain” gold outer petals, separated by pointed aristate leaf tips.

Like other luxury early modern textiles, not least tapestries, a talented designer would have conceived the pattern represented on this velvet; his or her design would have been shared with the weavers via an annotated drawn model on paper. Since the twelfth century, the Tuscan town of Lucca and the Adriatic port of Venice had dominated European silk weaving, which subsequently spread to Genoa, Florence, and Milan. Spanish silk weavers, long established at Granada and Valencia, were by the 1500s emulating their Italian counterparts. Raw silk, imported predominantly from Jordan, Syria, and the Balkans or increasingly cultivated locally in Calabria, Lombardy, and Piedmont, was spun, dyed, spooled, and woven within family workshops under the patronage of wealthy, sometimes noble, silk manufacturers. Production in most cities was strictly regulated by guilds. Gradually, Florence and Genoa came to dominate the market for the gold-woven deep-pile velvet silks so coveted by European and Levantine royalty.<sup>8</sup> The drawn model could be

copied, adapted, and transported between rival weaving centers (although there were civic measures in place to try to prevent this). They might be used and reused as long as market fashions, available raw materials, and, of course, weaving talent allowed. It is apparent that this pomegranate and rose design must have been much admired, its model emulated across multiple different workshops over a period of decades. Another surviving velvet with the same design, for example, had been imported into England by 1516, when a single loom width of it was used in the Fayrey family’s pall cloth.<sup>9</sup> Other surviving scraps are in The Met’s collection: smaller, cut, and patched (fig. 3) or later repurposed (fig. 4).<sup>10</sup> In addition to The Met’s three-width furnishing hanging, the most spectacular survival of this velvet design is in the church of Santa Maria nella Badia Fiorentina in Florence (fig. 5).<sup>11</sup> Some of the Badia Fiorentina examples date from 1470 (alongside later, matching pieces woven in the seventeenth century). Though the designs are so similar, it is very difficult to gauge by eye alone how closely these velvets’ techniques correspond, and whether or not they might have been woven in the same weaving center, let alone the same workshop.

Although a hanging like the large one in The Met is so evocative of Renaissance material sumptuousness, and proven so important an expenditure according to the documentary record, these extraordinary velvets



tend to be sidelined in art historical surveys, either summarily glossed over or ignored altogether. This, despite compelling contributions to the field of textile studies by scholars such as Lisa Monnas.<sup>12</sup> Apparently unaware of the Badia Fiorentina velvets (dating to 1470), misinformed historians have identified the



*fig. 5* Hanging of crimson velvet cloth of gold. Florence, 1470. Silk and gilt silver-metal-wrapped thread, 90 × 24 in. (228 × 61.4 cm). Church of Santa Maria nella Badia Fiorentina, Florence

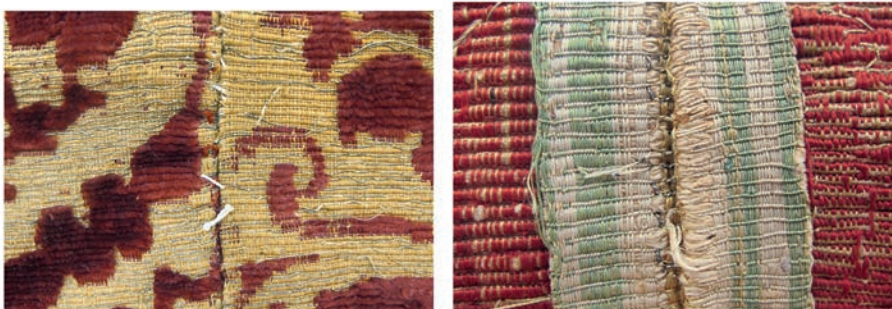
*fig. 6* Two Tudor roses (left) and two Lancastrian roses (right). Detail of stained glass, ca. 1500, in the rose window, south transept, York Minster

bicolored five-petaled rose in the repeat of The Met's velvet (fig. 2) as evidence that Henry VII (who seized the throne in 1485) specially commissioned this design, incorporating what would subsequently become his distinctive heraldic device of the Tudor rose (fig. 6).<sup>13</sup> Instead, it is worth considering that it was a glimpse of this stock motif prevalent in the velvets he so admired that gave Henry VII the idea to superimpose his family's red Lancastrian rose with his wife's white Yorkist rose to create the Tudor rose. This stroke of genius branding after thirty years' civil war would unite the two antagonistic symbols. The physical challenges of velvets like these—their poor survival rate; inaccessibility and infrequent public display; technical intricacies; replicated designs across broad geographies and decades of production—might explain why their publication is limited, and largely siloed within a narrow field of textile scholarship.

A major conservation project prepared The Met's furnishing velvet for display in the opening gallery of "The Tudors" exhibition. This intervention provided an unprecedented opportunity for Met colleagues to explore this important velvet as a physical object, engaging head-on some of the following challenges: to chart the intricacies of its technique; to identify and help source its dyes; and to analyze the composition and structure of its metal-wrapped threads. The study is part of an ongoing, collaborative technical investigation of weaving features, material, metal thread technology, and dyes in early modern Florentine velvet production underway between conservators and scientists from The Met and the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence. This article seeks to provide a model for future scholarship by contributing to a database of comparative material for such surviving early modern velvets.<sup>14</sup> E.C.







**fig. 7** Detail of the obverse (left) and reverse (right) of the joint seams between two of the velvet panels. Stitches in mercerized cotton were used in correspondence to the folded selvages retained on the reverse of each panel. Once the whole panel was reassembled, the conservation treatment allowed for the repositioning of the selvages in the same way, and the external selvages were left open and accessible to the public for a better appreciation of weaving details.

**fig. 8** Detail of the obverse (left) and reverse (right) of one of the three panels positioned on the conservation worktable. Once the selvages were unfolded, the panel was reversed, and narrow strips of cotton were stitched along both sides to strengthen these fragile areas.

**fig. 9** Detail of before (left) and after treatment (right) showing one of the whole panel corners after unfolding the ease of velvet weaving. Cleaning the surface from soil deposits made accessible details of the *alluciolato* features that were not visible prior to the conservation treatment. Stabilization of the damaged areas with conservation stitches in mercerized cotton allowed for the loose weft threads' realignment and the unfolded selva stabilization.

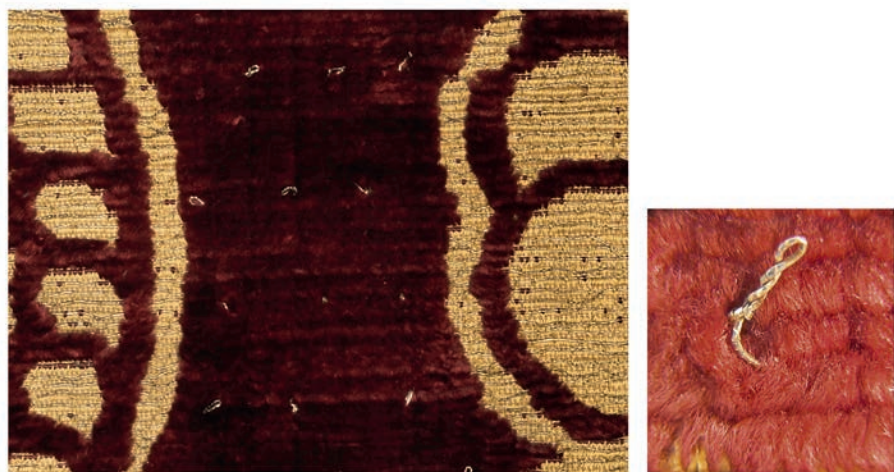
#### TREATMENT: CONSOLIDATION AND PREPARATION FOR DISPLAY IN "THE TUDORS" EXHIBITION

Assessment of the cloth of gold in 2019 by The Met's textile conservators proved the high quality of its weave and supported its significance to the study of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century velvet production. Deciding how to prepare the velvet for display, curators and conservators agreed on a treatment that allowed the velvet to be hung as a wall covering, its original function.<sup>15</sup> This style of installation required stabilization and consolidation. Though the cloth of gold's weave structure remained strong and well preserved, this luxurious textile's appearance was affected by the loss of main warp threads and small lacunae spread on the three loom widths' surface. Consolidation along the seams between the three panels provided additional support to degraded areas of the weave structure that could otherwise potentially affect the stability of the hanging during its display period.

A complete visual examination confirmed that no original joint seams remained, and disassembly could proceed. Supporting this decision was evidence of modern mercerized cotton threads in white and red used for the current stitches and creating unnecessary tension (fig. 7).<sup>16</sup> Disassembly of the whole hanging allowed for successful stabilization of each single panel and facilitated the maneuver of the large textiles during the treatment without further damaging the piece.

Once disassembled, the conservation treatment began. Each velvet length was placed on a worktable, allowing for the cleaning of the pieces with low-suction vacuum. Following photographic documentation, the tension-creating previous restoration stitches were removed from the foundation fabric. Humidification flattened folds in the selvages through a process that rehydrated the fibers and improved their structural condition. Once the selvages were open, narrow strips of cotton fabric were applied with conservation stitches along the reverse of both sides of each panel. Small tears and original weft threads were realigned and stabilized before proceeding with the reassembly of the three panels (fig. 8). Adjustments of the hanging length over the centuries had resulted in an abundance of folded velvet along the top and bottom edges. These areas were unfolded to return the panel to its original length (fig. 9). In the final stage of the conservation process, the cloth of gold was prepared for hanging with the application of segments of Velcro along the top edge. For display, the velvet is supported within an exhibition case made of a wooden stretcher wrapped in neutral color-tested fabric, with a Plexiglas bonnet protecting the textile from external environmental factors.<sup>17</sup> G.C.





