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# THE MISSING HEAD OF THE GLASGOW "CHRIST AND THE ADULTERESS"

By  
BERNARD BERENSON



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THE MISSING HEAD OF THE GLASGOW  
"CHRIST AND ADULTERESS"

BY BERNARD BERENSON  
*Settignano, Florence, Italy*



FOR several decades it has been known that the Glasgow "Christ and the Adulteress" (Fig. 1), a Venetian painting of about 1510 or 1515, was incomplete. A nearly contemporary copy in the Bergamo Gallery shows a figure on our right which was missing in the original (Fig. 2). Yet experience has taught us to think, with regard to pictures, less ill of acts of man than of "acts of God," for so many have turned up in recent years that were believed destroyed, and so many more have been preserved through generations of neglect. Decidedly, except when his passions are stirred or his interests served, man is not a destructive animal.

So I was more gratified than surprised when I learned a little while ago that Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Sachs, of New York, had acquired the head of the missing figure (Fig. 3) in the Glasgow "Christ and the Adulteress." As it must be a matter of interest to other students, and as it affords an occasion for saying in print what I have been thinking for many years about the authorship of the canvas to which this new-found fragment belongs, I am grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Sachs for allowing me to publish it.

It will not take much effort to prove that the Sachs head, as we shall henceforth speak of it, formed part of the Glasgow canvas. It corresponds to the minutest details with the head on the Bergamo figure that is missing in the Glasgow picture, and equally well with one in another early and somewhat altered version of the same that was well known more than thirty years ago in the collection of Sir Charles Turner in London, now belonging to Herr Friedeberg of Berlin (Fig. 4). The Sachs head is identical with the other two in every way, except quality only. It has an elegance, an attractiveness and an alertness which the others lack. It is, moreover, detached from, and sovereign over, the landscape in a way that is the more meritorious as it was not intended to be seen isolated. Perhaps, indeed, its seductiveness as a face, and its poetical ambiance, led to its undoing, tempting somebody to cut it out as a choice morsel. And in execution it has the

same sparkle, the same promptness, and, in a more material but not negligible point, the same system of cracks as the Glasgow "Christ and the Adulteress." Finally, the shoulder and back of a head visible in the Sachs Fragment fit on to the head on our extreme right in the same picture.

So much for the integration of the fragment with the parent canvas. The question remains who painted the whole?

Connoisseurship has been of two minds on this problem. The official attribution still is to Giorgione, it would seem. I find it as hard as ever to believe that the author of the Castelfranco Altarpiece, of the Giovanelli "Soldier and Gipsy," and of the Louvre "*Fête Champêtre*," all characterized by a dreamy gravity, should have conceived anything so vehement as this. Which is the most vulgarly melodramatic of the two figures, the Christ, or the youth He is shoving to one side, one hesitates to decide. And the Adulteress herself would seem to belong to a world where promiscuity is not the exception, but the rule. Nor can one praise the tall figure in the parti-coloured hose in the Bergamo version. It is hard not to approve of the people who cut off and kept the head, now the Sachs Head, and threw away the rest.

Defenders of the official attribution may plead that the Giorgiones I refer to give no scope for dramatic treatment, as if one could not feel how figures in repose would behave in action. Fortunately we can reply to the rubber-stamp school of attributors by pointing to the "Trial of Moses," where the youthful Giorgione had ample scope for melodrama, if he had cared to take advantage of it. He is as disdainful of the momentary, he is as grave, as soundlessly musical, in that earliest known work as in the "*Fête Champêtre*," which is his last.

Moreover, if the Glasgow picture were by Giorgione, it would have to be the exact date of the last named work (Fig. 5). The costumes preclude it being earlier. Then the cap, the coat, the parti-coloured hose of the lute-player in the one are identical with those of the two youngish figures in the other, as seen in the Glasgow picture and its Bergamo imitation. The kerchief on the back of the Adulteress's head is very nearly identical with the one worn by the nude at the well; and the progress of the kerchief from the forehead to the back of the head is all but a calendar, almost a clock-face, in Venetian painting. For these reasons it could not be earlier, and later it cannot be, because Giorgione died in 1510.



FIG. 3. TITIAN: THE SACHS HEAD  
*The Arthur and Alice Sachs Collection, New York*

So it is right to insist on not charging this work against Giorgione. But to ascribe it to Cariani or even to Sebastiano del Piombo, as we used to do, is to pay them too much honour. In the feeble light of what was known a generation ago, such attributions were permissible, even fruitful. They provoked one to the study of these masters; but study has led to the conclusion that the first was incapable, and the second not so much incapable as unlikely to have painted the Glasgow picture. Of course, Sebastiano in his purely Giorgionesque period comes within sight of this achievement. The St. Giovanni Chrysostomo Altarpiece, the Farnesina lunettes, and the Doughty House "Salome" were certainly due to a closely similar inspiration. But neither mood, nor *tempo*, neither form nor colour, close as they are, are close enough for identity of authorship.

That compelling identity we shall discover in the kind of Titian that is represented by the frescos of 1511 in the Scuola del Santo at Padua, particularly the one representing "St. Anthony making an Infant witness the Innocence of his Mother, accused of Adultery" (Fig. 6). The compositions are in every respect alike, the costumes are much the same, the action also, and the types are identical. One may compare the youths in both pictures; and if the mother in the fresco is not more like the woman in the canvas, that is chiefly because there is no occasion for her lurching forward. In that respect the "Madonna" by Titian, which until recently was in Mr. Robert Benson's collection in London, serves our purpose better (Fig. 7). The resemblance extends even to the features of the landscape. A great deal of minute proof could be brought to bear on this attribution to Titian, but it would necessitate the reproduction of scores of pictures, and a kind of discussion for which "Art in America" is not the most suitable platform. In a sense, too, the discussion is superfluous. We have but to familiarize ourselves with the less stabilized creations of the young Titian, as represented by the Scuola del Santo frescos, to realize that the Glasgow "Adulteress" is comprised in the group. And I am confident that this will happen, even if I refrain from piling up proof upon proof.



FIG. 2. NEARLY CONTEMPORARY COPY OF THE GLASGOW "CHRIST AND THE ADULTERESS"

*Bergamo*



FIG. 1. TITIAN: CHRIST AND THE ADULTERESS  
*Corporation Galleries, Glasgow*



FIG. 4. NEARLY CONTEMPORARY VERSION OF THE GLASGOW "CHRIST AND THE ADULTERESS"  
*Herr. Friedeberg, Berlin*



FIG. 5. GIORGIONE: FETE CHAMPETRE  
*Louvre, Paris*





FIG. 6. TITIAN: SAINT ANTHONY MAKING AN INFANT WITNESS  
TO HIS MOTHER'S INNOCENCE  
*Scuola del Santo, Padua*



FIG. 7. TITIAN: MADONNA IN LANDSCAPE  
*Formerly Mr. Robert Benson, London*