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A Renaissance Masterpiece in the Sinebrychoff Art Museum – *Virgin and Child with John the Baptist and St Anthony the Abbot*, by Jacopo Bassano

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Preface

Virgin and Child with John the Baptist and St Anthony the Abbot, by Jacopo Bassano (c. 1510–92), which was painted in the early 1560s, is one of the rare Italian Renaissance paintings in Finland. It belongs to the Ester and Jalo Sihtola Fine Arts Foundation Donation in the Finnish National Gallery and is a highlight of the Sinebrychoff Art Museum. My first encounter with the painting while a young university student was pivotal in my choice of professional career. Since then I have been studying different aspects of the art of this great master painter.¹ The Sihtola painting is well known to scholars. It was included in the important exhibitions at the Museo Civico in Bassano del Grappa in 1992 and also at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, in 1993.² At the beginning of 1992, the results of the research project on Italian art in the Finnish collections carried out at the University of Helsinki from the mid-1980s onwards were published in the *Ateneum, Finnish National Gallery Bulletin* and an exhibition was organised at the Sinebrychoff Art Museum.³ On that occasion I highlighted in my article the distinguished and noble, yet hitherto unknown provenance of

- 1 My dissertation, which I defended at the University of Helsinki in 2008, dealt with Jacopo Bassano as a fresco painter. Kirsi Eskelinen. *Jacopo Bassano freskomaalarina. Cartiglianon ja Enegon kirkkojen freskot: konteksti, rekonstruktio ja tulkinta*. (Jacopo Bassano as a fresco painter. The frescoes of Cartigliano and Enego Parish Churches: context, reconstruction and interpretation). Helsinki: Suomen kirkkohistoriallinen seura / Societas historiae ecclesiasticae Fennica, 2008. An important conference on Jacopo Bassano was organised in Bassano del Grappa and Padua in 2011. The paper I presented there is published, see Kirsi Eskelinen. 'Una proposta per la lettura iconografica delle Stagioni di Jacopo Bassano', in Claudia Caramanna and Federico Millozzi (eds.), *Jacopo Bassano, I figli, la scuola, l'eredità: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studio*: Bassano del Grappa, Museo Civico, Padova, Università degli Studi, Archivio Antico del Bò, 30 marzo – 2 aprile 2011, *Bollettino del Museo Civico di Bassano* 30–31 (2009–10), 32–33 (2011–12), 34 (2013). Bassano del Grappa: Centro di documentazione sui Bassano W.R. Rearick, 2014, (Vol. 1, 142–59).
- 2 Beverly Louise Brown and Paola Marini (eds.). *Jacopo Bassano c. 1510–1592*. Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editore, 1992.
- 3 Kirsi Eskelinen. 'Neitsyt Maria, Jeesus-lapsi, Johannes Kastaja ja Pyhä Antonius Apotti (Sacra conversazione), Jacopo Bassano = Virgin and Child with John the Baptist and St Anthony the Abbot (Sacra Conversazione), Jacopo Bassano. Conservator's report / Sirkka Nurminen. *Ateneum, Valtion taidemuseon museojulkaisu / The Finnish National Gallery Bulletin* 1992. Helsinki: Valtion taidemuseo, 1992, (42–47).

this painting. The re-publication of that article in *FNG Research* is prompted by the current plans for a monographic exhibition on Jacopo Bassano in the near future. The exhibitions in 1992, and the show in Museo Civico in Bassano del Grappa in 2010 are the last monographic exhibitions on Jacopo Bassano. The forthcoming exhibition in Helsinki, which has been preliminarily scheduled for 2024, will actually be the first monographic show on the artist to be mounted outside Italy.

I hope that this re-publication online will disseminate the results on the provenance of the painting more widely and will promote its further research. We are also publishing here all of the information on the frame moulding of the painting, which includes images of a coat of arms and a seal and three paper labels. These details were not included in the original 1992 article.⁴

Jacopo Bassano, *Virgin and Child with John the Baptist and St Anthony the Abbot (Sacra Conversazione)*

Jacopo Bassano's oil painting shows the Virgin and the Infant Jesus with St Anthony the Abbot and St John the Baptist. Jalo Sihtola purchased the painting from the art dealer Louis Richter in London in 1938. The work had been auctioned at Sotheby's on 20 July of that year⁵ as part of a collection of art formerly belonging to the Royal House of France. This collection had been housed at Frohsdorf Castle in Austria. No less than 151 artworks were up for sale, some of which, mainly portraits, had once hung in Paris at the Tuileries. The collection was sold by the last in the line of heirs of the Royal Bourbon family, Princess Beatrix of Bourbon-Massimo (1874–1961).

