

LUCAS CRANACH the Elder,
German school, 1472 - 1553.

This artist's real name was Lucas Sunder or Müller. His adopted name derives from Kronach, in Upper Franconia, where he was born. By tradition he was a pupil there of his father Hans. Around 1500 or a little earlier he travelled through Bavaria and subsequently reached Vienna. The Crucifixion now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna is generally accepted as his earliest known painting, and woodcuts of 1502-3 indicate that he knew the work of Dürer. On April 14, 1505 he was taken into the service of the Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony at Wittenberg, and remained there working for two subsequent electors, John the Steadfast and John Frederick the Magnanimous. In January 1508 he was granted a coat of arms. The next year he was in the Netherlands. He was elected a town councillor of Wittenberg in 1517, and became burgomaster there in 1537 and again in 1540. In 1550 he joined the Elector John Frederick at Augsburg, where this patron of his was being held as prisoner of Charles V. He painted Titian's portrait there. He returned to Weimar in 1552 and died there on October 16, 1553. He did mythological and classical as well as religious paintings, and portraits, including ones of his close friend Martin Luther and his wife. His artistic output was huge and involved a large degree of studio assistance. His sons Hans (who died in 1537) and Lucas the Younger (1515-1586) were certainly active in the studio, working from designs of his. The device of the flying snake or dragon, derived from Cranach's arms, was used without differentiation on autograph and on studio works, and it is frequently difficult or virtually impossible to make a clear demarcation between the two.

Crucifixion

oil on panel, 30 x 21½ ins

signed with dragon, bottom left, and
dated 1532 (?)

Provenance

Heinrich Ranzau, Schleswig-Holstein (1596) ; Count Wilczek, Schloss Kreuzenstein, near Vienna (before 1938). Acquired by Dr Clowes in 19 .

Literature

D.C.Rich, Catalogue of the Charles H. and Mary E.S. Worcester Collection of Paintings, Sculpture and Drawings, Chicago, 1938, p.39.

Exhibited

^{Exhibition}
~~Exhib.~~ of Paintings, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Jun.-Nov. 1936, Gallery of Primitives, no.15 ; Holbein and his Contemporaries, John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, Oct.-Dec.1950, cat.no.19, ill. (entry by R.O.Parks) ; Ind., 1959, no.20.

Versions

1. Lempertz sale, Cologne, Nov.21, 1957, no.30 (photograph in Witt Lib.). Corresponds exactly to the Clowes version, apart from the inscription. The date is clearly readable here as 1532.
2. Art Institute, Chicago, Worcester colln. (M.J.Friedländer - J.Rosenberg, Die Gemälde Lucas Cranach, Berlin, 1932, cat.no. 302, ill.) From the colln. of Sir Fairfax Cartwright. Friedländer and Rosenberg read the date here as 1538, rather than 1533, the reading given by Rich (Bull. of Art Institute of Chicago, 33, 1929, p.6). A variant of the same composition.¹⁾

This panel carries an inscription at the bottom left recording its gift by ^{D. v.} ~~Dr.~~ Hardwig of Dassel on October 26, 1596 to Heinrich Ranzau, Vicary of the King of Denmark and nobleman of Schleswig-Holstein.²⁾ The coat of arms is said to be that of the Dassel family.³⁾

It was certified to be a work of Cranach the Elder by M.J.Friedländer (1934)⁴⁾ and by W.Suida, G.Glück and W.R. Valentiner (1935)⁵⁾. Friedländer and Suida read the date as 1532, and this appears preferable to Rich's reading of it as 1544.

cont.

The situation as regards activity in Cranach the Elder's workshop (see above) makes it extremely difficult to make a firm attribution in the present case ; but the possibility that this version is by Lucas the Younger --whom Friedländer and Rosenberg suggested as the author of some of the variants that they list --deserves consideration.⁽⁶⁾

Notes.

1. Friedländer and Rosenberg also list (nos. 302a-d) the following further variants of the Chicago version which they do not illustrate : Dessau, Anhaltische Gemäldegalerie, nos.16 and 17 (the latter dated 1538) ; Erlangen, Galerie, nos.8, 9 and 10 (dated 1540) ; Lazzaro colln., Madrid, 1929 cat., no.1002. They further mention a version in the Schlosskirche, Hanover (pub. by F.Stuttmann, "Ein unbesehener Altar Lucas Cranachs d.Ä. in Hannover", Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst, 21, 1927-8, pp. 341ff.)
2. The inscription runs : GENEROSO DNO HENRICO RANTZOVIO VICARIO REGIS DANIAE PRODUCI CIMBRICO D.D. HARDWIGUS A DASSEL I.C. CAESAR XXVI DIE OCTOBRIS ANNO M.D.XCVI (reading by Glück, Clowes archives).
3. By Glück (see n.4).
4. Letter of Apr. 27, 1934, Clowes archives.
5. ^{S. 12} Statement of Oct. 20, 1935 ; Glück and Valentiner, docs. of Nov.25 and Dec.27, 1935, Clowes archives.
6. The version sold in 1957 seems definitely of lower quality.