

HANS HOLBEIN the Younger

German school, 1497/8 - 1543

This artist was born at Augsburg in 1497-8, the son of Holbein the Elder, by whom he was trained. By 1515 he was at Bâle, where his elder brother Ambrosius is recorded as a painter, and he took part at this time in the decoration of Erasmus's book The Praise of Folly. From 1517 to 1519 he was at Lucerne, and was a member of the Guild of ^{Saint} ~~St~~ Luke there; and it is probably that he visited North Italy during this period. He became a member of the painters' guild at Bâle in September 1519, and a citizen there in July of the following year. During the ensuing period which he spent in Bâle he was kept busy with paintings, did drawings for stained glass and woodcut illustrations, and drew the blocks for his famous series of the Dance of Death. A visit to France in 1524 is recorded, and he is to be identified as the painter mentioned by Erasmus, in a letter of August 1526, as on his way to England. He is correspondingly recorded in London in a letter from Sir Thomas More to Erasmus of December that year. On this first visit to England, he undertook a large portrait of More's family, which appears never to have been completed, and also painted Archbishop Warham and made decorations for one of Henry VIII's celebrations at Greenwich -- the first of a long series of works for the King. He returned to Bâle in 1528, but was in London again by 1532, and now settled there. He entered Henry VIII's service (the date of this is unknown, but he is referred to as a royal servant in 1536). In March 1538 he was in Brussels, and in France later that same year, after which he visited Bâle briefly. He made his will in London on October 7, 1543 and died between then and the end of November. He worked as a painter, draughtsman, and book illustrator, and also did jewellery-designs, pageant-designs and fresco decorations. In England he did mainly portraits.

Portrait of Thomas Cromwell

oil and tempera on panel, 20 X 17 ins.

Condition

A photograph in the files of the National Portrait Gallery, London (no.12511) shows the condition of the work at the time of the 1930 sale. A crack appears there, running all the way down the center of the panel, and the sitter's right hand --now missing --is included at the bottom left, resting together with the left hand. Comparison of infra-red photographs of the work in its present state (taken for the compiler) with that older photograph suggests, that in the course of the restoration ~~and~~ ^{made} between 1930 and Dr Clowes's acquisition of the work, older retouchings were removed and replaced, where necessary, with a slightly more delicate hand, and that the face is less covered up than it was. (1)

Provenance

Charles Penruddocke (1890) ; Capt. G.W. Penruddocke ; sold Robinson and Fiske, Nov.13, 1930, lot 23. Acquired by Dr Clowes in 19 . (2)

Literature

A.R.Chamberlain, Hans Holbein the Younger, 2 vols., London, 1913, II, p.61 ; P.Ganz, Hans Holbein, die Gemälde, Bâle, 1950, p.234, cat.no. 99 and fig.29 (Englishe ed., 1950, pp.249f. and fig.28)

Exhibited

~~Exhib.~~ ^{cat. no.} of the Royal House of Tudor, New Gallery, London, 1890, no.162; Holbein and his Contemporaries, John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, Oct.-Dec.1950, no.36, ill. ; Ind., 1959, no.37.

Versions

For the major versions of the Holbein portrait showing Cromwell as Master of the Jewel House (Frick colln., New York ; Chichester Constable colln. ; National Portrait Gallery, London, no.1727) see, most recently, R.Strong, "Holbein in England, I and II", Burl.Mag., 109, 1967, pp.276ff. Further versions are in the Saumarez colln., Shrubland Park (from the colln. of Lord Cunliffe ; sold Sotheby's Jan.23, 1946, no.52) ; in the colln. of Lord Egremont, Petworth House (1920 cat., no.181) ; and in the colln. of Major H.B.Trevor Cox (on loan to Northampton City Art Gallery)⁽⁴⁾. The National Portrait Gallery also has a second version, no.1083.

For related miniature versions, see L.Cust, "A Newly Discovered Miniature of Thomas Cromwell", Burl.Mag., 20, 1911, pp.5f. (this miniature was sold at Christie's, Jun.27, 1958, no.47) ; and Ganz, 1950, cat.no.137, pls.190-191.

Ganz also mentioned (under cat.no.81) further versions of the present work, but he did not specify their whereabouts. One was in the C.L.Cardon sale, Brussels, Jun.27-30, 1931 (roundel, head only).

Thomas Cromwell (ca.1485 - 1546), the son of a blacksmith and brewer, became known to Cardinal Wolsey and was elected a Member of Parliament? He was made Chancellor of the Exchequer by Henry VIII in 1533 ; Master of the Rolls and Vicar General of Ecclesiastical Affairs in 1535 ; Lord Privy Seal in 1536 ; and Earl of Essex and Lord Chamberlain in 1539. He was arrested on January 10, 1540 and beheaded on a treason charge on July 20.

Chamberlain (1913) considered that the present work could not be by Holbein. After its restoration, Ganz certified it to be a Holbein⁽⁵⁾ and published it accordingly (1950).

In fact all of the portraits of ^{Cromwell} Holbein which have been attributed to Holbein show, basically, the same face-mask, though the costume and accoutrements differ ; and they are all to be taken correspondingly, according to Strong, as derivations from a lost original of around 1533-34, the character of which is most closely reflected in the portrait in the Frick Collection;

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(see under versions). The condition of the present work makes it hard to assess its quality ; but it would appear, according to Strong's argument, that it can hardly be by Holbein, but is rather to be taken simply as a sixteenth century derivative -- from the same prototype as lies behind all the other versions.⁽⁶⁾

Notes.

1. I am grateful to Elizabeth Jones of the Fogg Museum for interpreting these photographs for me, and to F. Grossmann for giving me his opinion of the work's condition, before and after he saw the 1930 photograph, which I sent him (letters of Jul. 31 and Aug. 6, 1966). According to Ganz (see Lit.), the painting was cut down on three of its sides, and the restoration revealed "underdrawing in Indian ink on a light red-tinted chalk ground".
2. The previous owner was given in the 1959 cat. as Count Wilczek, Schloss Kreuzenstein ; but this would appear to be a transfer of provenance from the Portrait of a Lady (q.v.). Ganz (1950) gives no provenance in the present case.
3. As 18 x 16 ins.
4. Information from the revised cat. entry of the National Portrait Gallery, kindly provided for me by Mr Kerslake.
5. Doc. of Dec. 9, 1937, Clowes archives. In his 1950 cat. Ganz dated the portrait around 1538, on the grounds that the sitter appeared older than in the Frick portrait and that this might be the work for which "Hanns the painter" (Holbein) was paid 40 shillings by Cromwell on Jan. 4, 1538 (see Chamberlain, op.cit., II, p. 232 for this payment in Cromwell's account book). Chamberlain, in contrast, had suggested that this payment was for a miniature portrait. Since the document gives no

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specification as to the kind of work involved, all assumptions on the subject are purely hypothetical.

6. I am grateful to Dr Strong for outlining to me (orally, 1965) the viewpoint which he subsequently put forward in his 1967 article, and for giving me his opinion of the Clowes portrait in terms of that viewpoint (it will be mentioned correspondingly as a derivation in the forthcoming revised cat. of the National Portrait Gallery, under no.1727). F. Grossmann (letter to the compiler, Aug.6, 1966) considered that the differences from the Frick version were sufficient to justify the assumption that at least a design of Holbein's lay behind the Clowes version.