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Georges Seurat, *Bathers at Asnières* (NG 3908),  
detail of PLATE 4, page 7

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detail of PLATE 1, page 38



# Giulio Romano and *The Birth of Jupiter*: Studio Practice and Reputation

LARRY KEITH

GIULIO ROMANO'S *Birth of Jupiter* (PLATE 1) was probably created in the late 1530s as part of a comprehensive redecoration of part of the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua, and eventually entered the National Gallery collection in 1859.<sup>1</sup> Once held in high esteem, the painting suffered a decline in reputation, and it has not been displayed on the main-floor galleries for many decades. However, the recent decision to restore the picture (it had not been treated for well over a century) has stimulated research into its technique, and into the circumstances surrounding its manufacture. In addition, independent research undertaken by Guido Rebechini at the same time as the restoration has shed new light on the commission, offering a speculative reconstruction of the room for which the panel was painted.<sup>2</sup> The painting provides insights into some of the practical workings of Giulio's studio – its

materials, methods, and organisation – while its subsequent history is no less interesting as an example of the shifting taste and attitudes regarding its creator.

Giulio's reputation was established during his apprenticeship in the studio of Raphael, where, according to Vasari, he was responsible for parts of the fresco decoration of the Vatican Stanze, including most famously reliefs painted in imitation of bronze in the dado below the *Fire in the Borgo* in the Stanza dell'Incendio. After Raphael's death in 1520, Giulio was also responsible for much of the decoration of the Sala di Costantino. By 1524 his importance was such that Federico Gonzaga – with the apparent intercession of Baldassare Castiglione – was able to bring him to his court in Mantua, where he received some of the most extensive and important patronage in sixteenth-century Italy, and where he remained until his death in 1546.<sup>3</sup>



PLATE 1 Giulio Romano, *The Birth of Jupiter* (NG 624), mid-1530s. Panel, 106.4 × 175.5 cm.

PLATE 2 Giulio Romano, *The Nurture of Jupiter*, mid-1530s. Panel, 110.8 × 141.4 cm. Hampton Court, The Royal Collection. © 2003 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.



The most important product of this famous relationship was undoubtedly the Palazzo del Te, constructed between 1525 and 1536. Giulio was not only responsible for the design and construction of the building and grounds, but also for the decoration, which included a comprehensive scheme of fresco, stucco, panel paintings, and other furnishings.<sup>4</sup> Given the extent of the enterprise, Giulio must have been particularly adept at delegating tasks to teams of artists and workers, a skill no doubt derived from his artistic formation in the very large workshop of Raphael.

As the work on the Palazzo del Te was drawing to a close, another major project was initiated that was to occupy Giulio's studio throughout the mid-1530s: the creation of a series of new state apartments within the structure of the existing Palazzo Ducale. One of these new rooms was the Sala di Giove, the setting for the National Gallery panel. The *Birth of Jupiter* describes an episode in which the Corybantes – the Cretan guardian divinities of the infant Jupiter – are shown making music in order to drown the child's cries and help conceal him from his father, Saturn, who wished to devour him. It was one of a series of mythological panels dedicated to the rule of Jupiter and his power, with obvious allusions to Giulio's patron, Federico Gonzaga; the focus on youthful scenes from the life of the god is probably intended to refer to the succession of Federico's son Francesco, who would have been about five years old at the start of the project. Elaborate stucco decoration on the same theme still survives within the room, while a plausi-

ble reconstruction of the original disposition of the panel paintings has recently been advanced.<sup>5</sup> Several other surviving panels from the series are now in the Royal Collection, which generously lent what must have been the adjoining scene, *The Nurture of Jupiter* (PLATE 2), for purposes of technical study and comparison during the restoration of the National Gallery panel; the Royal Collection panel retains its discoloured nineteenth-century varnish layers.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to remember that the execution of these paintings, as a relatively minor component of a large decorative scheme, would have been assigned in large part to members of the workshop, working from designs by Giulio. Modern concepts of authorship have tended to place more emphasis on the distribution of labour than would have been the case in the sixteenth century, although few educated contemporary viewers would have mistaken any of the Jupiter panels for works from Giulio's hand. Critical interest in such paintings would instead have concentrated on the areas for which he was wholly responsible – the sophistication of the invention and the effectiveness of the design – and would have been less concerned with the finer distinctions of paint handling. Closer study of the technique of the *Birth of Jupiter* gives a better idea of how the painting's execution was delegated, thus allowing a fuller understanding of Giulio's role in the process.

The *Birth of Jupiter* was painted on a pine panel consisting of three vertical planks; unfortunately, this support was drastically thinned and cradled in





FIG. 1 *The Nurture of Jupiter*, back of the panel.



PLATE 3 *The Nurture of Jupiter*, back of the panel. The cross-grain channels made to receive the battens were made no wider than was necessary to span the panel join, rather than the more usual practice of extending them to the full width of the panel.

the nineteenth century, and much information has therefore been lost. However, the wooden support of the Royal Collection *Nurture of Jupiter* remains in a nearly undisturbed state (FIG. 1), and can be assumed to share a common construction method with its once neighbouring scene. It too was painted on vertical pine planks, and the construction was reinforced with two tapered cross-grain pine battens, let into dovetailed channels cut into the reverse of the structure. The inserted battens (PLATE 3), which have been subsequently thinned, were no longer than was necessary to adequately span the planks across the panel join furthest from the side of their insertion, and do not cross the entire width of the panel.

