REMBRANDT’S INFLUENCE IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY VENICE

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I

Rembrandt’s influence on Venetian painters and etchers in the eighteenth century has been touched on but never fully examined. A few students have dealt with the subject, but it has not been the purpose of any of them to attempt a full-scale exploration of the many examples involved. Such is not the purpose of this short note; it is merely to suggest, by citing a few instances of Rembrandt’s impact on the artists of the time, that he is a significant influence on Venetian art in its last great florescence.

At first sight, such a role for Rembrandt seems incongruous, for he is the master of introspection and the expressive power of darkness. For him, questioning and self-doubt were the constant companions of self-confidence, and it would seem such a spirit would be alien to the grandiose, light-filled productions that suited Venice so well in its gilded isolation at this time. Indeed, many of the best-known painters remained untouched by his power; Francesco and Giovanni Antonio Guardi, Canaletto, Pietro Longhi, Pellegrini, and Sebastiano and Marco Ricci seem virtually unaware of his style.

Among the most compelling reasons for the very real influence Rembrandt exercised on several eighteenth century Venetians, however, is the actual presence of many of his paintings and etchings in the city at the time. For example, there is evidence that two works by Rembrandt, “figure al naturale”, were sold


2 Finke, op. cit., 113, and Edoardo Arslan, “Gli ultimi disegni noti di Francesco Guardi”, Commentari 6, no. 2 (1955), 130, see Rembrandt’s influence in Francesco Guardi’s work; Antony de Witt, Incisione Italiana, Milan 1950, 156, finds Rembrandt’s influence in Canaletto’s etchings; Terisio Pignatti, (exhibition) Eighteenth Century Venetian Drawings from the Correr Museum, Washington (National Gallery) 1963, 8, and Alessandro Bettagno, (exhibition) Disegni e dipinti di Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini, 1674–1741, Venice (San Giorgio Maggiore) 1959, 25, 53, 59, 69, emphasize Rembrandt’s influence on Pellegrini’s drawings; Finke, op. cit., 113, and Anthony Blunt, in Anthony Blunt and Edward Croft-Murray, Venetian Drawings of the XVII and XVIII Centuries in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle, London 1957, 17–18, 47, 63, see Rembrandt’s influence in the work of Sebastiano Ricci. However, these authors have postulated only tenuous stylistic affinities; nevertheless, it is important to note the striking similarity in pose, even in the positions of the legs, between the angel in Sebastiano Ricci’s "Freeing of St. Peter", in Sant Eustachio (San Stae), Venice (reproduced, Joachim V. Derschau,
at auction in Venice at some time in the eighteenth century\(^3\). The *Young Woman in Bed* (Hofstede de Groot 305, Bredius 110, 164\(7\)), now in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, was in the Vitturi collection in Venice in the 1760's and 1770's\(^4\); and it has been noted that a *Baptism of the Eunuch* by Rembrandt (Hofstede de Groot 153) was once in the Mocenigo collection, Venice\(^5\). Another painting by Rembrandt, considered in Venice to be *Elijah Preaching to the King*, now in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, as *Two Philosophers* (Bredius 423), 1628\(^6\), was copied twice while it was in Venice. The first copy, by the Venetian Pietro Monaco and dated 1743, is inscribed, in Italian, with its title and its owner, Bertolo Bernardi\(^7\). The other copy is described as *Eliseo profetante*, del Rembrandt: era presso Bartolomeo Bernardi a San Apollinare*, no. 59 in a series of copies after mainly Italian paintings, published in Venice in 1789, and executed by V. le Fevre, Silvestro Manaigo, and Andrea Zucchi\(^8\). By 1762, Consul Joseph Smith, the great English patron and collector who lived in Venice, owned nine paintings attributed to Rembrandt; at least six of them can be firmly ascribed to the master\(^9\). One of them was the *Deposition* (Fig. 6), now in the National Gallery, London, which was copied in a color *Sebastiano Ricci*, Heidelberg 1922, 112, fig. 86, and that in the *Angel Leaving Tobias and His Family*, 1637, in the Louvre, Paris (Hofstede de Groot 70, Bredius 503), of which, as Hofstede de Groot notes, many copies have been made. (Cf. similar figures in Rembrandt's *Manoab's Sacrifice*, 1641, in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, Hofstede de Groot 27, Bredius 509, and in his etching, the *Angel Leaving Tobias and His Family*, 1641, Münz 179, as well as Rembrandt's apparent source for the figure, the woodcut by Maerten van Heemskerck, the *Angel Leaving Tobias and His Family*, Hollstein 49; Pietro Zampetti, *Mozza dei Guidi*, first edition, Venice 1665, 72, notes that the figure of the angel in Gian Antonio Guardi's *The Angel Raphael Leaving the Family of Tobit*, in the Chiesa dell'Angelo Raffaele, Venice, is similar to the angel in Ricci's *Freeing of St. Peter.*

\(^3\) The catalogue of this sale is transcribed in Giuseppe Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventar]i inediti*, Modena 1870, 431–434.

\(^4\) The catalogue of the gallery (*Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh 1957, 223*) notes that the work came to Venice between 1761 and 1765, and left there about 1776.

\(^5\) C. Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue raisonné of the works of the most eminent Dutch painters of the seventeenth century based on the work of John Smith*, London 1907–1927, VI, no. 153, quotes the catalogue of the Museum in Schwerin to the effect that no. 856 there is a copy of an original by Rembrandt once in the Mocenigo collection. This source will be referred to hereafter as HdG.


\(^7\) The most extensive list of copies after Rembrandt, including this one by Pietro Monaco, is found in Alfred von Würzbach, *Niederländisches Künstlerlexikon* II, Vienna and Leipzig 1910, 435–453.

\(^8\) Giannantonio Moschini, *Dell'incisione in Venezia*, Venice 1924, 73. Le Fevre, Manaigo, and Zucchi are not mentioned in Würzbach as copyists of Rembrandt. Although this collection of copies was published in 1789, they must have been done by 1740, the year of Zucchi's death; since Manaigo died in 1734 and Le Fevre, ca. 1682, the Rembrandt must have been in Venice in 1740.

\(^9\) Blunt, in *Blunt and Croft–Murray, Venetian Drawings, 1957* (see note 2), 13, notes that of these nine works by or attributed to Rembrandt, "two survive in the Royal Collection, the *Portrait of a Rabbi* (HdG 496, Bredius 382) and the *Young Man in a Turban* (HdG 354, Bredius 142). Another, the *Descent*