Frohsdorf Castle and its art collections were owned by the Count of Chambord (1820–83), son of the Duke of Berry and grandson of Charles X (reigned 1824–30). The Count of Chambord, who also used the title Henry V, never ascended to the throne, and had to spend most of his life in exile. Frohsdorf Castle was his permanent residence from 1844. On the death of the Countess of Chambord in 1886, the castle was inherited by Don Jaime (Prince Jacques of Bourbon, 1870–1931), nephew of the count's sister Louise.⁶ Princess Beatrix inherited the castle from her brother, Don Jaime, in 1931.⁷

Who, then, acquired the *Sacra Conversazione* for the collection? It has been ascertained that Princess Beatrix did not purchase any works for the castle's collection.⁸ The Count of Chambord spent a great deal of time in Italy, chiefly in Venice,⁹ and might have purchased the painting there, although he was by no means known as a great lover of art.¹⁰ However, his mother, the Duchess of Berry (1798–1870) married an Italian Count, Ettore Lucchesi-Palli, in 1831, and settled in Venice¹¹ and the couple is known to have had valuable

4 They were discussed and reproduced in a research report. See Kirsi Eskelinen. 'Jacopo Bassanon *Sacra Conversazione* Sihtolan kokoelmassa', in *Italialaisia renessanssimaalauksia suomalaisissa kokoelmassa 1, Taidehistorialliset analyysit ja selvitykset (esitutkimus)*. Helsinki, 1988, 80–124, 229 kuvat 4–7; III Kuvat.

5 Sotheby's sale catalogue, 20th July 1938, No. 3. Aune Lindström mentioned this catalogue in her letters to Pietro Zampetti, 7 September 1957 and to W. Arslan, 16 November 1957. The Archives of the Sinebrychoff Art Museum. Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki (FNG).

6 Pierre de Luz. *Henri V*. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1931, 464; Guy Coutant de Saisseval. *Les Maisons impériales et royales d'Europe*. Paris: Éditions du Palais-Royal, 1966, 208.

7 Saisseval, *Les Maisons impériales et royales d'Europe*, 209; as relayed by Paolo Galli Zugaro (Princess Beatrix's nephew) to Kirsi Eskelinen, 16 September 1989, Rome.

8 As relayed by Paolo Galli Zugaro to Kirsi Eskelinen, 16 September 1989, Rome.

9 Count Chambord spent his winters in Venice from 1846 to 1866. Luz, *Henri V*, 244, 250.

10 Luz, *Henri V*, 246.

11 Luz, *Henri V*, 257.



Jacopo Bassano, *Virgin and Child with John the Baptist and St Anthony the Abbot*, c. 1560–65, oil on canvas, 108cm x 130cm
 Ester and Jalo Sihtola Fine Arts Foundation Donation, Finnish National Gallery / Sinebrychoff Art Museum

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Matti Janas

collections of art.¹² The Count of Chambord might, therefore, have inherited the painting from his mother. The Count was also an heir of the Duke of Angoulême¹³ and might possibly have inherited the work from his grandfather, Charles X, through the Duke and Duchess of Berry.

¹² Luz, *Henri V*, 258. An inventory of the Duchess of Berry's art collection has been published: Bonnemaïson (Le Chevalier de). *Galerie de son Altesse Royale Madame la Duchesse de Berry*. Ouvrage dédié à S.A.R et lithographié par d'habiles artistes. Paris: Impr. Didot 1822. 2 vol.

¹³ E. Franceschini. 'Duc D'Angoulême', in *Dictionnaire de Biographie française*, tome 2. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1936, 1225. According to Franceschini, the Duke of Angoulême, in his will dated 1840, bequeathed his estate to his wife, with the next heir in succession being the Count de Chambord. The Duchess de Angoulême, Marie-Thérèse (1778–1851) was the daughter of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. The collection put up for auction contained portraits of the Duchesse de Angoulême and her mother.