The constructed panels were prepared with a gesso ground, over which was applied a warm biscuit-coloured priming consisting of lead white, carbon black, and brown and orange earth pigments, bound in linseed oil; as expected, samples



FIG. 2 *The Birth of Jupiter*, X-radiograph detail showing ridged, multi-directional brushstrokes from the application of the priming layer.

from both the National Gallery and Royal Collection panels show no significant differences in the composition of this layer, which is in accordance with descriptions in contemporary written sources.<sup>7</sup> This priming was applied in a rapid and rather crude manner; ridged brushstrokes from its application, running in several different directions, remain readily visible in the X-radiographs, and with the naked eye, through the subsequent layers of paint and varnish (FIG. 2).

Thus prepared, the panel was ready for the application of the drawn composition. As in much contemporary central Italian painting, study of the drawing on the panel must begin with consideration of its source – in this case, Giulio's highly finished, wholly autograph drawing now in the Devonshire Collection at Chatsworth House (FIG. 3).<sup>8</sup> A similar compositional drawing, now in the British Museum, also exists for the Royal Collection *Nurture of Jupiter* (FIG. 4). It too is a highly finished work which accords with the painted composition in almost every detail, with little if any deviation between the two versions. The widespread contemporary view of such drawings as being the purest expression of the inventive powers of the artist takes on even greater significance in the context of Giulio's sprawling workshop, in which technical evidence suggests that delegation of the finished work from the master's designs took place more



FIG. 3 Giulio Romano, *The Infant Jupiter guarded by the Corybantes on Crete*. Pen, brown ink and brown wash, 33.2 × 54.9 cm (corners chamfered). Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. © Reproduced by permission of the Duke of Devonshire and the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees. Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art, London.



FIG. 4 Giulio Romano, *Jupiter suckled by the Goat Amalthea*. Pen and brown ink and brown wash with traces of squaring in black chalk, 39.7 × 55.1 cm. London, The British Museum. © Copyright The British Museum, London.



comprehensively than usual. Giulio was greatly admired as a draughtsman by his contemporaries, for his sure execution as well as for his fluency with a wide range of classical and contemporary motifs; Armenini, for instance, writes:

Giulio Romano was so gifted and dextrous that whoever knew him affirmed that when he drew something extemporaneously, one could say that he was copying a subject in front of his eyes rather than composing from his own ideas. His style was so near to, and in conformity with, the ancient sculpture of Rome, to which he had studiously devoted much time while he was a youth, that what he placed and formed on paper seemed to be exactly drawn from those works.<sup>9</sup>

An aspect of Giulio's facility in composing is demonstrated in the *Birth of Jupiter* by his quota-

tion of Michelangelo's *Sleeping Cupid*. This sculpture, now lost but then in the Gonzaga collection, was itself probably derived from an antique source.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Armenini also describes Giulio's apparently unique method of producing finished ink drawings of the type used for the *Birth* and *Nurture of Jupiter*, which employed a tracing technique. His first rough sketch, executed in lead or charcoal, was covered in charcoal on the reverse. Giulio would then trace the finalised contours onto a fresh sheet, which would then be executed in pen and wash, after which the charcoal marks would be rubbed away, accounting for the remarkable sureness and lack of revision in many of his ink drawings.<sup>11</sup>

The British Museum drawing (FIG. 4) shows traces of squared lines, executed in black chalk on





FIG. 5 *The Birth of Jupiter*, infrared reflectogram mosaic detail, showing the schematic description of contours characteristic of the transfer of the underdrawn design from a cartoon.

top of the pen and ink study, and it is clear that the squaring provided the basis for the execution of a larger-scale cartoon, the design of which was in turn directly transferred onto the primed panel. The Chatsworth study for the National Gallery painting (FIG. 3) shows no apparent remains of squaring, although there can be little doubt that it was also faithfully enlarged in order to produce a cartoon for the painting. Like the Royal Collection *Nurture of Jupiter*, the National Gallery *Birth of Jupiter* carefully reproduces the drawn composition in almost every detail. Infrared reflectography of the panel's underdrawing is entirely consistent with the transfer of an image from a cartoon (FIG. 5); the traced design is essentially a schematic and reductive placement of forms more carefully rendered in the drawing on paper. In the absence of the lost cartoons, a simple enlargement of the original drawings shows an extraordinary alignment of the principal forms, especially given the dramatic increase in scale between the initial drawings and the final paintings (FIGS 6 and 7). Furthermore, Armenini specifically mentions having seen evidence of the squaring method of enlargement used in the production of cartoons from drawings by Raphael and many of his more illustrious assistants, including Perino del Vaga, Daniele da Volterra, and Giulio himself. Giulio's documented use of a tracing method to produce the drawings themselves also implies a preference for use of the same technique to transfer the enlarged cartoon image to the panels.<sup>12</sup>



FIG. 6 (ABOVE) *The Birth of Jupiter*

FIG. 7 (BELOW) *The Nurture of Jupiter*

If the contours of the drawing are re-scaled and laid over an image of the final painting, the resulting alignment of forms strongly suggests the use of an intermediary cartoon.

