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FRONT COVER
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Andrea del Verrocchio, *The Virgin and Child with Two Angels*, NG 296, photomicrographs (see page 17 for details)

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Giorgione and not Giorgione: The Conservation History and Technical Examination of *Il Tramonto*

JILL DUNKERTON

The story of the early sixteenth-century Venetian canvas painting known as *Il Tramonto* (*The Sunset*) (FIG. 1, NG 6307), including its rediscovery in the early 1930s and its acquisition by the National Gallery in 1960, is a remarkable one.[1] The sequence of interventions by restorers which forms part of that story has never been denied, not least by the National Gallery itself,[2] yet it seems that the full extent of the restoration has not been properly recognised and described. This has implications both for the iconography of the painting and for discussion of its attribution to Giorgione. Developments in simultaneous viewing of multiple digital images such as X-radiographs and infrared reflectograms, together with close examination with the aid of a stereo binocular microscope (and the capture of digital photo-micrographs),[3] now allow for as accurate an account of the painting's true condition as can be given without actually going through the process of cleaning and removal of all previous restoration. The investigation also sheds light on an intriguing, and perhaps questionable, episode in the history of restoration in Italy in the 1930s, not to mention the occasionally erratic documentation of conservation treatments at the National Gallery in the 1950s and 60s.

In its present condition the canvas, of moderate dimensions (73.3 × 91.4 cm), shows a rocky landscape, with a clump of trees on the left and a large pond in the right foreground. Behind this is a rocky cliff, which partly masks a group of buildings. Further into the distance there is more water, with a watermill, and at the horizon deep blue hills with trees and towers, all illuminated by the sunset from which the painting takes its name (even if the possibility that this is in fact a sunrise cannot be excluded).[4] The landscape is populated in the foreground by two men, apparently travellers, the older man tending to the lower leg of the younger who, in turn, gives his attention to the object that he is holding, perhaps his missing shoe. To the right of them a small beaked monster emerges from the pool, while further to the right there appears to be another monster of ambiguous form. At the right edge a hog-like animal seems to be emerging from a burrow into the water. On the further side of the pool a knight, mounted on a grey horse with a turquoise blue saddle that seems oddly discordant with the ultramarine blue of the young man and the distant landscape, tackles an undersized dragon with strange tendrils for its tail and front legs. At the left edge, an old man with a long grey beard, presumably a hermit, peers out from behind a boulder. Inevitably, this collection of figures and animals has led to several attempts to explain the subject of the painting; these have not, however, taken sufficient account of its conservation history.[5]

When *Il Tramonto* was found by Giulio Lorenzetti, Director of the Museo Correr, in a store room full of old canvases at the villa of the Conti Donà dalle Rose at Pontecasale in the Veneto, it was in a badly damaged and neglected state.[6] Nevertheless, the photograph that documented its condition on discovery (FIG. 2) was made widely available, appearing in the British press in *The Illustrated London News* of 4 November 1933.[7] Taken in a slight raking light, it shows an undulating cockled canvas, possibly never lined, with a large hole through it in the lower right corner. The edges of the cracks in the paint and ground appear raised and evidently there had been a long history of flaking. The uneven lighting of the photograph means that it is not always clear whether this flaking was of the gesso ground from the canvas or whether there was also cleavage between the paint layers and the preparation. The most immediately apparent area of loss, since it shows as white in the photograph, is that from the trees on the left. There are also other substantial



FIG. 1 Giorgione, *Il Tramonto (The Sunset)* (NG 6307), 1506–10. Oil on canvas, 73.3 × 91.4 cm.



FIG. 2, above, NG 6307, copy of photograph taken shortly after its discovery in the early 1930s.

FIG. 3, top right, NG 6307, copy of photograph probably taken during restoration by Augusto Vermehren in *c.*1933.

FIG. 4, bottom right, NG 6307, copy of photograph reproduced in *The Illustrated London News*, 4 November 1933, showing the painting after the restoration by Vermehren.

losses from the centre of the painting, the sky and the top of the cliff, as well as many smaller missing flakes scattered across the surface. In the lower right corner, in the area around the hole, there is further evidence of flaking, but the extent of the damage is partially masked by the residues of what appears to be a flat, unmodulated layer of overpaint, some of which in turn may have peeled off from the canvas. This, and the surprising visibility of the surviving areas of paint, not apparently much obscured by dirt and old discoloured varnishes, confirms that the painting had received the attention of a restorer of sorts at some earlier date.