### TECHNICAL OBSERVATIONS

Prior to its display as part of the exhibition, the textile underwent microscopy analysis of the weaving technique, fiber identification, and a visual examination of the obverse and reverse of the piece. Woven in crimson silk pile, the panel is constructed of three identical loom widths of cut and voided silk velvet enhanced by silver-gilt-wrapped silk threads.<sup>18</sup> Just as the velvet's asymmetrical design suggests attribution to Florence, bolstered by its resemblance to the well-documented Badia Fiorentina velvets (see fig. 5), technical analysis reveals that the textile's physical construction correlates strongly with Florentine manufacture. Each loom width, of which all selvages are still well preserved, measures approximately 22½ inches. This figure neatly corresponds with the breadth of the standard measurement in Florence, the 23-inch braccio.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the selvages edging The Met's three loom widths are ⅝ inch (1.5 cm) wide; they are woven in plain weave with alternating green and white threads (a detail normally hidden from view). In both width and coloration, the selvages correspond to those recorded on the Badia Fiorentina velvets, as well as other velvets documented as Florentine production.<sup>20</sup>

Skillful weavers made the most of their costly materials in the creation of this velvet. The foundation fabric is composed of a taffeta *doublé*, in which parallel rows of thick, undyed silk wefts are covered by a fine yellow silk warp (fig. 10).<sup>21</sup> An even finer narrow additional weft, called a covering weft, conceals the pile warp in the voided areas, which are those areas of the textile not covered with the deep crimson pile. This crimson pile on the surface of the velvet articulates the design's contours, while the yellow-gold color of the flatter, voided areas conveys the pomegranates, roses, and foliage. By dyeing the warp and the covering weft yellow, they complement and accentuate the glow of the actual silver-gilt-wrapped silk thread. These golden threads are *filé*, meaning that they are continuous, covering the whole loom width, running from selva to selva. They are visible in some areas, but hidden beneath the pile in others.<sup>22</sup> The weavers used the *filé* of silver-gilt-wrapped silk thread to best advantage, manipulating rods during weaving to create tall loops of metal thread where the weft could not be pulled down tightly into the weave but instead rose up above the finished surface once the rods were removed. Tiny *alluciolato* effects, only used in the crimson pile areas, are characterized by a single, taller loop that twists up around itself (fig. 11). Creating subtle, golden sparkles within the crimson areas, this technique evocatively



**fig. 10** Detail of the foundation fabric in taffeta *doublé* (left) and microphotograph 20x (right) of its weave structure showing a count of 30 fine yellow silk warp and 36 thick silk weft threads, Z-twisted, per centimeter; 8 covering wefts per centimeter in yellow silk fine thread conceal the voided crimson silk pile warps; 8 *filé* of silver-gilt-wrapped silk thread per centimeter is tied adjacent to the covering weft by a ½ twill binding warp in yellow silk thread.

**fig. 11** Detail of the *alluciolato* feature (left) and microphotograph 20x (right) of a single loop. *Alluciolato*, a term derived from the Italian word *lucciola* (firefly), is distinguished by individual loops of the *filé* metal-wrapped threads twisted and spread in the pile area. The feature is achieved through the addition of a row into the weaving that lifts the metal-wrapped thread to form the loop.

**fig. 12** Detail of the bouclé feature (left) and microphotograph 20x (right). The bouclé feature is achieved in the same way described above for the *alluciolato* effect, but it forms a rod of loops of the *filé* metal-wrapped thread instead of a single loop.

takes its name from *lucciola*, the Italian for “firefly.” In the effect called bouclé, short rows of “loop-the-loop” rings of gold appear across the yellow-gold voided areas (fig. 12). (This type of golden loop was the distinguishing feature of the most expensive “cloth of gold of tissue” singled out in Henry VIII’s Acts of Apparel cited above.) The harmonious combination of these technical features with the well-preserved red and yellow dyes enhances the entire design.<sup>23</sup> The early Badia textiles share a significantly similar weaving structure, also composed of a taffeta *doublé* in *filaticcio*, with comparable technical features of the looped precious-metal wrapped threads.<sup>24</sup>

Technical clues support the theory that the velvet is an example of the portable furnishing textiles purchased by the likes of Henry VII and Henry VIII from the Florentine market to decorate the interiors of their permanent and temporary palaces. The whole panel has a structurally strong weave, the thickness of which might initially strike one as heavy-handed compared with the more delicate construction of dress velvets. However, this very strength of the textile would render it physically hardy enough to withstand the constant handling, installation and deinstallation, and general wear and tear of a functional wall hanging. Combining costly materials with such a dense weave, the weavers skillfully achieved a wall covering of sumptuous appearance. The large dimensions of the depicted pattern are enriched by an abundance of precious material to magnify the reception of this magnificent decorative textile from up close or far away. Furthermore, the extent of the preserved length of the three loom widths supports the hypothesis that the whole velvet functioned as a hanging textile from its genesis. While it is not unusual to observe velvet panels of these dimensions in museum collections, most are cleverly assembled modern composites of similar and contemporary textile fragments.<sup>25</sup> This rare, full-length textile shows the full design composition and original splendor of the cloth of gold. G.C.

#### ANALYSIS OF DYES

To help understand the provenance of the velvet, dyes used on the samples of red pile and yellow weft yarn from the velvet were analyzed by high performance liquid chromatography with photodiode array detector (HPLC-PDA). Small yarn samples were taken from the velvet and their dyes extracted for analysis.<sup>26</sup>

The dye used on the red yarn sample suggests cochineal, an insect dye from either South or Central America (*Dactylopius coccus* Costa) or from Armenia

(*Porphyrophora hamelii* Brandt).<sup>27</sup> Carminic acid, a dominant colorant of those dyes, was detected as a main colorant in the red sample. Cochineal from America is reported to have been imported by Spain in the early half of the sixteenth century for the first time. Armenian cochineal had been used in Europe prior to American cochineal; however, when the latter became popular it eventually replaced the use of Armenian cochineal.<sup>28</sup> Using the insect dye cochineal, which was expensive, indicates the high quality of this velvet textile.<sup>29</sup>

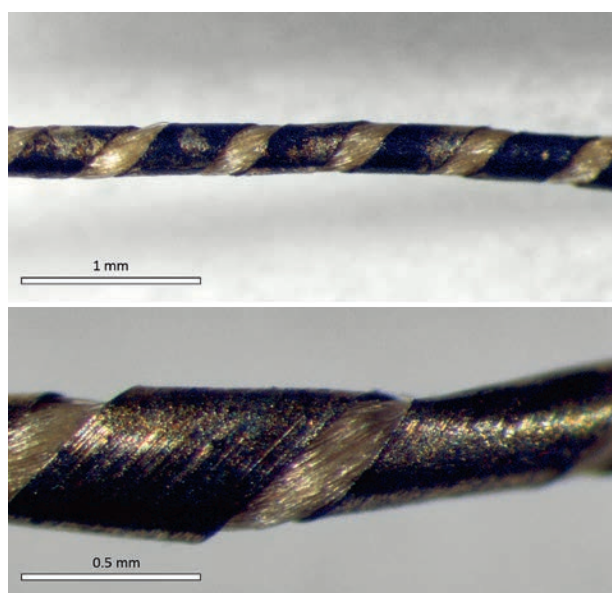
The dye used on the yellow yarn sample suggests a combination of weld (*Reseda luteola* L.) and young fustic (*Cotinus coggygria* Scop.). Luteolin 7-O glucoside, luteolin, and agigenin, which are main colorants of weld, and sulfretin, a main colorant of young fustic, which adds an orangey tone to the yellow yarn, were detected from the yellow sample.<sup>30</sup> Weld was the representative yellow natural dye in Europe and in the Mediterranean because of its beautiful color, availability, and lightfastness.<sup>31</sup> Young fustic mainly grows in southern and Central Europe. It is known to be less lightfast than weld, and as a result perhaps regarded as less salient than weld. However, young fustic was the only yellow dye in the medieval silk-dyeing recipes of Florence and Venice, which differs from the recipes of silk yellow dyeing in France or Spain where weld was used as the main yellow dye.<sup>32</sup> In addition, weld appears to have been used as a supplement in an early fifteenth-century Florence treatise, where it is recommended to nuance the yellow of young fustic to less of a russet shade.<sup>33</sup> The main production area of young fustic was the Veneto and Provence.<sup>34</sup> The yellow yarn sample from a Florentine border showed the presence of young fustic and weld by dye analysis, proving the recipe in the Florence treatise.<sup>35</sup> In addition, yellow yarns from other velvets attributed to Florence are found to be dyed with a mixture of weld and young fustic.<sup>36</sup>

Although the types of dyes that were indicated as having been used in The Met’s velvet were widely used in Europe and parts of Western Asia, historical records indicate that the use of young fustic with weld in the yellow yarn sample is suggestive of Italian origin. However, to narrow attribution to Florence on the basis of its dyes, more Florentine velvets need to be studied to understand the relationship between the dyes and the attribution. The combination of the two dyes young fustic and weld, for example, was also found in a yellow silk yarn sample from a textile that was probably made in Granada, Spain, in the late fifteenth century and a yellow silk core yarn of metal thread from a