The only significant change between the transferred cartoon image and the final painting in the National Gallery panel paradoxically suggests the rigidity of the approach with which the drawing was followed. The two groups of background musicians or Corybantes to the left and right of the principal foreground protagonists are placed in more or less the same spatial plane, but the group on the right is significantly larger in scale in both the preparatory drawing and the analogous section of the first underdrawn image (PLATE 4 and FIG. 8). This basic infelicity is less telling in the smaller format and highly limited chromatic range of the drawing, but must have been more glaring in the context of the larger surface and more convincing aerial perspectives afforded by the rich palette of the painting itself. Armenini advocates the making of full-scale cartoons as an intermediary stage prior to painting precisely to avoid this kind of error: 'Practice shows that great defects remain hidden in little drawings, whereas in large drawings every little error becomes obvious.'<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, in this case, the original discrepancy in scale was faithfully executed on the cartoon – which suggests that Giulio played little if any part in its production. The error was then carried out to near completion in the painting before being altered. This change was revealed during the recent restoration, where the removal of discoloured nineteenth-century retouchings unfortunately exposed an early harsh overcleaning which had greatly damaged the correcting layers.

If further evidence of Giulio's heavy dependence on his workshop were needed – beyond the rather pedestrian quality of much of the paint handling – then the dutiful execution in paint of the poorly scaled musicians suggests the participation of artists lacking either the ability or authority to correct the initial error. It is easy to imagine that the need to re-scale this area would have been quickly grasped by the sorely pressed Giulio during a near-final round of inspection. While the corrected figures are now badly abraded, it is evident that they were painted directly onto the repainted blue of the water and it is not inconceivable that they were sketched in by Giulio as part of a more comprehensive retouching and editing final phase. This sort of process, albeit in fresco, is alluded to by Vasari as he describes some of the decoration of the Palazzo del Te:

...they were painted from the great cartoons of Giulio by Benedetto of Pescia and Rinaldo Mantovano, who carried into execution all the stories except the Bacchus, the Silenus, and the two children suckled by goat; although it is true



PLATE 4 *The Birth of Jupiter*, detail, after cleaning, before restoration. An old overcleaning clearly shows the earlier, larger scale of the figure group, which was nearly completed before the revision of scale.

that the work was afterwards retouched almost all over by Giulio, so that it is very much as if it had been all painted by him. This method, which he had learned from Raffaello, his instructor, is very useful to young men, who in this way obtain practice and thereby generally become excellent masters. And although some persuade themselves that they are greater than those who keep them at work, such fellows, if their guide fails them before they are at the end, or if they are deprived of the design and directions for the work, learn that through having lost or abandoned that guidance too early they are wandering like blind men in an infinite sea of errors.<sup>14</sup>

A combination of Vasari's text and other documents from Mantua provides an enormous list of painting assistants: Benedetto Pagni da Pescia, Figurino da Faenza, Rinaldo and Giovan Battista Mantovano, Fermo Ghisoni, Fermo da Caravaggio, Bozino, Anselmo de Ganis, Agostinoda Mozzanegra, Girolamo da Pontremoli, Luca Tedesco, and other carvers, gilders, sculptors and *stuccatori*.<sup>15</sup> Whatever inaccuracies may exist in Vasari's attribution of hands in Giulio's workshops, he was undoubtedly essentially correct in his description of a wide distribution of labour within the workshop, often deducible within individual paintings themselves. Vasari's disparaging remarks about the inappropriate ambition of some of Giulio's assistants also seems to describe an essential truth about his organisational methods, albeit indirectly; as has been mentioned elsewhere, Giulio





FIG. 8 *The Birth of Jupiter*, infrared reflectogram mosaic of the figure group at right, showing the transferred underdrawing from the cartoon of the first, larger version of the group, along with further drawing for the re-scaled second version.

seems to have been a highly controlling employer who was little interested in cultivating initiative from his assistants, who were effectively there as mere ‘mechanical executants of his will’.<sup>16</sup> Vasari’s stated preference for Giulio’s drawings to his painting is perhaps better understood as a comment on the often uneven results of his studio’s painted production than on the master’s own abilities: ‘It can be affirmed that Giulio always expressed his concepts better in drawings than in his finished works or paintings, since in the former we see more vivacity, boldness, and emotion.’<sup>17</sup>

From this perspective, many of the more ungainly features of the National Gallery and Royal Collection panels make more sense. As noted above, the pentimento of the figure group in the *Birth of Jupiter* is most plausibly explained by the assistants having made uncritical use of the cartoon furnished to them. The *Nurture of Jupiter* also shows technical evidence of systematic final retouching, presumably by Giulio or at least under his direction.

