

APPRAISAL

The oil painting, size 243 x 141 cm on canvas, depicting a flag bearer, is a fragment of a large composition: in fact, we see on the right side an arm and a leg belonging to bodies, which have been depicted on a part of the canvas, which obviously has been cut off, whereas on the left the portrayal of the event onto which the glances of the two men and the woman are directed, is missing. Since their expressions show devotion and humility, one tends to believe, that the subject might be a holy event. Furthermore, the presence of the warrior in armour bearing a flag, leads to believe that a civilian or military personality of high rank could be present at this event. Maybe it could be even royalty. Therefore, one cannot help suspecting that this painting represents an episode of the legend of the cross of Christ, as narrated by Jacopo da Voragine in his "Legenda Aurea". This legend was interpreted by many painters: famous are the frescos of this subject painted by Piero della Francesca between 1452 and 1462 in the church of San Francesco in Arezzo. The scene depicted here could be the adoration of the Cross by Saint Helen, the mother of emperor Constantin the Great, or it could be the Elevation of the Cross, when the Emperor Heraclius returned the precious relic to Jerusalem, from where it had been Stolen by Cósroe, the king of the Persians.

It is believed that originally the painting was hanging in a convent church in Venice. One needs to remember that Napoleon I suppressed almost all existing religious institutions in the territories of the former republic of Venice, seizing monasteries and churches, from which approx. 12.791 paintings were taken over by the State. From this 1.279 were reserved for the Crown for the royal palaces and museums in Venice and Milan. 6770 were destroyed in 1820 because they were damaged. The others, except a certain number destined for poor churches, were sold between 1811 and 1867. Unfortunately, only the sales documents as of 1855 are preserved, after which date the number of available paintings was reduced to 504. The examination of these documents, which are kept in the archives of the State of Venice (government property, accounting dept.) proved fruitless, because a description of the above painting could not be found.

The painting was bought in Venice in 1878 according to a document (No. 09. Tintoretto bought in Venice in 1878 by Prof. E. A. Donadini) It was customary at this time to burn the name of the proprietor into the frame. Ermengildo Antonio Donadini, born in Spalato (Dalmatia) on 6-19-1847, was a painter and very active restorer in Germany. His biography is recorded in U. Thieme-Becker "General Encyclopedia of Fine Arts" IX, Leipzig 1913, page 417. He died in 1936 (H. Vollmer "Artists Encyclopedia of the 20th century", I, Leipzig 1953, page 582).

Prof. Dr. Josef Knubben conducted a technical examination of the painting. In his report of May 17, 1991, he reveals, that the pigments are the same that were used in the 16th and 17th century. With regard to the condition of preservation he noted the detachment of the colors.

The figures of the men and the woman lost in meditation are worn. Since the painting was restored it is clearer and shows great power, especially in the figure of the magnificent flag bearer, which is a true masterpiece.

The attribution to Jacopo Robusti detto IL TINTORETTO, one of the greatest masters of the Venetian School of the 16th century, born in 1518 and died in 1594, can have its origin in antiquity, according to Prof. Donadini. This opinion is shared also Prof. Dr. Knubben. Also, in my judgement, considering the degree of preservation, the painting appears certainly to be a work of IL TINTORETTO. In a close examination it can be observed that the sash tied at the hip of the flag bearer, is reminiscent of the loin cloth of Saint John the Baptist in the painting of the "Baptism of Christ" which can be seen in the collect of Alice and Arthur Sachs, New York (ref. E. von der Bercken "The Paintings of Jacopo TINTORETTO", printed in Munich in 1942, page 118, no. 260, fig. 178, or in the Cleveland Museum of Art (ref. R. Pallucchini- P. Rossi "TINTORETTO, le opere sacre e profane" printed in Milan in 1982, I, page 224, cat. 432, II, fig. 550). It is also noted that the head of the bearded man on the left resembles the head of Longino, the centaur on horseback, in the famous "CRUCIFIXION" which Tintoretto painted in 1565 for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco (reproduced in its entirety in Bercken, op. cit. page 125, no. 374 fig. 235, and in Pallucchini-Rossi, op. cit. I, page 189, cat. 283, II, fig. 371). The head of the woman is reminiscent of the head of Saint Barbara of the painting "Adoration of the Cross", painted for the church of San Marcuola in Venice. This painting hangs now in Milan in the Pinacoteca di Brera (ref. Bercken, op. cit. page 115 no. 208, fig. 6, and Pallucchini-Rossi op. cit. I page 227-228, cat. 446, II, fig. 571). The head of Mary in "Christ in the house of Martha and Mary" hanging in the paintings gallery in Bavaria (ref. Bercken, op. cit. page 116, no. 224, fig. 168, and Pallucchini-Rossi, op. cit. I, page 192, cat. 298, II, fig. 391) and the head of the woman with her hand on the chest standing next to the paralyzed man in the "Piscina Probatica" painted by TINTORETTO for the church of San Rocco in Venice (ref. Bercken, op. cit. p. 124, no. 358, fig. 83-84, and Pallucchini-Rossi, op. cit. I, page 179, cat. 226, fig. XVI, II, fig. 295-296).

In the examined painting the flag bearer is an excellent example of superb imagination and rare excellence of painting technique. We admire the clarity of design, the precision of the shape, the foreshortening of the head and the neck, the palpitating drape of the flag and the sash around the hips, the brilliant play of light and shadow on the arm, on the material and the reflection of the light on the armour. All this points to the art of a supreme master like precisely Jacopo TINTORETTO.

translated from
the original Italian
appraisal by Prof.
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signed: Prof. M o r e t t i

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