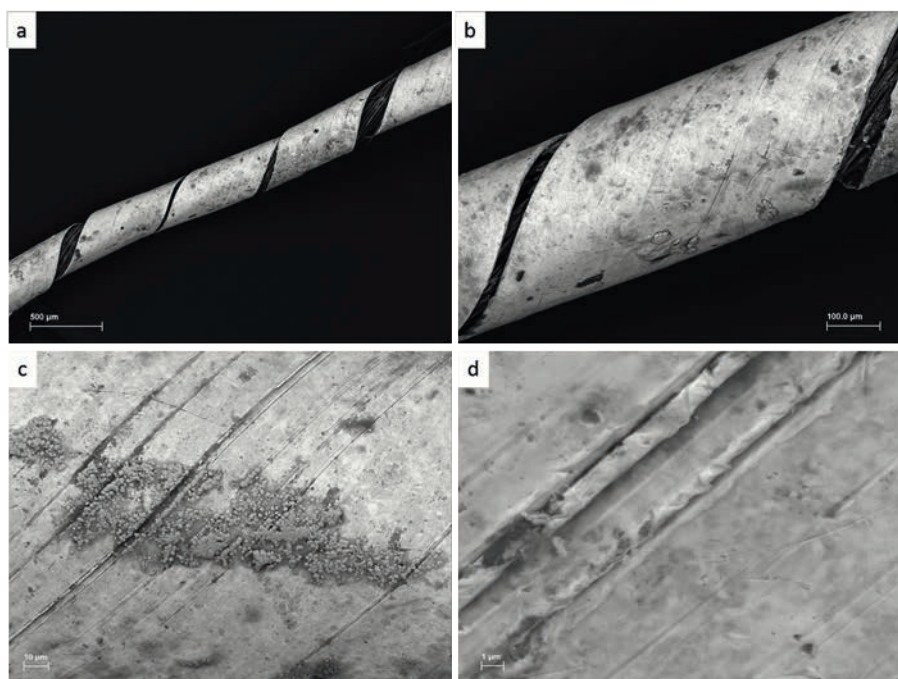
seventeenth-century Ottoman velvet.<sup>37</sup> In those instances, the dyed yarns could have been exported from Italy to those places or there might have been a similar dyeing recipe in use.

The red silk appears to be weighted with tannins,<sup>38</sup> or tannins were used as an auxiliary agent.<sup>39</sup> Ellagic acid, derived from ellagitannins under hydrolytic conditions,<sup>40</sup> was detected from the red yarn sample in addition to colorants of cochineal. Ellagitannins are one of two subdivisions of hydrolysable tannins along with gallotannins. The technique of weighting silk with tannins had been used in the medieval period or earlier, and gall was a typical source plant.<sup>41</sup> Ellagic acid is

**fig. 13** The metal thread is seen here under visible light at the binocular microscope. Longitudinal marks along the entire length of the strip are visible in the bottom image.



**fig. 14** Backscattered electron (BSE) images of the metal thread, showing the thread's overall surface (a and b), and details of the die marks and corrosion products at the surface of the metal strip (c and d)



found often in historical red silk yarn samples dyed with carminic acid, a main colorant of cochineal, in Europe and the Middle East.<sup>42</sup> N.S.

#### ANALYSIS OF METAL THREADS

One sample of metal thread was collected and examined by optical microscopy (OM) and scanning electron microscopy with energy dispersive spectroscopy (SEM-EDS).<sup>43</sup> Characteristic measurements of the whole sample were taken under high magnification, such as the thread width, the metal strip width, the distance between coils, and the coil angles. A small portion of the metal strip was embedded in epoxy resin and cross-sectioned in order to investigate its composition, thickness, and the type and thickness of metal coating. Together, the data help to reconstruct the technology used to manufacture the metal-wrapped threads, and ultimately place this production within the broad context of technological practices at the service of European textile makers.

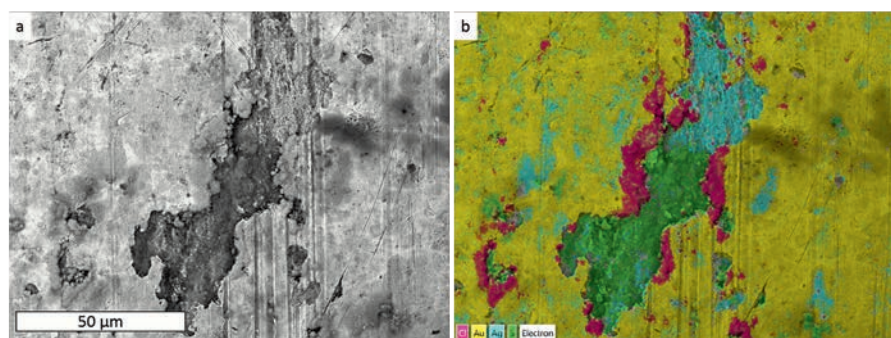
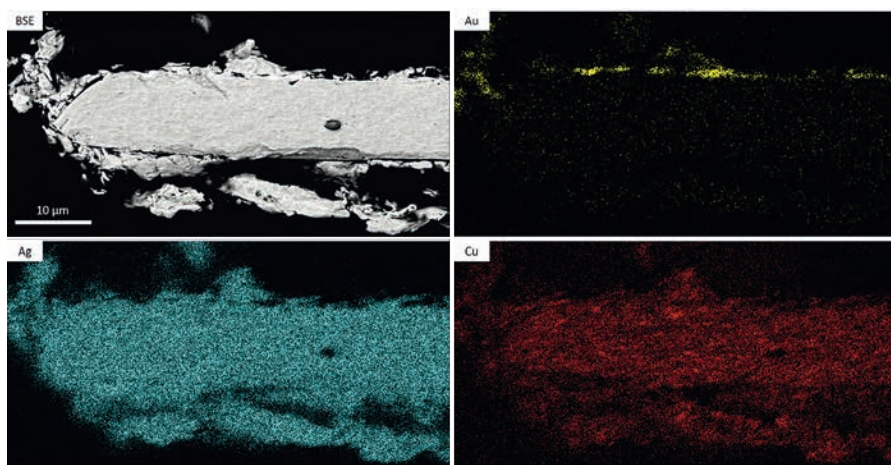
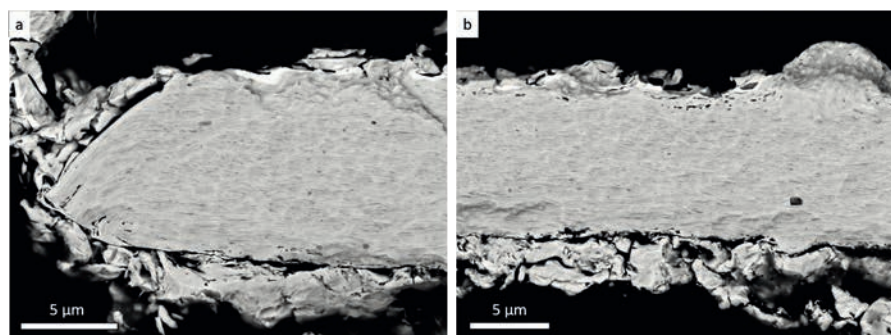
The thread consists of S-type metal coil wrapped around a yellow-dyed core yarn (figs. 11, 12). The thread has a total diameter of about 300 µm. The metal strip has an average width of 400 µm, and is about 10 µm thick. The coils are tightly and evenly spaced by a gap 10–50 µm wide, and wrapped with an angle of about 50°. The metal strip is a binary Ag-Cu alloy with an average composition of 82.6 ± 0.4 wt% silver (Ag) and 17.1 ± 0.4 wt% copper (Cu). Lead (Pb) is present in trace amounts of about 0.3 ± 0.1 wt%.

The surface of the metal strip bears traces of straight and rather deep die marks that run along the entire length of the strip, and that are more pronounced on the gilt side (figs. 13, 14). In places, these die marks expose the silver core underneath the gilding. Straight die marks indicate that the strip was likely rolled or drawn sometime after gilding.

The silver strip is gilt on one side with a highly discontinuous gold layer (fig. 15) that varies in thickness from about 80 nm to about 150 nm, suggesting that a bar of metal was first gilt on one of its sides, and then flattened and reduced to a thin strip.

In cross section, the texture of the metal strip is typical of a highly worked alloy, where the cast structure has been deformed and flattened. The edges of the strip are asymmetrical, with strong bending and folding of the metal toward the ungilt side of the strip (figs. 15, 16). This indicates that the strip was cut using a directional shear pressure applied predominantly from the gilt side of the strip. The strip is also characterized by the presence of abundant fines of metal,





**fig. 15** Cross section of the metal thread seen in BSE, showing the heavily worked metal structure (a and b), asymmetrical edges (a), and abundant metal fines (a and b). Gold is visible on one side of the thread (top) as a bright, discontinuous layer (a and b).

**fig. 16** BSE image of the metal thread cross section, and distribution maps of gold (Au), silver (Ag) and copper (Cu). The elemental maps show the gold layer on one side only (in yellow), and the deformed Cu-rich phase (in red).

**fig. 17** BSE image of a highly corroded thread surface with loss of gilding (a), and a composite elemental map (b) showing the distribution of silver chlorides (red, Cl), silver sulfides (green, S), and of the silver substrate (blue, Ag) and gilding layer (yellow, Au).

sometimes carrying gilding, and adhered to the strip surfaces (fig. 15).

The formation of corrosion products is especially developed and diffused as silver sulfides and chlorides built up on top of the strip surfaces. These corrosion products often concentrate along the grooves and are responsible for the loss of portions of the gilding (fig. 17).