While both the National Gallery and Royal Collection panels show extensive use of natural azurite (the specific impurities of which suggest an identical source<sup>18</sup>), the Royal Collection painting also makes use of an artificially made azurite, the so-called blue verditer, in parts of the landscape.<sup>19</sup> The particles of this pigment display the distinctive round shape characteristic of its manufacture, as viewed in cross-section and with the scanning electron microscope (SEM), and it appears to be a very

early occurrence of the material. The likelihood of the pigment having been used as a retouching material from an early restoration is small, as in some samples it appears within paint layers that are unquestionably original (PLATE 5). In the hills of the distant landscape at the left of the picture, however, it is employed as the principal constituent of a final glaze that is laid over two distinctly fluorescing varnish layers which are therefore by implication also original (PLATE 6). While it was not possible to obtain a sample large enough to identify the exact composition of the intermediary varnishes, they appear very similar under ultraviolet examination to the lowermost and therefore oldest varnish layers seen elsewhere on the Royal Collection and National Gallery paintings, consisting of linseed or walnut oil-containing varnishes.<sup>20</sup> It is not inconceivable that the varnishes seen between the paint layers of the Royal Collection painting could have been applied considerably later and seeped between flaking layers of original paint, but the preservation of neat and distinct varnish layers in the surrounding paint structure makes this unlikely (PLATE 7).<sup>21</sup> It is more easily explained as further circumstantial evidence of the systematic revision of the nearly completed paintings described by Vasari and implied by the evidence of the revisions discovered on the *Birth of Jupiter*. Although no evidence of either blue verditer or intermediary varnish layers was found in analogous distant landscape sections of the National Gallery panel, it is worth noting that it is precisely these areas that contained most of

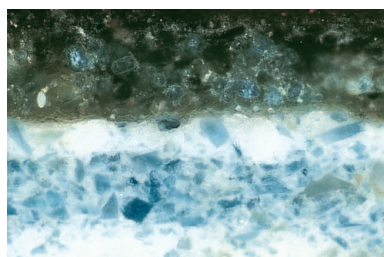


PLATE 5 *The Nurture of Jupiter*, cross-section of sky, showing the use of artificially manufactured blue verditer pigment, with characteristic smooth, spherical particle shape, within the unambiguously original uppermost dark blue paint layer. The lower lighter blue layers contain natural azurite. Original magnification 500x; actual magnification 225x.

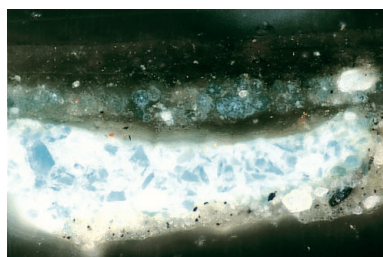


PLATE 6 *The Nurture of Jupiter*, cross-section of sky, showing a final glaze of blue verditer over presumably original varnish layers. Original magnification 440x; actual magnification 200x.

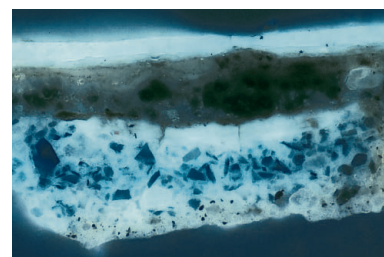


PLATE 7 *The Nurture of Jupiter*, cross-section illustrated in PLATE 6 under ultraviolet light, showing the preservation of evidence of two distinct varnish layers within the paint structure. Original magnification 440x; actual magnification 200x.

the worst damage from early restorations (PLATE 8). Were similar intermediary varnish layers to have existed in those parts of the National Gallery landscape they would certainly have rendered them far more vulnerable to the harsh cleaning methods of early restorers, the unfortunate results of which became plainly visible during the recent restoration.

The most cursory stylistic examination also reveals something of the division of labour within the two pictures. The figure painting in both is quite similar, and can reasonably be suggested to have been painted by the same hand.<sup>22</sup> Considerable differences exist within the landscape painting, however. It is not possible to make any useful comparison between the beautifully rendered aerial perspective of the distant landscape of the Royal Collection panel and that of its National Gallery counterpart, because of the damaged condition of the latter. More identifiable differences do exist, however, in the rendering of foliage. While hardly naturalistic in intent, the carpet of grasses, flowers and reeds among which the protagonists of the *Birth of Jupiter* are placed is painted with a highly evolved decorative sense of rhythm, pattern and spacing, while the leaves of the overhanging grapevine are wonderfully fluent, rapid passages of painting (PLATE 9). Similar sections of the Royal Collection foliage, although certainly effective, are rather more mechanical and repetitive by comparison (PLATE 10). Without advancing a strict Vasarian delineation of specific hands, visual analysis is nevertheless consistent with technical and literary evidence in suggesting a comprehensive delegation of work to members of the workshop, with results that were often uneven in quality.

As has been suggested earlier, within the rich decorative scheme of the room as a whole these distinctions would have been of secondary importance to contemporary viewers. Writing less than ten years after Giulio's death, Vasari gives several specific examples of Giulio's delegation of labour that are certainly not pejorative in intention. Giulio was justly celebrated for the inventiveness of his creations and the totality of his enterprise, and when the paintings were first dispersed and sold from the palace their reputation must have been as firmly based on their associations within that context as much as on their intrinsic qualities.