Jacopo Bassano, *The Adoration of the Shepherds (with Saints Vittore and Corona, also known as The Crib of St Joseph)*, 1568, oil on canvas, 240cm x 151cm. Musei Civici di Bassano del Grappa

Photo: Musei Civici di Bassano del Grappa

It has been confirmed that the coat of arms and the seal on the frame moulding of the painting belong to the royal branch of the Bourbons of France¹⁴, although it has proven difficult to produce a more accurate identification and date. According to Martine Dalas-Garrigues, the seal could have belonged to Louis XVIII (r. 1814–24), Charles X (r. 1824–30) or the Count of Chambord.¹⁵ No reference is made to the work in the inventories of the French Royal art collections.¹⁶ The painting was, then, evidently acquired after the French Revolution, in the 19th century.

The *Sacra Conversazione* in the Sihtola collection was evidently painted in the 1560s. Three of Jacopo Bassano's paintings from that decade have been given uncontested datings; *The Crucifixion of St Teonisto* (1562–63, Museo Civico, Treviso), *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (1568, Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa) and *St Jerome with Virgin and Child* (1569, the Accademia, Venice). *The Crucifixion* has been a key point of reference in establishing the chronology of Jacopo Bassano's output in the 1560s. Some authorities on Bassano (Roberto Longhi, Rodolfo Pallucchini, Alessandro Ballarin) believe that the work marks a turning point that ended a period of vibrant, creative Mannerist formal studies, which was superseded by a new preoccupation with light and colour.¹⁷ This change has been accounted for by the influence of Paolo Veronese, which is manifest in the increasing monumentality of Bassano's figures and a progressive cooling of his palette in the early 1560s.¹⁸ Other scholars (Edoardo Arslan, Pietro Zampetti) maintain that some of Jacopo's distinctly Mannerist paintings post-date the St Teonisto altarpiece.

Edoardo Arslan and Pietro Zampetti propose that the *Sacra Conversazione* was painted around

- 14 For a more detailed analysis of the coat of arms, see Eskelinen, 'Jacopo Bassano's *Sacra Conversazione* Sihtolan kokoelmissa', 85–86; Denis Diderot. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers. Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts mécaniques: avec leur explication*. Seconde livraison, en deux parties. Paris: Briasson, 1763, 21.
- 15 As relayed by Martine Dalas-Garrigues (Conservateur du service des Sceaux, Archives Nationales, Paris) to Kirsi Eskelinen, 5 September 1990.
- 16 Letter from Arnauld Brejon de Lavergnée to Kirsi Eskelinen, 13 March 1989. Author's Archive, Espoo. Brejon de Lavergnée has studied the inventory of Louis XVI's art collection compiled by Le Brun in 1683. He found no reference to the *Sacra Conversazione* in this inventory, nor can he recall it having appeared in the inventories of the Royal art collection.
- 17 Roberto Longhi. 'Calepino veneziano. IV – Suggestimenti per Jacopo Bassano', *Arte Veneta*, II. Venezia: Alfieri, 1948, (43–55), 54; Alessandro Ballarin. 'Introduzione a un catalogo dei disegni di Jacopo Bassano. III', *Arte Veneta*, XXVII. Venezia: Alfieri, 1973, (91–124), 108; Rodolfo Pallucchini. *Bassano*. Bologna: Casa Editrice Capitol, 1982, 35, picture caption 26.
- 18 Rodolfo Pallucchini. *Jacopo Bassano e il Manierismo*. Dispense universitarie, Università degli Studi di Padova, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, anno accademico 1977–78, 45; Ballarin, 'Introduzione a un catalogo dei disegni di Jacopo Bassano. III', 108.



Jacopo Bassano,
Saints Peter and Paul,
c. 1561, oil on canvas,
228cm x 123cm
Galleria Estense, Modena

Photo: Su concessione del
Ministero per la Cultura –
Archivio fotografico delle
Gallerie Estensi

1568–69¹⁹, apparently on the grounds of physiognomic similarities between the figures in this painting and those found in *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1568, in the Bassano Museo Civico.²⁰ Mary and Joseph in particular bear a marked resemblance to the Virgin and the hermit St Anthony in the *Sacra Conversazione*. These paintings share the same cool palette, the same sense of frozen time, and the same contemplative mood. The palette used in *The Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Bassano Museum is much darker than that of the *Sacra Conversazione*, and its brushwork is less restrained, with the brushstrokes overlapping the outlines (e.g. in the three figures behind Joseph). This switch to a less cautious manner of handling paint is generally thought to have occurred around 1568.²¹ The dating suggested by Arslan and Zampetti is, I contend, inaccurate. The *Sacra Conversazione* was most probably painted before *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, presumably in the early 1560s.