The presence of die marks running along the strip length, combined with a single gilt side, cut edges, and metal fines, suggests that the strip might not have been manufactured using the “beaten-and-cut” method or the “drawn-and-rolled” method described in the literature,<sup>44</sup> but rather by a combination of the two. Threads with similar characteristics have been previously identified on a mid-sixteenth-century tapestry belonging to the Fables of Ovid series, woven in Brussels by Willem de Pannemaker and purchased in 1556 by Philip II of Spain.<sup>45</sup>

Reconstructing the exact technology employed in the production of this metal thread is challenging, as several combinations of manufacturing and spinning processes could have led to the microstructures seen in the studied sample. Among the possible manufacturing techniques, it is suggested that the strip was obtained from a gilt bar that was beaten and flattened mechanically, and then rolled and cut through cutting rollers. It is also possible that the straight marks were left during the stretching of a “beaten-and-cut” strip, by friction against the portion of the strip that was rolled onto the stretcher. In this case, however, fines containing traces of gold should have been detected on the underside of the metal strip as well, an occurrence that was not confirmed by this analysis. Ultimately, these findings indicate that the presence of longitudinal die marks on the metal threads’ surface does not necessarily imply that the strip was produced by rolling a drawn gilt wire, and that a thorough characterization of these materials requires the study of both their surfaces and cross sections.

It is very likely that other ways to produce long, narrow, and gilt metal strips existed in addition to the traditionally recognized “beaten-and-cut” and “drawn-and-rolled” methods, at least in sixteenth-century Europe. These manufacturing techniques, possibly bridging and combining characteristics from both the well-known methods, need further investigation to be fully understood. F.C.

## CONCLUSION

The size and excellent condition of the rare textile of crimson velvet cloth of gold in The Met capture the appeal of large-scale luxury furnishing velvets for their

original patrons, not least the fledgling Tudor dynasty. The velvet's stylistic attribution to Florence is bolstered by the historical record that Florence was one of the two centers patronized by the Tudors. Likewise supporting the attribution to Florence is the loom width's concordance with the Florentine braccio, and the green and white selvages. The use of young fustic dye, with its orangey color, is reported to be more characteristic of medieval Italian silk recipes in contrast to those of Spain and France, with the weld-young fustic combination documented to Florence. However, to confirm this attribution, the results will need to be compared with future analyses of velvets that securely document the place of production.

Beyond this contributing evidence to the regional attribution of the velvet, the technical data on weave, dyes, and threads shared here more broadly enhances our knowledge of Italian velvet weaving in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Materials and technical analysis trace the hands of this velvet's makers, revealing otherwise indiscernible trade secrets. The velvet, for example, has a strong, thick weave, designed to survive the handling and weight for use as a hanging. Gilt bars were flattened and cut by rollers to create the metal strips, a sophisticated technology that would have allowed the fabrication of large quantities of golden threads at efficient and cost-effective rates. Such a manufacturing process might be more common than previously documented, and its identification in two different fifteenth- and sixteenth-century textiles, one woven in Brussels and one in Florence, raises questions about movements of materials and technologies. The technical study of further comparative material will help determine whether this technology was specific to specialized and possibly regional workshops, or the result of the spread of technological innovations to various production centers of Europe. The silk cores to these

metal-wrapped threads were dyed yellow to enhance their glittering effects. The weavers used *allucciato*, random loops of gold, in the crimson velvet pile to accentuate the sparkle of the hanging. The skill and work of the weavers, dyers, *battitori* (gold beaters), and *filatrici* (assemblers of the metal threads) become more readily appreciable. The technical and physical analysis of the three velvet loom widths provides important evidence that such velvets not only served as dress fabrics but could also be designed and constructed as luxury interior furnishings, a documented function until now recognized mainly through representations in paintings.

The present case study is intended to help create a core body of knowledge that, analyzed in tandem with growing comparable data of velvets with complete provenance, might shed light on questions of regional attribution, perhaps even associations with specific family workshops, and continue to sharpen scholars' focus on the materials and manufacturing techniques in the decorative arts.

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## NOTES

- 1 Published with translation by Bamforth and Dupèbe 1991, 71.
- 2 Discussed in detail in Cleland and Eaker 2022.
- 3 See Hayward 2020, 117–19.
- 4 The documents pertaining to Henry VII's commission of the vestments for Westminster Abbey are published and discussed by Monnas 1989; see also Condon 2003, 68, and Cleland and Eaker 2022, no. 7.
- 5 Passed between 1509 and 1533, these Acts of Apparel are published by Baldwin 1926, 140–62, and discussed in detail by Monnas 2008, 2, and Hayward 2009.
- 6 See studies by Monnas 2008 and Duits 2008.
- 7 See Giulia Chiostri in Cleland and Eaker 2022, no. 15.
- 8 For a detailed account of the context of early modern European silk weaving and an accompanying bibliography, see Monnas 2008, 1–65.
- 9 For the context producing “countless variations of only a few pattern types on the market,” see Peter 2020, 20. The *Fayrey Family Funeral Pall*, ca. 1516 (St. Peter's Church, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London), is made of Florentine velvet cloth of gold, crimson silk cut and uncut pile, and silver-gilt weft loops, with side panels of violet velvet, applied embroideries of silver-gilt, silver, and colored silks on linen. Monnas in Marks and Williamson 2003, no. 349, pl. 31.
- 10 The Met's patched panel of crimson velvet cloth of gold (fig. 3) is a modern composite of multiple small, irregular fragments of velvet. Other smaller examples of velvet with this design (in addition to figs. 3 and 4), are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. 81-1892, see Monnas in Marks and Williamson 2003, no. 201; the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, inv. 2478, see Peter 2020, 20; the Antonio Ratti Foundation, Como, inv. 146, see Buss 1996, 23; and the Costume Gallery, Pitti Palace, Florence, inv. Tessuti Antichi no. 614, see Orsi Landini 2020, 68–69. Two magnificent examples that have survived with dimensions comparable to the one in The Met belong to the Comunità Ebraica, Pisa, inv. 09-00500741, and the Museo Ebraico di Roma, inv. 675; see Liscia Bemporad and Melasecchi 2019, nos. 30, 31. A considerably later but splendid example, with deep blue pile, combining four loom widths, each with three repeats, is the Pall Cloth made for Pope Leo XI (d. 1605) in the Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. 142-1869.
- 11 For the Badia Fiorentina velvets, see Liscia Bemporad and Guidotti 1981; Buss, Butazzi, and Pertegato 1983; and Paolo Peri in Dal Prà, Carmignani, and Peri 2019, no. 10.
- 12 In particular, Monnas 1989, 2008, 2012.
- 13 Chiara Buss (1996, 22) describes these as “Tudor roses” in reference to a small fragment of velvet woven to the same design, preserved in the Antonio Ratti Foundation, Como. Thomas P. Campbell (2007, 145) illustrates The Met's hanging in his discussion of the “Field of the Cloth of Gold,” having raised the suggestion of a Tudor commission (verbal communication to E. Cleland, January 25, 2006).
- 14 We acknowledge the trailblazing approach of the Lombardy-based Progetto PSL (La produzione Serica in Lombardia), headed by Chiara Buss (see Buss 2009 and 2011). Monnas 2008, 16; Buss 2009, 15; and Adelson 2013, 975, call for increased publication of data from scientific analysis of specific textiles. Corinna Kienzler (2020) presents targeted case studies in this mode; Monnas (2012) includes thread, dye, and weave structure analyses in entries in her Victoria and Albert Museum highlights catalogue.
- 15 We are grateful to Janina Poskrobko, Conservator in Charge of the Department of Textile Conservation at The Met, for her support of this project.
- 16 Traces of old thick threads in the form of knots located on the surface of the folded selvages were found on the reverse of the panels. They were documented and left in place. Further investigation is needed to verify their contemporaneity to the velvet weaving.
- 17 All the material in contact with the art for temporary or permanent use was Oddy-tested and approved by the Department of Scientific Research, The Met.
- 18 Silver-gilt-wrapped thread is a thin layer of gold applied on a silver metal strip wrapped around a silk core. See the discussion and analysis of metallic threads below.
- 19 The Florentine measure called *braccio* for this type of velvet manufactured between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries corresponded to 23 inches [58.362 cm], excluding the selvages. See Monnas 2008, 320–21.
- 20 For existing analysis of similar textiles of Florentine production, see Orsi Landini 2017, 37–44; Liscia Bemporad and Melasecchi 2019, 158–59; and Monnas 2012, 98–101, nos. 24, 25. A collaborative technical investigation of Renaissance Florentine velvet production is underway among conservators and scientists from The Met and the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence. The research is ongoing, but is currently focused on a comparison study of weaving features, material, metal threads technology, and dyes implied in the construction of The Met's furnishing textile of crimson velvet cloth of gold (fig. 1) and the fifteenth-century Badia church velvets.
- 21 Taffetta *doublé* is an extended tabby weave in which the warp threads pass over a great number of weft threads. For a helpful description of this type of foundation fabric in velvet weaving, see Orsi Landini 2020, 63–80.
- 22 *Filé* is a continuous metal weft thread that creates a selvage-to-selvage pattern. In contrast, a “brocaded” weft indicates a discontinuous weft thread inserted into a weaving only in correspondence of a design pattern.
- 23 See the dye analysis below.
- 24 *Filaticcio* is an Italian term taken to mean “raw silk.” For a detailed description, including technical analysis of the tissues, see Liscia Bemporad and Guidotti 1981. The study suggests that the 1470 Badia velvet panels were commissioned to decorate the interiors of the Florentine church.
- 25 For instance, we can observe velvet panel MMA 46.109.26 (fig. 3) (60½ in. × 46½ in.), which resembles the hanging under discussion both from a design and a technical perspective. However, the textile is made of four small fragments of velvet that have been joined along their perimeters sometime in their more recent history with the intention to construct a certain length. Many examples of important Renaissance velvets in museum collections are fragmentary, often with evidence of previous folding suggesting that they were originally part of vestments rather than hangings.
- 26 The experimental method was as follows:  
 Small yarn samples were taken from the velvet, and each sample (approx. 5 mm) was extracted using 40 µl of a mixture of 0.01 M aqueous oxalic acid, pyridine, and methanol (3/3/4, v/v/v) in a small test tube. The yarn sample was left for half an hour at room temperature, subsequently heated at 55–60°C for 20 minutes. The extract was then removed to an insert, and the tube was rinsed with 20 µl of methanol; the rinsing solution was