Whether by his association with Raphael, or the result of the promulgation of Vasari's *Vite*, or the spread of engravings after his works by Marcantonio Raimondi (particularly a highly prized set of erotic prints with accompanying text by Pietro Aretino), Giulio's fame was certainly well established in Britain by the seventeenth century; he is the only Renaissance artist Shakespeare cites by name:

That rare Italian Master, Iulio romano, who (had he himselfe Eternitie, and could put Breath into his Worke) would beguile Nature of her Custome, so perfectly he is her ape.<sup>23</sup>

Giulio's paintings feature prominently among the extraordinary collection of works obtained by Charles I at the time of the dispersal of the Gonzaga Collection in the early seventeenth century. Some measure of the esteem in which the monarch held Giulio can be seen from the fact that the *Birth of Jupiter* was among six paintings which Charles had hung in the second room of his privy chambers, alongside eight pictures attributed to Titian and



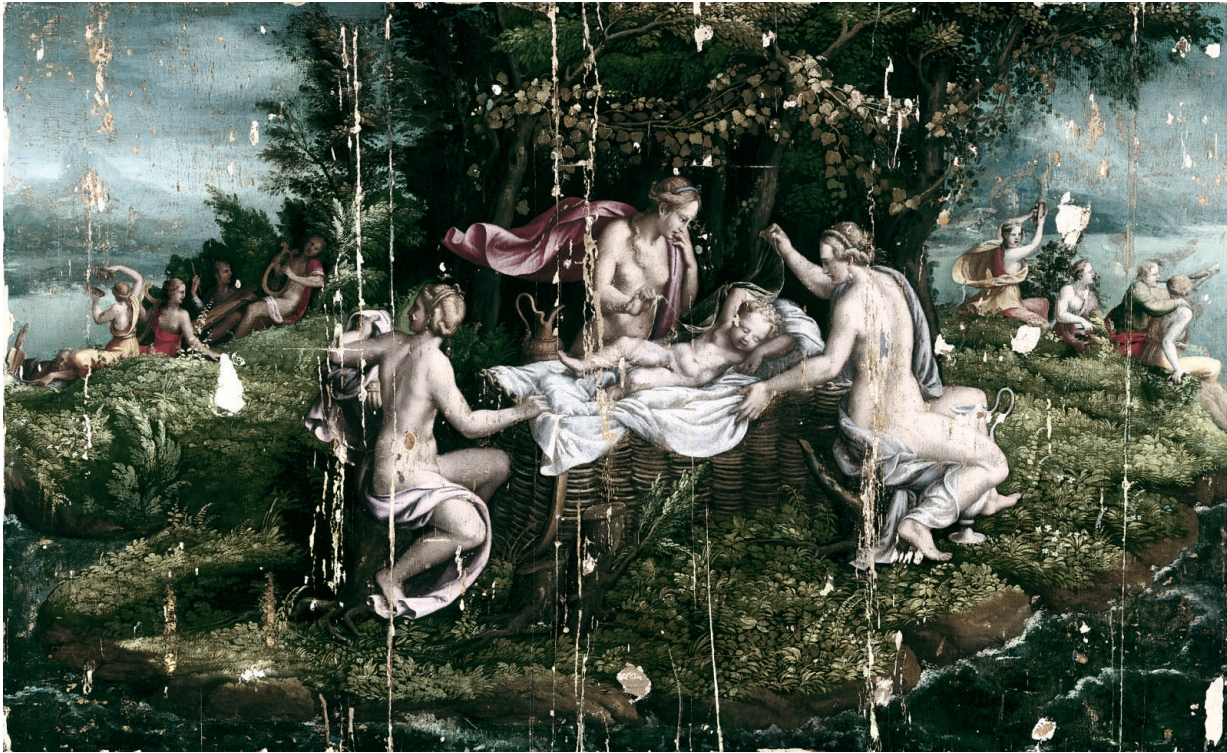


PLATE 8 *The Birth of Jupiter*, after cleaning, before restoration. While the network of vertical losses is primarily the result of nineteenth-century panel treatment, the picture shows the worst cleaning damage in the sky and distant landscape; the intermediary varnish layers on the *Nurture of Jupiter* were found on an analogous area.



PLATE 9 *The Birth of Jupiter*, detail of foliage.



PLATE 10 *The Nurture of Jupiter*, detail of foliage.

four works by another of Raphael's celebrated pupils, Polidoro da Caravaggio.<sup>24</sup>

Most of Charles I's acquisitions were sold by the Commonwealth government after his death. Although many were reacquired during the Restoration, including most of the panels by Giulio, a considerable number of works were never recovered. The next firm documentary evidence relating to the *Birth of Jupiter* is a 1727 inventory of the Orléans Collection (where it is catalogued as having been previously owned by the Abbé de Camps). There are further references to the painting as an 'ex-Orléans' picture in two sale catalogues at the

Lyceum in London in 1798 and 1800, and it seems to have returned to France around this time. The picture then passed through at least two French collections, those of Lapeyrière and Erard, before it was acquired by the English collector Lord Northwick, in 1833.<sup>25</sup> Northwick included the picture among a group put up for sale in 1838, but the reserve price was placed so high as to suggest that he was more interested in testing the market than in making a sale, and the painting remained in his collection until his death in 1859.<sup>26</sup>

The eminent art historian Gustav Friedrich Waagen saw the painting while it was in

Northwick's possession, and included it in his 1838 comprehensive survey of prominent English collections, the *Works of Art and Artists in Great Britain*, where it was described in this manner:

A rich, noble landscape, with a view of the sea, forms the background. In this spirited composition, the bold, poetical enthusiastic character of Giulio is entirely manifested. The execution, too, is careful; the colouring very powerful, and unusually clear. This picture, about 3ft. in high, and 5ft. 9in. wide, came from the Orleans gallery, and was afterwards in the well known collection of Mr Erard, at Paris.<sup>27</sup>

An 1858 catalogue of 'some of the principal paintings' in Northwick's collection, the *Hours in Lord Northwick's Picture Galleries*, also enthusiastically describes the *Birth of Jupiter*:

The sheet of glass which protects this picture testifies the estimation in which it is held. It was originally painted on panel, but its present noble possessor has had it transferred to canvass (sic). Previous to its removal to Thirlstaine House, we believe Lord Francis Egerton endeavoured, by an offer of fifteen hundred guineas, to become its purchaser, but in vain. It is elaborately painted, and has such a truly exquisite tone, as to challenge, in this respect, a comparison with the choicest works of Corregio. The scene is supposed to be an enchanted island, wherein the infant god is represented cradled in the midst of luxuriant vegetation, his mother, Rhea, being in the act of lifting up the veil which covers him. Two river nymphs are in attendance, and, at some distance, on either side, are the *Corybantes*, priests of Cybele, who, with various musical instruments, are presumed to be fulfilling their important mission, of endeavouring to drown the cries of the new-born babe. In the distance is Mount Ida, and beyond, to the line of the horizon, appears a long line of coast interspersed with promontories and bays. The drawing of the principal figures is considered highly graceful, and the colouring of the whole exceedingly rich.<sup>28</sup>

Waagen's second edition of *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, published in 1854, contained another description of the panel, but one that was clearly more disinterested and rather less laudatory: 'The Corybantes raising a noise with their weapons, in order that Saturn should not hear the cries of the infant Jupiter. Spirited, but very much injured.'<sup>29</sup>

In his Director's report to the National Gallery Trustees of 19 July 1859, Sir Charles Eastlake

recommends the purchase of the painting among several he wished to obtain from the Northwick sale, describing it quite accurately as 'somewhat injured but capable of being put in order. A fine specimen, formerly in the Orleans Gallery'.<sup>30</sup> After securing the Trustees' approval, Eastlake was able to report on 5 August of the same year that it had been purchased for the not inconsiderable sum of £920. In a more private letter of 8 August to Ralph Nicolson Wornum, then Keeper of the National Gallery, Eastlake mentions having been recommended the purchase of the *Birth of Jupiter*, presumably some time beforehand, by Mr William Buchanan, an important dealer of old master paintings through whom the Gallery made many notable acquisitions. He also mentions having received an account of the picture's recent restoration, when it had been in the Lapeyrière collection, by a restorer referred to only as 'old Reinagle', who was under the interesting misapprehension that the picture was by Dosso Dossi. Eastlake relates that in thanking Reinagle he stated that although the colouring was worthy of Dosso Dossi, 'the classic taste and style of design belong to Giulio alone';<sup>31</sup> he also directs that Reinagle was not to see his old restorations until the picture was toned. Rather than a comment on Reinagle's abilities as a restorer – at least one outright copy of a Van Dyck by Reinagle was owned by Northwick<sup>32</sup> – Eastlake's wish to have the picture toned may have been the result of more recent problems with the structure of the work. It seems that the familiarity allowed by a few months' ownership offered a much fuller appreciation of its condition; by the time of the meeting of the Board of Trustees on 30 November 1859 the new purchase was bluntly described as 'considerably injured', and 'the picture was by Sir Charles Eastlake's order entrusted, with the sanction of the Trustees, to Mr C. Buttery, to be repaired'.<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting to speculate whether, in a pre-photographic era when many pictures were shown with heavily toned varnishes, a combination of the favourable 1838 description by Waagen (he was respected enough in England to be asked to give evidence before the Royal Commission on the condition and future of the National Gallery in 1853) and the advocacy of Buchanan may have carried more weight with Eastlake than would have been the case had today's routine investigative technology of X-radiographs, ultraviolet and infrared examination been available. It is also likely that the picture's undeniably prestigious provenance – the Gonzaga, Royal, and Orléans collections – also



weighed in its favour. It is also very possible that the picture suffered a considerable decline in its physical condition in the period between Waagen's two publications.

The curious but inaccurate reference to the picture's transfer to canvas which occurs in the 1858 viewer's guide to Northwick's collection is probably best explained as a misunderstanding of a different, and only slightly less injurious, treatment which seems to have occurred at about this time. Northwick's 1839 catalogue contains several glowing references to the structural treatments carried out on many of his paintings – including a transfer from panel to canvas of a Giorgione – by 'that ingenious artist Mr. Francis Leedham'.<sup>34</sup> The Leedham stamp appears on the reverse of the cradle that was applied to the *Birth of Jupiter*, and it is not unreasonable to suggest that Leedham carried out this treatment during Northwick's ownership. During this operation the panel was also drastically thinned and therefore became more responsive to changes in relative humidity, resulting in dimensional changes in the wood that the cradle could not accommodate. The stresses caused by this misguided but then-fashionable structural treatment are almost certainly responsible for the majority of the extensive vertically oriented paint losses (PLATE 8), flaking which may well have begun almost immediately after treatment in the unregulated environment of a nineteenth-century country house.

The picture was not treated again after Buttery's work until 2000, when a comprehensive cleaning and restoration was undertaken. When this work was begun the picture had been in the lower floor galleries for many decades, and the continuing degradation of its numerous varnish layers, some of which had been deliberately toned, had rendered the picture extremely difficult to read (PLATE 11).