A painting showing St Peter and St Paul in Modena's Galleria Estense provides invaluable clues for establishing a dating for the *Sacra Conversazione*. In both paintings the figures are monumental and clearly delineated against the background. There are marked resemblances in the figure types and their poses, as well as in the overall technique used. Moreover, the pigments deployed in these paintings are strikingly similar. The light burgundy of St Paul's garment in the Modena painting and the yellow sheen of the green cape are very reminiscent of the colours of John the Baptist's leather and fur garment and robe. The light brown of Peter's cape recurs in the brown fabric draped over the pedestal in the *Sacra Conversazione*.

Ballarin and Pallucchini have suggested that the *Sacra Conversazione* and the Modena altarpiece were painted in the period of 1561–62²², with the Modena painting as the earlier. According to the dating assigned by both scholars, the *Sacra Conversazione* would, then, have been painted before *The Crucifixion of St Teonisto* (1562–63).

Meanwhile, William Roger Rearick maintains that the *Sacra Conversazione* was painted after the St Teonisto

- 19 Edoardo Arslan. *I Bassano*. Milano: Ceschina, 1960, 169. Arslan initially dated the work to 1570–80. Letter from Edoardo Arslan to Aune Lindström, 29 November 1957. The Archives of the Sinebrychoff Art Museum. FNG; Pietro Zampetti. *Jacopo Bassano*. II edizione. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico Stato, 1958, 43.
- 20 Arslan, *I Bassano*, 169. Arslan dates the paintings in the list of works in his monograph. Zampetti, *Jacopo Bassano*, 43. According to Zampetti, John the Baptist echoes the same figure in the painting in the Bassano Museum (1558) and the Virgin and Infant Jesus foreshadow the figures in a painting showing Silvano Cappello and Giovanni Moro kneeling before the Virgin (1573), in Vicenza Museum.
- 21 Pallucchini, *Jacopo Bassano e il Manierismo*, 52–53.
- 22 Ballarin, 'Introduzione a un catalogo dei disegni di Jacopo Bassano. III', 95. Ballarin has since revised his dating of the *Sacra Conversazione*. In 1968 he thought it coincided with a painting of John the Baptist in the Bassano Museum, i.e. 1558. Alessandro Ballarin. 'Aggiunte al catalogo di Paolo Veronese e Jacopo Bassano', *Arte Veneta*, XXII. Venezia: Alfieri, 1968, (39–46), 44. In 1969 he revised the dating to 1560. Alessandro Ballarin. 'Introduzione ad un catalogo dei disegni di Jacopo Bassano. I', *Arte Veneta*, XXIII. Venezia: Alfieri, 1969, (85–114), 106; Pallucchini, *Jacopo Bassano e il Manierismo*, 42, 44–45; Pallucchini, *Bassano*, 34.

altarpiece, i.e. around 1563–64²³, and gives the Galleria Estense painting a dating of 1564.²⁴ Contrary to Ballarin and Pallucchini, Rearick thus assigns the *Sacra Conversazione* an earlier dating. We thus find the key to the puzzle emerging in the form of the following question: was the *Sacra Conversazione* painted before or after the St Teonisto altarpiece?

The similarities between the two paintings provide compelling reasons for dating them closely together. The treatment of light in the Modena altar painting creates a cooler effect than that of the *Sacra Conversazione*, where the rendering of the light has parallels with pastorals painted by Jacopo in the mid-1560s.²⁵ These affinities provide grounds for dating the Modena painting, and thus also the *Sacra Conversazione*, after the St Teonisto altarpiece. The *Sacra Conversazione* was in my opinion painted slightly before the Modena work, as has been suggested by Rearick.

