

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} 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.

Self-Portrait

1620, oil on panel, 4 5/8 ins. diameter.
monogrammed HH either side of head, and inscr.

on the walls AN. 1542 and AETA 45

Condition

Restored in the 1870s by Andreas Müller. It was reported then that the oak panel had been broken on the left side and repaired, and that the inscription had been somewhat strengthened.⁽¹⁾ The last figure of the date appears today to be somewhat dubious.⁽²⁾

Provenance

Von Stackelberg family, Schloss Föhna, near Riga (1873)⁽³⁾; Emil Paravicini-Engel, Bâle (from 1929); Silberman Galleries, New York (1936). Acquired by Dr Clowes in 19 .

Literature

H.Wörmann, "Hans Holbeins d.J. Selbstporträt von Schloss Föhna", Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst, 10, 1875, pp.315ff.; A.Woltmann, Holbein und Seine Zeit, 2nd ed., 2 vols., Leipzig, 1874-76, I, p.101, n.1 and II, pp.168f. ; H.Knackfuss, Holbein der Jüngere, 4th ed., Beudfeld-Leipzig, 1902, p.154 ; P.Ganz, "Das Bildnis Hans Holbeins d.J.", Jahrbuch für Kunst und Kunstpflege in der Schweiz, 5, 1928-29, pp.287f. and pl.1 ; H.A.Schmid, "Wie hat Hans Holbein d.J. ausgesehen", Anzeiger für Schweizerische Altertumskunde, 33, 1931, p.282 and pl.19 ; P.Ganz, "Holbein's Last Self-Portrait", Burl. Mag., 71, 1937, pp.62ff., ill. ; H.A.Schmid, Hans Holbein der Jüngere, 3 vols., Bâle, 1945-48, I, p.19 and II, p.380 ; P.Ganz, Hans Holbein, die Gemälde, Bâle, 1950, p.240, no.130, ill. ; (English ed., 1950, p.257) ; H.A.Schmid, "Ein unbekanntes Selbstbildnis Hans Holbeins des Jüngeren", Das Werk, 38, 1951, pp.27ff., ill. ; F.Grossmann, "Holbein Studies -- II", Burl. Mag., 93, 1951, pp.113f.

Exhibited

Masterworks of Five Centuries, San Francisco. Golden Gate International ^{Exhib.} ~~Exhib.~~, 1939, no.12a (not in cat.) ; Holbein and his Contemporaries, John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, Oct.-Dec.1950, no.38, ill. on cover ; Art Unites Nations, E.and A. Silberman Galleries, New York, Dec.1957, no.10, ill. ; Ind., 1959, no.36.

Versions

1. Private colln., Switzerland. Oil on panel, 12.5 cm. in diameter. (Knackfuss, 1902, p.154 ; Schmid, 1951, ill. pp.29ff.) Green background. Inscr. HH either side of the head, and beneath each of the letters AN^o 154(3?) --last figure illegible -- and AETA 45^(h). Considerably damaged, restored 1949 with removal of earlier retouchings. From the colln. of Capt. Edward Manners, Rutland House, Knightsbridge (inherited by him in 1835^(s)); then with the Verety family.

2. Florence, Uffizi (no.149). Drawing, black and colored chalk. (Ganz, 1950, no.131, ill. ; Schmid, 1948, II, p.21 and frontispiece). Acquired by Cardinal Leopold Medici in 1714. Enlarged then on all four sides and almost entirely painted over with watercolor and gold. Dimensions, without the later additions, 23 x 18 cm. Inscr. IOANNES HOLPENIUS BA / SILENSIS / SUI IPSIUS EFFIGIATOR AE XLV ; this inscription is not original.

There are also various miniature versions : Wallace Colln., London (P.Ganz, Hans Holbein der Jüngerer, des Meisters Gemälde, Stuttgart-Leipzig, 1912, p.150) ; colln. of Duke of Buccleuch (H.Kennedy, Early English Portrait Miniatures in the Collection of the Duke of Buccleuch, The Studio, 1917, pl.II) ; colln. Meyer van den Bergh, Antwerp, etc. The first two versions, which seem to be the best, are both dated 1543^(c).

There was already considerable controversy in the 1870s, when this work was first written about, as to whether or not it could be by Holbein himself⁽⁷⁾. Woltmann (1876), taking support from a report by E.His-Heusler (quoted by him)^{review of the problem and} considered that it could not be an autograph work.

Ganz subsequently published the portrait and argued (1929, 1937, 1950) for its being a work of 1542 --the year before Holbein's death --by the artist himself⁽⁸⁾; but the arguments which he presented in support of this are confused and inconsistent⁽⁹⁾. At the same time Schmid (1931, 1948) judged the Clowes version to be a copy after Holbein. Schmid's later view (1951) that the Verety-Manners version, which he had previously classed as more

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removed still from the original, was by Holbein was echoed in a modified form by Grossmann (1951 also), who stated that while its condition made judgement difficult, the Verety-Manners version appeared to be better. The compiler concurs with the view that the Clowes version can hardly be by Holbein ; its metallic and enamel-like character suggest that it is a later sixteenth century version, of very high quality, and that the inscription correspondingly represents a retrospective statement as to Holbein's age when he died.⁽¹³⁾

The adoption of a tondo form for self-portraits in the sixteenth century is related to the use of a mirror for portraying oneself.