also added to the insert. Then, 80  $\mu$ l of the new mixture mentioned above was added to the test tube again and heated at 90–100°C for 10 minutes; this extract was then moved to the same insert. The tube was rinsed with 20  $\mu$ l of methanol, and the rinsing solution was also added to the insert. The extract in the insert was dried in a vacuum desiccator using an aspirator. The residue was mixed with 2  $\mu$ l of dimethylformamide at 60°C for 5 minutes, next, 6  $\mu$ l of methanol was added to vortex, and then 4  $\mu$ l of 1% aqueous formic acid (v/v). The solution was centrifuged for 10 minutes at 3500g; the supernatant was injected into the HPLC system. The extraction method was slightly modified from the method developed by Mouri and Laursen 2011.

The chemicals used here are analytical or HPLC grade and a high pure water was made by Milli-Q water purification system.

The analytical system used consisted of a 1525 $\mu$  binary HPLC pump, 2996 PDA detector, 1500 series column heater, in-line degasser and a Rheodyne 7725i manual injector with 20  $\mu$ l loop (Waters Corporation, Milford, MA). An XBridge BEH Shield RP<sub>18</sub> reversed-phase column (3.5  $\mu$ m-particle, 2.1 mm I.D.  $\times$  150.0 mm, Waters Corporation, Milford, MA) was used with a guard column (XBridge BEH Shield RP<sub>18</sub> 3.5  $\mu$ m-particle, 2.0 mm I.D.  $\times$  10.0 mm, Waters Corporation, Milford, MA) with a flow rate of 0.2 mL/min. The column pre-filter (Upchurch ultra-low Volume pre-column filter with 0.5  $\mu$ m stainless steel frit, Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO) was attached in front of the guard column. Column temperature was 40°C.

The mobile phase was eluted in a gradient mode of 1% formic acid in high purity water (v/v) (A) and a mixture of methanol and acetonitrile (1/1, v/v) (B). The gradient system was 90% (A) for 3 min  $\rightarrow$  to 60% (A) in 7 minutes in a linear slope  $\rightarrow$  to 0% (A) in 24 minutes in a linear slope, and then to 90% (A) in 1 minute and held at 90% (A) for 10 minutes.

- 27 Several studies using statistics to differentiate species of cochineal that contain the same colorants with a different ratio have been done (Wouters and Verheken 1989; Serrano et al. 2015).

However, in this study, the differentiation is not performed.

- 28 Cardon 2007, 630; Phipps 2010, 26–27.

- 29 Monnas 2012, 23.

- 30 Cardon 2007, 171, 192.

- 31 Ibid., 168.

- 32 Ibid., 172.

- 33 Ibid., 192.

- 34 Ibid., 195.

- 35 Wouters 1995.

- 36 Monnas 2012, 99, 111.

- 37 MMA 2011.480 and 1970.65.9. Unpublished internal documents, 2005 and 2011, Department of Scientific Research, The Met.

- 38 Hacke 2008.

- 39 Serrano et al. 2015.

- 40 Haslam 1966, 91.

- 41 Bogle 1979.

- 42 Monnas 2012, 158; Shibayama, Wypyski, and Gagliardi-Mangilli 2015.

- 43 Analysis was performed with a FE-SEM Zeiss Sigma HD, equipped with an Oxford Instrument X-MaxN 80 SDD detector. Backscattered images (BSE), energy dispersive x-ray spectroscopy (EDS) analysis and X-ray mapping were realized at 20kV. One fragment of metal thread was mounted on a carbon stub with carbon tape and analyzed by SEM-EDS in low vacuum. One fragment of metal strip was embedded in epoxy resin,

cross-sectioned, polished by means of an ion milling system (Hitachi IM4000), and carbon coated (carbon thickness of 12  $\mu$ m) before being studied by SEM-EDS in high vacuum.

- 44 Brenni 1930; Montegut et al. 1992; and Járó, Gondar, and Toth 1993.

- 45 Hacke et al. 2009. For the tapestry series, see Cecilia Paredes in Cleland 2014, 294–301.

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# Malachite Networks: The Demidov and Medici Vases-Torchères in The Met

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Since the middle of the last century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art has held three extraordinary works executed by the Parisian atelier of Pierre Philippe Thomire, which incorporated Russian malachite. This richly patterned semiprecious stone, known for its brilliant green color, had strong associations with the Russian count, collector, and industrialist Nicolai Nikitich Demidov (1773–1828). The first, a monumental vase with gilt bronze figural handles, has been amply studied, and its history traced from the time of its making in 1819 for Demidov to its acquisition by the Museum in 1944.<sup>1</sup> The others, impressive twelve-light torchères, were given to the Museum in 1964 by Rodman A. de Heeren, and until now had not been studied in depth or attributed to a specific patron (fig. 1a, b). This research note

*fig. 1a, b* Pedestal and plinth of one of a pair of vases-torchères, 1821–23 (see fig. 9 for the vase, now too delicate to photograph). Pierre Philippe Thomire (French, 1751–1843) and Francesco Sibilio (Leopoldo Francesco Sibilio, 1784–1859). Paris and Rome. Malachite veneered on copper, patinated bronze, gilt bronze, overall 8 ft. 6 in. × 16 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 16 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (259.1 × 42.9 × 42.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Rodman A. de Heeren, 1964 (64.163.1a–d and 64.163.2a–d)





reconstructs the pieces' history with Nicolai Demidov and his residence in Florence, Villa San Donato. Archival documents that have never before been published in English reveal Demidov's key role as a supplier of Russian malachite to skilled artisans in Italy and France, and his equally central position in shaping the European taste for this semiprecious stone as a luxury material for monumental furnishings. Importantly, the documents also show that Demidov's son, Anatole, sought to refashion the vases for new audiences in the second half of the nineteenth century, displaying them at San Donato, which functioned as a residence and as a showroom for promoting new uses for malachite.

The pair was executed for Demidov by the workshops of Pierre Philippe Thomire in Paris and Francesco Sibilio in Rome in 1821–23, and arrived in the United States after 1880. The model of the vases derives from the famous classical krater shape of the Medici vase (Greek, 1st century B.C., Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) that once belonged to the Villa Medici in Rome.<sup>2</sup> However, the malachite pieces are embellished with imposing pedestals with cubic plinths. The large branches shaped as bouquets once served as candelabra.<sup>3</sup> The bronze decoration is extraordinarily rich: a relief scene representing the sacrifice of Iphigenia as well as grape and acanthus leaves, and the ovoid decoration on the lip of each vase is complemented by the sprigs and geometric frames below. On each side of the

pedestal and plinth are black stone reserves, now embellished with bronze relief. The pedestal and the plinths employ malachite, but the types of stone and the technique of the applied mosaic differ from that of the vases, for reasons that will subsequently become clear.

The visibility of malachite as a luxury material increased significantly at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as Demidov desired monumental objects of striking, architectural proportions for use at his Parisian houses, and later at the palazzo in Florence, where he moved in the 1820s, believing the climate would benefit his health. While the history of Catherine the Great's patronage of French luxury objects in the second half of the eighteenth century is well known, less studied are the connections that linked Russian suppliers of rare and precious materials, such as malachite, to elite French workshops that incorporated these materials into exceptional works of decorative art in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Documents related to the vases in Russian Archives show the close links between France and Russia in the early nineteenth century.

Malachite, a stone featuring striations of intense green, appeared in European decorative arts at the onset of the nineteenth century. One of the main suppliers of this material to emerge in France was Demidov, a wealthy Russian aristocrat at the time and an early mining industrialist. In the first years of the century he lived in Paris, seeking to acquire the highest-quality goods on the Parisian market. Demidov not only purchased finished pieces, but also played an active role in commissioning objects for which he supplied the raw materials. This distinguished him from other connoisseurs of the period. He sought out the finest artists. Such was the case for his relationship with Thomire (1751–1843), among the most important *bronziers* in Paris with an exceptional list of illustrious clients, including Napoleon. The main part of Demidov's French gilt bronze collection was developed in this workshop. Unusually, the count was actively involved in the entire evolution of his orders, discussing the composition, details, and material throughout ongoing correspondence with Thomire.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it was Demidov who introduced the use of malachite into their collaboration. The unconventional construction of the pair of torchères at The Met makes it possible to reconstruct the early history of the pieces, which we know were originally part of a set of four pieces that were once housed at the Villa San Donato in Florence, thus aligning their provenance with the monumental vase on view in the galleries.