If the decline in the picture's reputation began with the proper appreciation of its condition, which must have become apparent during Buttery's 1859 restoration, more abstract changes in taste may have also played a role in the picture's relative neglect as the twentieth century progressed. Removed from the decorative scheme of the ducal apartments, the painting's obscure textual source, arcane classically referenced imagery and wilfully unnatural setting must have seemed increasingly alien in the context of growing post-Romantic interest in the more personally expressive and painterly qualities of an artist's output. Furthermore, the undeniable reduction in quality of execution resulting from Giulio's delegation to his workshop results in a somewhat



PLATE 11 *The Birth of Jupiter*, detail, showing initial cleaning test.

awkward and flawed image – particularly when seen as an independent, stand-alone painting on a modern gallery wall and viewed by a comparatively less literary and more visual culture.

Yet in spite of these weaknesses we may still enjoy the qualities that Eastlake cited – 'the classic taste and style [that] belong to Giulio alone' – aspects which would have been at least as highly regarded by Giulio's contemporaries. Neither a sublime painterly achievement nor an inconsequential ruin, the *Birth of Jupiter* is rather a noteworthy and charming episode in a key moment in the history of Renaissance palace interiors – when proper consideration is given to its original context – and as such has an important function within the Gallery collection. While Giulio was certainly capable of producing autograph paintings of as high a quality as any painted in the Cinquecento, the greatest source of his fame remains the comprehensive architectural and decorative programme produced for the Gonzaga court at the Palazzo del Te and the Palazzo Ducale. It is therefore appropriate, and indeed fortunate, that Giulio Romano should be represented within the National Gallery by a picture which formed a part of that most remarkable achievement.