Notes.

1. See the restorer's statement of that time, published by Wörmann, pp.317f.
2. Dr F.Grossmann, after seeing the work, wrote to the compiler to that effect (letter of Jul.31, 1966). For the evidence of other versions which can equally be taken as casting doubt on this date, see below ; and cf. Woltmann's comment, p.168. According to Ganz (1937, p.68, n.23) the last figure of the date was altered at some point and then revealed as a "2" by cleaning.
3. According to Wörmann, it had been with the family for 150 years ; according to Knackfuss, who appears more reliable here, their ownership went back to 1774. The supposed appearance of the work in the Dresden Holbein-Austellung, May-Oct. 1871, is not substantiated by the cat. of that exhb.
4. See the comments on this inscription of R.N.Wornum, Some Account of the Life and Works of Hans Holbein, London, 1867, .81f.

Notes, cont.

5. It would appear most likely, from this provenance, that ^{it was} this version and not the Clowes one ~~is the one~~ that belonged to the Earl of Arundel ; for, as noted by Wornum (loc.cit.) there was a marriage connection between the Arundel and Rutland families. Cf. Schmid (1951) and Grossmann for this suggested identification.

The history of the Arundel version can be put together as follows : possibly the version which Carel van Mander recorded having seen in the possession of the painter Bartholomeus Ferreris (Het leben der....sschilders [1604], Amsterdam, 1764 ed., I, p.134): "groot omtrend de palm van eene hand") : recorded in an engraving by Lucas Vosterman (H.S.Hymans, Lucas Vosterman, Catalogue Raisonné de Son Oeuvre, Brussels, 1893, no.167 ; Ganz, 1937, pl.IB ; inscr. *....ANNO 1543 AETAT 45*), which was probably done in England between 1624 and 1630, since Vosterman worked for the Earl of Arundel at that time ; also recorded in a corresponding engraving by Wenzel Hollar, dated 1647 (G.Parthey, Wenzel Hollar, Beschreibendes Verzeichnis seiner Kupferstiche, Berlin, 1853, no.1418 ; Ganz, op.cit., pl.IC ; the writing on the portrait itself is reproduced in this case --HH and AE.45, put here to the left of the head, and AN. 1543, put on the other side --and the inscription below records the original as being in the Arundel colln.) ; recorded by Richard Symonds in his notebooks (British Museum, Egerton MS. 1636, f.89v. ; cited by Wornum, loc. cit.) as being in the Arundel colln. in 1653, and as being dated 1543 ; passed subsequently to Lord Stafford (H.Walpole, Anecdotes of Painting in England, 1828 ed., I, p.128)

6. Schmid's statement (1948, p.19) implying that there is at least one miniature dated 1542, as against 1543, remains unverified. The earliest record of a miniature version is provided by Carel van Mander, who saw one in the house of Jacques Razet in Amsterdam (op.cit., I, p.134 : "het Portret van Holbein door hem zelf in een kleine rondje zeer net en zuiver in migniatuur geschildred"). Subsequently Joachim von Sandrart, who was in Amsterdam between 1639 and 1645, gave a small, round version which was probably a miniature one to the collector Michel Le Blond

n.6, cont.

(Academie der Bau-, Bild- under Mahlerey-Künste [1675], Munich, 1925 ed., p.102). The version belonging to the Duke of Buccleuch goes back to the colln. of Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill (1842 sale, p.116, no.40).

7. See Wörmann's remarks on this subject, recording the views of both sides and abstaining from a final judgement of his own.

8. It was sold to Dr Clowes with ⁶certificates from Ganz of Jul. 24, 1936 and one from W.Suida (Clowes archives).

9. Cf. Grossmann's corrective comments, 1951. If the date of 1542 on the Clowes version is genuine, as Ganz consistently believed, then this version cannot have been the Arundel one (discussed in n.5), since the latter was definitely dated 1543. Also, in his 1950 cat. entry, Ganz now gave 1616 as the date of the Vosterman engraving, rather than 1624-30 (cf. again n.5), and argued from this that the Clowes version could have been one of the two versions seen by van Mander in Amsterdam (cf. ns. 5,6), at the same time maintaining his point (cat.no.64) that one of those two was in fact the Holbein portrait of Hans of Antwerp; whereas he had previously maintained (1937) that the version seen in the Ferreris colln. was the Hans of Antwerp and had correctly stated that the other version was described by van Mander as a miniature. That the Arundel version was not a miniature is shown by Symonds' description of it as an oil-painting. In his 1950 entry Ganz also suggested that the Uffizi drawing was most probably the preliminary study for the Clowes version; in his 1937 article he had argued that that drawing was used for a lost original, of which the Clowes version was to be taken as a small replica.

10. I am grateful to Dr Grossmann for his help here (letters of Jan.7 and Jul.31, 1966).