Documents in the Russian Archives confirm that the two vases at The Met were originally part of four Medici vases with twelve lights owned by Nicolai Demidov in the late 1820s. The origins of the four vases-torchères remained obscured until the discovery of nineteen letters in the State Archive of the Sverdlovsk Region (Ekaterinburg, Russia). The letters were written by Louis-Auguste-César Carbonelle, Thomire's son-in-law who took over the workshop upon Thomire's retirement in 1823 and was responsible for correspondence with Demidov.<sup>5</sup> The documents are dated 1822 to 1826, corresponding to the beginning of Demidov's Tuscan stay. In addition to Thomire and Carbonelle, the names of Francesco Sibilio, an antiquities dealer and *marbrier* based in Rome, and Solomon Levy, the Milanese-Parisian art dealer, also appear. We know that from about 1815, Thomire's workshop produced several malachite pieces destined for the market. In 1823, Carbonelle, corresponding on behalf of Thomire, asked Demidov to sell him some malachite for an ensemble comprising a clock and a pair of candelabra, demonstrating that Demidov had instigated the incorporation of malachite as a luxury material.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, in 1825, a suite of pieces (a pair of candelabra, mantel thermometer, and mantel clock) in gilt bronze with Russian stone was acquired for the English king George IV.<sup>7</sup> The correspondence makes clear that from the early 1820s after contact with Sibilio, the Italian marble specialist and merchant, Demidov changed the location of production.<sup>8</sup> The order now stated that after this period, all commissions undertaken by Thomire for Demidov would be finished in malachite in Rome, where Sibilio's marble workshop was based, and which Demidov deemed the highest quality.<sup>9</sup>

Cross-border collaboration took place between Demidov's suppliers uniting Russian copper and malachite mines with French and Italian producers. The commissions were complex, with Demidov functioning as both supplier and intermediary. An example of the complicated production process is illustrated by a sumptuous surtout made in 1822–24.<sup>10</sup> Thomire was responsible for designing the surtout, a decorative ensemble intended for a lavish table display, in Paris, with the final composition consisting of two circular plateaus, or platters, and one large plateau divided into five parts, all of which combined to reach a length of five meters. These large platters, along with a centerpiece that incorporated a tazza and base with bronze figures of four dancing women, two Medici vases, two tripods, and two cups on balusters, were all fashioned from malachite. Rather than producing the ensemble in



Paris, the surtout was first shipped to Sibilio in Rome, where the malachite components were incorporated, then shipped back to Paris so that Thomire's workshop could complete the gilt-bronze decoration. From Paris, the work was sent to Demidov in Florence, suggesting that the shipping costs must have added considerable sums to the already lavish price of the surtout.

While the example of The Met's Medici torchères were not as complex as the surtout, their production nonetheless depended upon considerable correspondence between Demidov and his respondents in Paris and Rome. The archival information allows for a detailed reconstruction to be made of the four malachite vases-torchères, illustrating the different stages of creation. In early 1821, Thomire et Cie signed an agreement for the execution of

A pair of medici vases, measuring 9 *pouces* in diameter at the bottom of their mounts and 18 at their openings, the said vases will be a limited size in order to be plated in malachite. The ornaments in gilt bronze, namely the feet decorated with a row of laurel leaves, in the midst of which will be a second row forming astragals, the mounts of the feet formed by a quarter-round egg and dart decoration, the bottom decorated with light ornaments, with palmettes. The body of the vessels will incorporate bas-reliefs, representing on the one hand the Sacrifice of Iphigenia and on the other the Bacchanals, above which is a grape vine, crowned by egg-and-darts, and a row of pearls.<sup>11</sup>

This description of the vases corresponds to the vases-torchères in The Met. It should be noted that the letter of agreement lists the dimensions of the pieces as 259.5 centimeters in height and 48 centimeters at the widest diameter. The variation in their actual dimensions (64.8 centimeters in height and 48.3 centimeters in diameter) is probably a result of imprecise measurements in the translation of *pouces* to meters, or a variation in scale in the process of production.

Given the widespread popularity of themes from the ancient world in the first half of the nineteenth century, the choice of the design for the bas-relief is not surprising. The two scenes were taken from designs on famous ancient monuments. The sacrifice of Iphigenia that appeared on the Medici vase was widely reproduced in the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, such as on the frontispiece of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Vasi, candelabri, cippi, sarcofagi* (fig. 2). The bacchanalian scene came from the well-known Borghese vase; its relief was also reproduced by Piranesi (fig. 3). The easily recognized ancient motifs

belied the complexities of marketing malachite.

For Demidov was not only commissioning malachite objects for his own use, but also seeking to promote the material. Thus, dealers such as Levy played a key role in advancing his efforts to widen the market for malachite and the sale of certain pieces in Paris as well as London.<sup>12</sup> Levy's shop of curiosities and jewels, "Au bassin d'or," was located at 18, rue Vivienne in Paris.<sup>13</sup>

Documentation shows that there was an initial pair of vases produced primarily in Thomire's Paris workshop in early 1821, followed by the commission for a second pair, which involved the more complex model of production divided between Paris and Rome. Thomire's workshop delivered a first pair of the torchères to the shop at rue Vivienne shortly before August 21, 1821.<sup>14</sup> It was prominently displayed in Levy's shop. About October 17, 1822, they were viewed by the British ambassador, Sir Charles Stuart.<sup>15</sup> In February 1823, an individual named "Aldegonde" cited in a letter (assumed to be comte Charles Camille de Sainte-Aldegonde, whose daughter coincidentally brought about the end of Anatole Demidov's marriage to Princess Mathilde Bonaparte) is mentioned as searching for both of the vases, which ultimately remained unsold.<sup>16</sup> While the first pair was available for sale in Levy's shop, Demidov proceeded to order a new pair of vases based on the same model. In a letter of October 8, 1822, Carbonelle, Thomire's son-in-law and collaborator, wrote that he would send the design of the vases that were in Levy's shop and that the price of the bas-reliefs for those vases was 2,000 francs.<sup>17</sup> On October 23, Carbonelle sent Demidov the design of the Medici vases from Levy's shop and explained that only one design was produced because the difference between the two vases was only in the bas-reliefs (and the second vase featured the relief of the bacchanale).<sup>18</sup> In his next letter, from November, Carbonelle demanded an additional 500 francs for the bronze for the Medici vases.<sup>19</sup>

A principal difference between the first and second pair of vases was the creation of a wood model, made to scale, necessitated by Demidov's move to Florence and the construction of the Villa San Donato. In the letter dated October 23, Carbonelle promised to provide a model in wood to be reproduced exactly in malachite.<sup>20</sup> This was necessary because of the addition of Sibilio's workshop in Rome to the production process, which required a scaled model to add the malachite pieces to the vases. The correspondence indicates that Demidov was intending the vases for display in San Donato. Though described as a villa, San Donato was palatial in scale, having been constructed in the late 1820s to



fig. 2 Giovanni Battista Piranesi (Italian, 1720–1778). *Medici Vase*, 1778. Published in Piranesi 1778, vol. 2, pl. 57. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, transferred from the Library (41.71.1.13[57])

fig. 3 Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Borghese Vase*, 1778. Published in Piranesi 1778, vol. 2, pl. 40. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, transferred from the Library (41.71.1.13[40])

1830s on land Demidov had purchased from the monks of the San Donato monastery near Florence. After his death in 1828, the property and collections were inherited by his son, Anatole, who had married and would later divorce Princess Mathilde Bonaparte. As will become clear, Anatole was responsible for the subsequent display of the malachite objects at San Donato, including the arrangement of two malachite rooms. One of them paired examples from the Saint Petersburg workshops with French Romantic paintings, and the other, known as the Sala degli Arazzi, held his father's malachite collection, including the Medici torchères.

By 1823, all of Demidov's malachite orders were produced in Sibilio's workshop. What is interesting to note here in Demidov's commission for the second pair of vases is the subject matter. Originally, each pair of vases featured an example of Iphigenia and the Bacchanals. After the sale of 1880, the four vases, commissioned at different times, were rearranged and sold off as pairs that featured the same motifs, in contrast to the original commission by Demidov.

On September 26, 1822, the Paris workshop received Demidov's order for the reproduction of the gilt bronze decorations for the two new vases.<sup>21</sup> It is probable that at this moment, the drawing of the vase with the exact outline was made (fig. 4). The Demidov papers list the measurements of the vases as 66 centimeters in height and 48 centimeters in diameter. The final size of the pieces was therefore identical to that of the vases in The Met. On March 12, 1823, the bronzes for the vases and their pedestals were sent to Rome. They appeared in the list of properties of Nicolai Demidov in Italy, dated September 23, 1823, as "two large Medici vases in malachite, similar to the vases in Levi shop" with a mention of payment to Thomire for the bronze ornament (2,500 francs) and for malachite mosaic (250 piastre).<sup>22</sup>

Although the pair at the Levy shop remained unsold, they were eventually sent to Demidov in Florence, traveling first to Marseilles via coach and onward to Livorno, where they were placed on a ship headed to Rome and Sibilio's workshop. Recorded as numbers 747 and 748 in the inventory of goods



shipped to Demidov—the “vases Medici malachite & bronze doré”—the pieces were listed alongside others restored by Sibilio, dated October 15, 1825: “Two small bases [pieducci] of malachite Medici vases restored as lights.”<sup>23</sup> A letter of July 12, 1825, from Sibilio to Demidov mentions work on this pair of vases and the pedestals.<sup>24</sup>

While the previous documents provide a clear itinerary for the vases from Paris to Rome and eventually Florence, less clear is the documentation regarding the completion of four pedestals with colored stone mosaic reliefs. However, we can assume they were included in the completion of Demidov’s spectacular collection of gilt bronze malachite and colored stone mosaic reliefs between 1821 and 1828. The bronze torchères were probably finished at the same time but we cannot be certain whether they were ordered by Anatole Demidov, the count’s son, at the time of his move to the Villa San Donato in the 1840s.