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## Notes and references

- 1 See Cecil Gould, *National Gallery Italian Catalogues; the Sixteenth Century Italian Schools*, London 1987, pp. 118–20.
- 2 Guido Rebecchini, *Burlington Magazine*, in press.
- 3 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives*, ed. D. Ekserdjian (trans. De Vere), Vol. 2, New York 1996, pp. 119–23 and 124–5; Giorgio Vasari, *Vite (nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568)*, ed. R. Bettarini, Florence 1991, Vol. 5, pp. 59–61 and 64–5; Giovanni Battista Armenini, *De' veri precetti della pittura*, Ravenna 1586, p. 217, (trans. Edward Olszewski, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, New York 1977, pp. 284–5). For a modern critical study of Giulio's Roman activity with Raphael, see Sylvia Ferino Pagden, 'Giulio Romano pittore e disegnatore a Roma', in *Giulio Romano* exh. cat. Palazzo del Te and Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, 1989, pp. 65–95.
- 4 Vasari ed. Ekserdjian, cited in note 3, Vol. 2, pp. 127–29, and F Hartt, *Giulio Romano*, 2 vols, New Haven 1958, Vol. 1, pp. 91–161. See also Amedeo Belluzzi and Kurt Forster, 'Giulio Romano architetto alla corte dei Gonzaga', in *Giulio Romano*, exh. cat., cited in note 3, pp. 177–227, and Gianna Suttner and Chiara Tellini Perina (English trans. Christopher Evans), *Palazzo Te in Mantua*, Milan 1994.
- 5 Rebecchini, cited in note 2.
- 6 See John Shearman, *The Pictures in the Royal Collection of Her Majesty the Queen: The Early Italian Pictures*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 126–31.
- 7 For contemporary written sources see Raffaello Borghini, *Il riposo*, Florence 1584, p. 174; the preface to the 1568 edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* (ed. G. Milanesi), Florence 1878, vol. I, p. 186; *Vasari on Technique* (preface to the original 1568 edition; translated and edited by Louisa Madehose), reprinted 1960, pp. 230–1; Armenini, cited in note 3, p. 125 (trans. Olszewski, New York 1977, p. 192).
- 8 Michael Jaffe, *The Devonshire Collection of Italian Drawings*, 1992, p. 105, Philip Pouncey and J.A. Gere, *Italian Drawings: Raphael and his Circle*, Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum, London 1962, p. 65, Hartt, cited in note 4, Vol. 1, pp. 212, 305, and Vol. 2, fig. 456.
- 9 Fu parimente Giulio Romano così copioso e facile, che chi lo conobbe affermava che quando egli disegnavo da sé qualcosa si fosse, che si potea più presto dire che egli imitasse e che avesse innanzi a gli occhi ciò che faceva, che ch'egli componesse di suo capo, perciò che era la sua maniera tanto conforme e prossimano alla sculture antiche di Roma che, per esservi stato studiosissimo sempre mentre era giovane, che ciò che deponeva e formava pareva esser proprio cavato da quelle. Armenini, cited in note 3, p. 76 (trans. Olszewski, p. 147–8).
- 10 See Gould, cited in note 1, p. 119.
- 11 Armenini, cited in note 3, p. 76 (trans. Olszewski, p. 148). See also Hartt, cited in note 4, Vol. 1, pp. XVII and 85–6.
- 12 ...e questi sono i modi ch'io ho veduti e considerati più volte sopra a i disegni e ne i cartoni di Raffaello, di Perugino, di Giulio, di Danielle e di Tadeo Zuccaro... Armenini, cited in note 3, p. 102 (trans. Olszewski, pp. 172–3). For a comprehensive study of Giulio's working methods with drawings and cartoons for frescoes in Mantua, see Konrad Oberhuber, 'Giulio Romano pittore e disegnatore a Mantova', in *Giulio Romano*, exh. cat., cited in note 3, pp. 135–75.
- 13 Armenini, cited in note 3, p. 102: ci è manifesto per le prove che ne i disegni piccoli vi stanno ascosi i gran difetti e ne i grandi ogni minimo errore che vi sia (trans. Olszewski, p. 173).
- 14 Vasari, ed. Ekserdjian, cited in note 3, Vol. 2, pp. 128–9; Vasari, ed. Bettarini, cited in note 3, pp. 67–8: elle furono dipinte con i cartoni grandi di Giulio da Benedetto da Pescia e da Rinaldo Mantovano, i quali misero in opera tutte queste storie, eccetto che il Baccho, il Sileno et i due putti che poppano la capra: ben è vero che l'opera fu poi quasi tutta ritocca da Giulio, onde è come fusse tutta fatta da lui. Il qual modo, che egli imparò da Raffaello suo precettore, è molto utile per i giovani che in esso si esercitano, perché riescono per lo più eccellenti maestri: e se bene alcuni si persuadono essere da più di chi gli fa operare, conoscono questi cotali, mancata la guida loro prima che siano al fine, o mancando loro il disegno e l'ordine d'operare, che per aver perduta anzi tempo o lasciata la guida si trovano come ciechi in un mare d'infiniti errori.
- 15 Vasari gives a lengthy list of the assistants he thought were among Giulio's best: see Vasari, ed. Ekserdjian, p. 140; Vasari, ed. Bettarini, p. 82; Hartt, Vol. 1, pp. 79–80, all cited in note 3. Numerous specific citations of collaborators and assistants can also be found in *Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Giulio Romano, Repertorio di fonti documentarie* (ed. Daniela Ferrari), Mantua 1992.
- 16 Hartt, cited in note 4, p. 80.
- 17 Vasari, ed. Ekserdjian, cited in note 3, Vol. 2, p. 121; Vasari, ed. Bettarini, cited in note 3, Vol. 5, p. 80: ...benché si può affermare che Giulio esprimesse sempre meglio i suoi concetti nei disegni che nell'opere o nelle pitture, vedendosi in quelli più vivacità, fierezza et affetto.
- 18 Rachel Grout, National Gallery Scientific Department, report dated August 2001.
- 19 Ashok Roy (ed.), *Artist's Pigments: A Handbook of their History and Characteristics*, Vol. 2, Washington 1993, pp. 23–33.
- 20 Catherine Higgitt and Raymond White, National Gallery Scientific Department, report dated 6 February 2002.
- 21 Rachel Grout, cited in note 18.
- 22 John Shearman's opinion of the Royal Collection picture is that 'the figure painter is among the weakest in Giulio's workshop, but the landscape may be by a different and more independent artist'; unfortunately he makes no specific comparison with the National Gallery painting. See Shearman 1983, cited in note 6, p. 127.
- 23 William Shakespeare, *A Winter's Tale*, act V, scene 2, cited in Lucy Whitaker, 'L'accoglienza della collezione Gonzaga in Inghilterra', in *Gonzaga. La celeste Galeria: L'esercizio del collezionismo* exh. cat. Palazzo del Te, Mantua 2002, p. 236. See also Gould, cited in note 1, p. 118.
- 24 Lucy Whitaker, cited in note 23, p. 244.
- 25 Gould, cited in note 1, p. 119. See also David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*, Princeton 1978, pp. 188–90.
- 26 Oliver Bradbury and Nicholas Penny, 'The picture collecting of Lord Northwick: Part 1', *Burlington Magazine*, CXLIV, September 2002, p. 495.
- 27 Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in Great Britain*, 3 vols, London 1838, Vol. 2, p. 396.
- 28 *Hours in the Picture Gallery of Thirlestaine House*, Cheltenham 1858, pp. 45–6.
- 29 Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, 3 vols, London 1854 (2nd edn.), Vol. 3, p. 198.
- 30 Charles Eastlake, Director's Report to the Trustees of the National Gallery, 19 July 1859. See also O. Bradbury and N. Penny, 'The picture collecting of Lord Northwick: Part 2', *Burlington Magazine*, CXLIV, November 2002, p. 616.
- 31 '...Reinagle will probably be curious to see how his old restorations look and it will be important not to show the picture to him until it is toned... You can easily make some excuse for not showing the picture, nor should it be said that the delay is in consequence of needful restoration.' Charles Eastlake, letter to Ralph Nicolson Wornum dated 8 August 1859, in National Gallery archives.
- 32 *Catalogue of the late Lord Northwick's extensive and magnificent Collection of Ancient and Modern Pictures, etc*, London 1859, lot 935: 'Reinagle, *St John after Van Dyck*.' The artist in question is almost certainly Ramsay Richard Reinagle (1775–1862), a Royal Academician who was often employed as a copyist and restorer. In 1848 he was forced to resign his Royal Academy diploma in consequence of exhibiting another artist's work as his own, although he continued to exhibit there until 1857. Lot 268 from the same sale is described as 'Reinagle, *Rocky Landscape*', while lot 154, *The Sermon, from 'Tristram Shandy'*, is given to P. Reinagle, Ramsey's father. See also *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. J. Turner, London 1996, Vol. 26, pp. 124–5.
- 33 Minutes of the meeting of the National Gallery Board of Trustees, 30 November 1859, in the National Gallery archives.
- 34 Bradbury and Penny, cited in note 26, p. 495.