Appendix: Clues to the provenance

The frame moulding of Jacopo Bassano's painting at the Sinebrychoff Art Museum has three papers affixed to it. One of these is cut on the corners and bears the text 'R.1, 17' (Fig. 1). Another seems to be a storage label and is partly torn. It reads 'GARDE-MEUBLES CAMBRAY Frè...' and also includes the handwritten numbers 389 and 462 (Fig. 2). The third is a depiction of a coat of arms (Fig. 3). There is also a fourth paper tag, which resembles parchment and its text is handwritten in ink (Fig 4). This text in French is difficult to read: 'Vierge [...] Enfant Jésus avec 2 Saints Bassano' and is also inscribed with the numbers 6604 and 462, the latter being the same as on the storage label. This tag probably dates back to the 19th century.²⁶



Fig. 1. The frame moulding of Jacopo Bassano's painting *Virgin and Child with John the Baptist and St Anthony the Abbot* has three paper labels affixed to it. The one shown above is cut on the corners and bears the text 'R.1, 17'.

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Petri Virtanen



Fig. 2. The second of the three papers affixed to the frame moulding of Bassano's painting seems to be a storage label and is partly torn. It bears the text 'GARDE-MEUBLES CAMBRAY Frè...' and also includes two handwritten numbers, 3889 and 462.

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Petri Virtanen



Fig. 4. On the frame of Bassano's painting there is also a paper tag, which resembles parchment. This bears handwritten text in ink. The text, in French, is difficult to read: 'Vierge (...) Enfant Jésus avec 2 Saints Bassano'. In addition the tag bears the numbers 6604 and 462, the latter being the same number as on the storage label (Fig.2).

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Petri Virtanen

23 As relayed by William Roger Rearick to Kirsi Eskelinen, 10 June 1988, Venice. Rearick had previously dated the painting to 1561. William Roger Rearick. *The paintings of Jacopo Bassano*. Vol I–III. Thesis PH.D. Harvard University 1969, 986.

24 As relayed by W.R. Rearick to Kirsi Eskelinen, 10 June 1988, Venice. Zampetti also believes that the work was painted before the St Teonisto altarpiece. Zampetti, *Jacopo Bassano*, 40.

25 Ballarin, 'Introduzione a un catalogo dei disegni di Jacopo Bassano. III', 93, 95–96; Zampetti, *Jacopo Bassano*, 36–37; Arslan, *I Bassano*, 108–09; Pallucchini, *Jacopo Bassano e il Manierismo*, 50–52. Ballarin and Zampetti believe Jacopo's pastorals coincide with the John the Baptist in the Bassano Museum (1558). Arslan and Pallucchini assign the pastorals a dating of around 1565.

26 Kirsi Eskelinen. 'Jacopo Bassanon *Sacra Conversazione* Sihtolan kokoelmassa', in *Pohjoisitalialaisia renessanssimaalauksia suomalaisissa kokoelmissa I*. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopiston taidehistorian laitos, Suomen taideakatemia säätiö, Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 1988, 84.



The coat of arms depicted on the paper label on the back of the Bassano painting (Fig. 3, above left) is the same as can be found on the seal in Fig. 5 (above right).

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Petri Virtanen

The red seal (Fig. 5) depicts the same coat of arms as can be seen on one of the paper labels (Fig.3). It comprises an oval shield, with horizontal parallel lines representing the colour blue, and bearing three heraldic fleur-de-lis. The shield is topped by a crown with five arches decorated with pearls and fleur-de-lis. The coat of arms includes the chains of two orders of knighthood with their respective decorations. The central shield is circled first by an inner chain of the St Michael's Order which is decorated with shells. On the paper label (Fig.3) this chain is connected to the lateral parts of the crown, whereas on the seal (Fig.5) it goes around the shield. The chain has an oval medallion which hangs below the shield and this bears a depiction of St Michael and the dragon. The Order of St Michael was founded by Ludvig XI in 1469. The outer chain belongs to the Order of the Holy Spirit and has three decorations repeating in sequence: one with the character 'H' in memoriam of Henri III; one with the heraldic fleur-de-lis and a third with an armour ornament, which was added to the chain by Henri IV in 1594.²⁷ This outer chain is hung with a Maltese cross, which bears in the middle a dove – a symbol of the Holy Spirit – and pearls on the points of the cross, as well as fleur-de-lis between each arm. This chain is also connected to the lateral parts of the crown.²⁸

Keywords: Sacra Conversazione, Jalo Sihtola, Jacopo Bassano, provenance research, Frohsdorf Castle, Royal Bourbon family

²⁷ Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, 21.

²⁸ Eskelinen, 'Jacopo Bassanon *Sacra Conversazione* Sihtolan kokoelmassa', 85.