While it is evident that Nicolai Demidov was behind the commissioning and arrangement of the Medici torchères, his son played an equally important role in preserving his father’s legacy and discovering new markets for malachite. Four Medici vases with gilt bronze were mentioned in two documents listing the Demidov property in Italy. In the first, Nicolai Demidov’s will, they appear “from 639 to 642, Four vases Medici, in malachite, with gilt bronze ornament.”<sup>25</sup> The document is not dated, but it was certainly drawn up between 1824 and 1828, based on the list of dated works and the death of Demidov. Other papers, titled “Register of Valuables and Furniture Belonging to S.E. Mr. Demidov,” are signed and dated October 1, 1826. Items 639–642 are listed as “Four Medici vases, in

malachite with gilt bronze ornament,” from the “Salone verde.”<sup>26</sup> This most probably refers to the Palazzo Serristori, Demidov’s Florentine residence before the Villa San Donato. By contrast, the primary focus of the decor of one of the malachite rooms at San Donato was the ensemble formed in the 1820s by Demidov, which encompassed several pieces of architectural decor in addition to the vases. All the pieces of this suite were created in malachite and gilt bronze with the addition of colored stone mosaic reliefs, all of which was based on Demidov’s direct commission. Demidov’s preferences first appeared in the chimney-piece with ancient Florentine mosaic panels in Thomire’s Paris workshop. The ensemble was completed by the chimney garniture—an impressive clock with the figure of the Genius of the Arts and a pair of candelabra. The stone reliefs for the pieces were made by a Parisian mosaic artist, trained in Francesco Belloni’s workshop.<sup>27</sup> It seems that the four vases-torchères were created to complete the decoration in malachite and mosaic.

Importantly, Anatole Demidov sought to create continuity between the earlier malachite works commissioned by his father, displayed in one room, and the pieces made at the Saint Petersburg workshop, displayed in the separate, French salon-style malachite room that he added during his residence at San Donato. When visiting in 1858, the comte de Vandoni described the malachite in the first room, the “Galleria degli Arazzi” at San Donato, on display with Gobelins tapestries: “The room is called the Tapestry Gallery, because there are six beautiful tapestries from the old Gobelins manufactory, which decorate the walls. It appears to me however that the Malachite Gallery would be a more appropriate name, because this rare stone resides in this room like a master among its guests.”<sup>28</sup> In the second room, Anatole Demidov displayed malachite objects alongside paintings by French Romantics such as Eugène Delacroix and other artists, with whom Anatole was close friends. The use of malachite appears to be the connecting link between the two different “period rooms”: one belonging to the world of his father, who passed away in 1828, and the new vision that Anatole sought to support and champion as a collector and enthusiast of Romantic art.<sup>29</sup>

A crucial piece of evidence in tracing the provenance of the torchères is provided by a photograph taken in 1880 from the San Donato sale that took place in Florence, and displays of the vases in the villa. Although the condition of the vases prevents them from being assembled, a contemporary negative from the



*fig. 4* Drawing for a Medici vase, 1822. Paper, 26 × 18½ in. (66 × 48 cm). State Archive of the Sverdlovsk Region (GASO), Ekaterinburg

fig. 5 Vase-torchère with bacchanalia scene. Photograph negative, ca. 1880. Folder F.B.205.13, Collection of Fabio Bisogni, The Historical Archive, Berenson Library, I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence



historic image, first published in 1996, is now in the archives of I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies<sup>30</sup> (fig. 5). It shows the Medici vase with its twelve-part candelabrum bouquet, and the floral mosaic in the medallions that were described as “ancienne . . . florentine” in the French sale catalogue. The pieces from The Met have the bronze reliefs in that same place, but it is still possible to detect traces of the floral composition. It should be noted that the relief on the Demidov vase seen in the

photograph depicts a bacchanalian scene, after the relief of the Borghese vase. Furthermore, in the 1860s, the Demidov vases-torchères were captured in situ in a watercolor by Emanuel Shtekler (fig. 6). In this view of the Sala degli Arazzi in the Villa San Donato, we can see two of the malachite pieces, identical to the photograph. They are composed of the pedestal, plinth, and vase, decorated with gilt bronze details and reliefs. According to the description published in 1858, four identical vases-torchères were placed in this room:

Four large malachite vases, found symmetrically placed along the length of the wall, have bas-reliefs of pietra dura, each of which have a height of 9 *piedi*.<sup>31</sup> Each of these support a grand candelabrum.<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the Sala degli Arazzi was one of two “malachite rooms” in the Villa San Donato. The interior is completed by malachite tables, two important columns (now in the Wallace Collection, London), and sections of a sumptuous surtout (in various private collections).<sup>33</sup>

The final part of the story of the Medici torchères is their arrival in the United States. Art writer and collector James Jackson Jarves served as vice consul of the United States to Florence between 1880 and 1882, and donated a considerable collection of glass to The Met in 1881. From the Demidov sale in 1880, he acquired pieces for an American client, including paintings by Gabriel Metsu, Nicolaes Maes, Caspar Netscher, and François Hubert Drouais.<sup>34</sup> He also purchased four important Medici vases, although it is evident that by 1880, the year of the sale at San Donato, their provenance and connection to Nicolai Demidov had already been obscured, with the bronzes mistakenly attributed to Jean-Jacques Feuchère.<sup>35</sup> Listed in the sale, the vases were described as:

Four large and very beautiful Medici vases, in malachite, decorated with bas-reliefs, a crown of vines and handles in gilt bronze, resting on square socles offering on each face a hexagonal medallion with floral bouquets in old florentine mosaic relief. They are elevated on rectangular bases in malachite decorated in the same manner.

The bronzes were executed by Feuchère.

Twelve-light bouquets will be sold with each of these vases, which can be added at will.

The lot can be divided.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the misattributions, the description is very close to that of the torchères in The Met. It is also useful





fig. 6 Emanuel Shtekler (1819–1893). View of the Sala degli Arazzi in the Villa San Donato, Florence. Early 1860s. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (inv. N. ERR-719)

to note the size of the piece in the description: “Haut, total, 2 m. 05 cent.; Haut des bases, 1 m. 05 cent.” The pieces in The Met measure 108 centimeters for the height of the pedestal, and about 208 centimeters in total for the vase (64.8 cm), plinth (35.6 cm), and pedestal together.<sup>37</sup>

Twelve years after the San Donato sale, the vases appeared again in the sale of the collection of Robert H. Coleman, which took place in New York in November 1892.<sup>38</sup> Coleman was an iron processing and railroad industrialist as well as the owner of extensive farmland in Pennsylvania. He lost his fortune due to the financial Panic of 1893, and the construction of his large mansion in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, was never finished. The sale of his collection was organized in the hope of staving off the businessman’s complete financial ruin. Lot 137 of the sale lists a detailed description:

Pair of large and beautiful Medici vases, in malachite, ornamented with bas-reliefs in gilt bronze of vine branches, figures, etc., resting on square pedestals displaying on each face a medallion of flowers in antique

Florentine Mosaic; with square bases of malachite, ornamented in the same manner; the bronzes by Fenchère [sic], surmounted by candelabra of 12 lights each, in gilt bronze, decorated with flowers and fruit. No. 311 in San Donato Catalogue.<sup>39</sup>

Nearly an exact translation of the earlier description found in the San Donato sale, the preface to the sale catalogue explicitly made the connection between San Donato and the Pennsylvania industrialist: “This collection is chiefly composed of objects purchased at the sale of the collection of the late Prince Demidoff at the Palace of San Donato, by Mr. James Jackson Jarvis, the famous connoisseur and expert, at that time the representative of the United States at Florence. . . . This special collection was formed by Mr. Jarvis for Mr. Robt. H. Coleman, of Lebanon, Pa.”<sup>40</sup>

While we can thus trace the arrival of the vases to the work of Jarves, the question remains of how and exactly when the four vases were separated, and re-paired. A catalogue from a 1955 sale of furniture from a private collection at Parke-Bernet Galleries in



fig. 7 Page from catalogue of Parke-Bernet 1955, lot 457. Two Medici vases in The Met before the replacement of the *pietra dura* by bronze reliefs

fig. 8 Comparison of Parke-Bernet 1955, lot 457, and pieces in The Met

New York listed a pair of “Massive Empire Malachite and Bronze Doré Campana Urns and Pedestals, Fitted with Candelabra.”<sup>41</sup> The detailed description of the items was accompanied by a black-and-white photograph (fig. 7). This image offers a view of the *pietra dura* floral reliefs in the medallions on the pedestals and the bases, which were part of the original composition, changed to black marble reserves at a later date. The similarity of these vases with those from The Met is indicated by the bronze reliefs on the vases, and the reproduced composition of the sacrifice of Iphigenia. An additional piece of evidence is suggested by careful visual analysis of the malachite mosaic. With malachite, the irregular pattern of the stone and the type of the mosaic are a unique design that cannot be reproduced, especially at a large size, and thus function as the “fingerprint” of the piece. Comparison of the two pedestals in the 1955 photograph with images of The Met’s pieces leaves no doubt that they are one and the same item (fig. 8).

It is probable that Rodman A. de Heeren acquired two malachite vases from the 1955 auction. In 1964 the pieces were given to The Met and became part of the

permanent collection in 1983 after the death of De Heeren.<sup>42</sup> Although the vases were exhibited in 1990 in The Met’s exhibition “From Poussin to Matisse: The Russian Taste for French Painting,” they were not formally listed in the catalogue, but were displayed “in the entrance gallery to the loan exhibition.”<sup>43</sup> The same year, at the request of De Heeren’s widow, Aimee, the vases were loaned to her New York home for some years before returning to the Museum.

If The Met’s vases can be traced to the Parke-Bernet sale, then what became of the other pair? Related documents in The Met’s Archives provide some clues. The correspondence between Nicolai Demidov and Louis Carbonelle indicates that the pair was decorated with a relief of Iphigenia’s sacrifice, and with the bacchanalia from the Borghese vase. The photograph negative taken about 1880 shows this variation of the vase (fig. 5). In an undated postcard probably from the 1980s, the upper portions (the vase and socle) of part of the second pair are visible (fig. 9). The color postcard shows the *pietra dura* reliefs and identifies the clear-green color of the leaves, similar to those used in the pair of console tables





fig. 9 Postcard showing one of two Medici vases with *pietra dura* decorated pedestals, 1980s. Smithsonian Institution Archives



from the Demidov collection and now in a private collection, and also to the Genius of the Arts clock from San Donato now in the Château de Malmaison.<sup>44</sup> The text on the back of the postcard says that the vase comes from the Alfred Duane Pell collection. Notes on the copy in The Met's Archives indicate that the vase formed part of a pair that was exhibited in the 1984–85 exhibition “People and Places: Selections from the Collection” at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC. The *Annual Report for the Year Ended June 30, 1958*, of the United States National Museum, records the presence of the vases in the collection. Specifically, the report mentions the repair of “Two malachite vases and pedestals ornamented with gilt bronze, Italian, believed to have belonged to Prince Demidoff and Princess Mathilde Bonaparte.”<sup>45</sup> The Italian attribution, while

erroneous, nonetheless points to the links that persisted between the Demidov family and San Donato, inadvertently underscoring the complex international networks that connected the Russian malachite mines with the luxury workshops in Paris and Rome in the nineteenth century. Despite the large size of the vases, their present location, once at the Renwick Gallery, is still unknown. The newly found documentation linking the vases to Demidov's commissions for San Donato may well lead to the rediscovery of the lost works and complete the history of the four vases-torchères made for an exceptional patron with a distinct taste.

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## NOTES

- 1 MMA 44.152a, b; Remington 1945. See Zek 2008, 658.
- 2 Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, inv. 307.
- 3 The candelabra are located in The Met. Scholars had previously believed that they were lost.
- 4 See Budrina 2018a, 117–19.
- 5 Letters of Carbonelle to Demidov, 1822–25, box 1, folder 140, 316–51, Demidov family collection (102), State Archive of the Sverdlovsk Region (GASO).
- 6 Carbonelle to Demidov, May 29, 1823, box 1, folder 140, 316v, Demidov family collection (102), GASO.
- 7 The pieces are now in the Royal Collection Trust, United Kingdom: inv. RCIN 2731, inv. RCIN 2763, inv. RCIN 2762; Guitaut and Patterson 2018, 372.
- 8 Budrina 2019.
- 9 Demidov to Carbonelle, June 1827, box 2, folder 944, 48, Demidov family collection (1267), Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA).
- 10 Budrina 2018b.
- 11 “Une paire vases forme medici, portant 22 pouces de haut sur 9 pouces de diametre en bas de leurs serré et 18 à leurs couronnements, les dits vases seront en taille restreint pour être plaqué en malachite. Les ornements en bronze doré savoir les pieds ornés de rang [*sic*] en laurier, en milieu des dites un second formant astragales, les couronnements des pieds formé par un quart de rond à oves avec feuilles rayés de coeur, les culots décoré d’ornement leger, avec palmettes. Les corps recevront des bas-reliefs, representant l’un—le Sacrifice d’Iphégénie, et l’autre des Bacchanales, au dessus des quels régnent un pampre de vigne—couronne d’un quart de rond à oves, avec un rang des perles.” Agreement by Thomire et Cie with Nicolai Demidov, February 15, 1821, box 16, folder 149, 5, Demidov family collection (1267), RGADA.
- 12 Carbonelle to Demidov, May 3, 1816, box 2, folder 201, 2, Demidov family collection (1267), RGADA.
- 13 Business card of Levy’s shop, dated September 1825, box 2, folder 260, 97, Demidov family collection (1267), RGADA.
- 14 Levy to Demidov, August 21, 1821, box 2, folder 260, 12, Demidov family collection (1267), RGADA.
- 15 Levy to Demidov, October 17, 1822, box 2, folder 260, 28, Demidov family collection (1267), RGADA.
- 16 Levy to Demidov, February 7, 1823, box 2, folder 260, 34, Demidov family collection (1267), RGADA.
- 17 Carbonelle to Demidov, October 8, 1822, box 1, folder 140, 318, Demidov family collection (102), GASO.
- 18 Carbonelle to Demidov, October 23, 1822, box 1, folder 140, 319, Demidov family collection (102), GASO.
- 19 Carbonelle to Demidov, November 4, 1822, box 1, folder 140, 344, Demidov family collection (102), GASO.
- 20 See note 18 above.
- 21 Carbonelle to Demidov, September 26, 1822, box 1, folder 140, 350, Demidov family collection (102), GASO.
- 22 “Registre des objets appartenant à S.E. Mr. N.N. Demidov qui se trouvent actuellement en Italie,” September 23, 1823, box 1, folder 153, 11v, Demidov family collection (102), GASO.
- 23 “Due pieducci de Medici vasi di malaghita restaurato al lustre.” Sibilio, List of restored pieces, October 15, 1825, box 1, folder 140, 122, Demidov family collection (102), GASO. See also “Note de contenu des caisses expédiées à Marseilles pour S.E. M. De Demidoff,” ca. 1825, box 1, folder 140, 133, Demidov family collection (102), GASO.
- 24 Sibilio to Demidov, July 12, 1825, box 2, folder 400, 2, Demidov family collection (1267), RGADA.
- 25 Demidov, Testament [1824–28], box 1, folder 834, 67v, Durnovo family collection (934), Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA).
- 26 “Quatre vases forme medici en malachite ornés de bronze doré”; “Registre des objets précieux et meubles appartenant à S.E. Mr. Demidov,” October 1, 1826, box 1, folder 173, 10v, Demidov family collection (102), GASO.
- 27 Budrina 2013, 12–15.
- 28 “Sala detta la Galleria degli Arazzi, perchè ve n’ha sei bellissimi dell’antica fabrica dei Gobelins, che ne adornano le pareti. Sembrami però che il nome di Galleria di Malachita sarrebbe più appropriato, imperrochè si rara pietra sta in questa sala come il padrone di case fra i suoi ospiti.” [Vandoni] 1858, 11.
- 29 The present author is writing about the two “malachite rooms” of the Villa San Donato for a forthcoming article, “‘Malachite Rooms’ of Villa San Donato,” to be published in a 2022 issue of *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University; Arts*. The author is also writing a book on the attribution and history of about one hundred malachite pieces from the early Demidov collection.
- 30 Tonini 1996, 97.
- 31 About 290 centimeters, probably referring to the total size, including the candelabrum bouquet.
- 32 “Quivi si trovano simetricamente disposti lungo le pareti quattro grandi vase della stessa malachite con bassirilievi di pitre dure, dell’altezza ciascuno di 9 piedi. I quali sostengono rispettivamente un gran candelabro.” [Vandoni] 1858, 11.
- 33 See Budrina 2018b and Budrina 2020, 22–23.
- 34 *Art Amateur* 1880, 99.
- 35 Annotated catalogue of San Donato sale 1880, 78–79, lot 311, owned by the Wallace Collection, London.
- 36 “Quatre grands et très beaux vases Médicis en malachite, ornés de bas-reliefs, de couronnes de pampres et d’anses en bronze doré, reposant sur des socles carrés offrant sur chaque face un médaillon hexagone à bouquet de fleurs en ancienne mosaïque florentine en relief. Ils sont élevés sur des bases carrées en malachite ornées de même manière. Les bronzes ont été exécutés par Feuchère. Avec ces vases seront vendus des bouquets de douze lumières chacun, en bronze doré, qui s’y adaptent à volonté. Ce lot pourra être divisé.” San Donato sale 1880, 78–79, lot 311.
- 37 Metropolitan Museum 2020.
- 38 Coleman sale 1892.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 19, lot 137.
- 40 *Ibid.*, [1].
- 41 Parke-Bernet 1955, 94, lot 457. I am grateful to Iris Moon and colleagues in the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at The Met, who shared archival documents with me.
- 42 James Parker, interdepartmental memorandum to Olga Raggio, November 15, 1990, MMA Archives.
- 43 *Ibid.* See also Metropolitan Museum 1990.
- 44 Musée National des Châteaux de Malmaison et de Bois, Rueil-Malmaison, inv. MM40-4708382.
- 45 United States National Museum 1958, 48.



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GASO	State Archive of Sverdlovsk Region, Ekaterinburg
RGADA	Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, Moscow
RGIA	Russian State Historical Archive, Saint-Petersburg

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