Shortly after its discovery[8] the canvas was sent to Florence for restoration by Augusto Vermehren, resident restorer for the Uffizi and a pioneer in Italy of the use of diagnostic techniques such as X-radiography in the examination of paintings.[9] He cleaned and lined the canvas and was possibly responsible for the next photograph in the series that documents, at least partially, the treatment of the painting (FIG. 3). It shows the canvas lined or relined and the hole repaired. Some of the damage appears as in the previous photograph, but other areas seem to have been filled with a dark-coloured putty, including the loss in the centre of the composition and also the smaller flake losses in the sky, which makes this part of the painting seem in a worse state than before. In the lower right quarter it looks as though most of the earlier repainting was removed, exposing what appears to be a large, irregularly shaped area of missing paint. Vermehren then restored the painting, presenting it in the condition reproduced in the slightly cropped image from *The*



FIG. 3

FIG. 4



Illustrated London News (FIG. 4).[10] In spite of the poor quality of the reproduction, it is clear that most of the losses have been suppressed by conventional imitative retouching. The very large loss from the area of the pool on the right, however, was restored in an indeterminate way without attempting a detailed reconstruction of the missing design.

Meanwhile *Il Tramonto* had been sold in advance of the auction of the Donà dalle Rose collection to the scholar and dealer Vitale Bloch who, in 1934, obtained a licence for it to leave Italy, the reviewing committee endorsing its export on the grounds of its ruined condition and their belief that it was probably by the painter and printmaker Giulio Campagnola.[11] Once the export licence had been secured the painting was sent to Rome for another cleaning and restoration, this time by Theodor Dumler, who carried out the work under the supervision of Mauro Pellicioli, the leading Italian restorer of the time.[12] Advice was given by Roberto Longhi, friend and mentor to Bloch, who referred briefly but enthusiastically to the painting in his *Officina Ferrarese* published in 1934, returning to it at greater length in 1945.[13] The painting which emerged from this restoration – and was sent almost immediately to London – looks very different from the previous intervention (FIG. 5).

Bloch kept *Il Tramonto* hidden in a London bank vault for the next twenty years, unseen by scholars of Venetian painting. It re-emerged in 1955, returning to Italy for the exhibition *Giorgione e i Giorgioneschi* held at the Ducal Palace in Venice. There it was seen by the Director of the National Gallery, Philip Hendy, and by October of that year it was offered for sale to the Gallery for the sum of £50,000. The reservations of certain trustees and curators about the painting, especially its condition and the high price, led to its rejection in 1957. It remained unsold and was again offered to the Gallery in October 1960. This time the Board of Trustees agreed to its purchase at the slightly reduced price of £45,000.[14]

In October 1956, when the National Gallery was considering the acquisition, three test areas of the painting were cleaned in order to ascertain the truth about its condition. This was carried out with the permission of Bloch and in his presence, by the Gallery's Chief Restorer, Arthur Lucas. In his report to the Trustees, dated 31 October, Lucas acknowledged that 'about 12%' was lost but declared that 'most of the



FIG. 5 NG 6307, photograph taken at the National Gallery in 1956, showing the painting after the 1934 restoration by Theodore Dumler.

remaining paint is in good condition'.[15] The painting was photographed at the Gallery before the making of the cleaning tests (reproduced as FIG. 5) and again the following year, where two of the tests, made in well-preserved areas of the sky and the buildings in the background, can just be discerned.[16] More tests, this time not recorded by photography, were carried out in August 1960, when the purchase was again under consideration. Once the canvas had been acquired, the reduction of the previous restoration and 'judicious removal of the old brown varnish' that Lucas had proposed was carried out. This was completed by April 1961.[17] Exactly what was involved is far from clear. No reports appear in the Conservation Record and only one detail photograph (FIG. 6). Judging by this detail, it would seem that it was decided to clean fully a small area of the painting. On revealing the extent of the damage it was presumably decided not to proceed further and the area was re-restored by Lucas, in the process turning Dumler's hypothetical reconstruction of three rocks into the semblance of another water monster. Since it was at this time that Lucas and Cecil Gould, the then curator of sixteenth-century painting at the National Gallery, reported the revelation of the green-blue saddlecloth of the horse,[18] it would seem that a heavily toned varnish was applied in the restoration of 1934, and that this was indeed partially removed in Lucas's intervention.

What is extraordinary about Gould's remarking on the saddlecloth, and the alarming excavation of the lower right corner, is that the National Gallery had made an excellent X-radiograph of the canvas back in 1956, which, following digital assembly and reduction of the visibility of the stretcher members, has been used for the present investigation (FIG. 7). Other than the making of a very approximate diagram of the main area of damage revealed by the X-radiograph,[19] neither Lucas nor Gould seem to have made further use of it to establish, for instance, the status of details such as the saddlecloth and indeed the whole figure taken to be Saint George. A possible reason for this confusion will become apparent. Clarification of the painting's condition has also been aided by digital infrared reflectography (FIG. 8), valuable since much of the retouching shows as darker than the surviving original paint.



FIG. 6 NG 6307, detail of the lower right corner photographed during the partial cleaning by Arthur Lucas in 1960.

The X-ray image shows that in the second restoration, that carried out by Dumler, the larger losses were filled by insetting what at first sight appear to be pieces of painted canvas. The practice of cutting patches from unwanted old canvas paintings and setting them into holes and wide tears in a canvas undergoing restoration was relatively common, the inset pieces being held in place by the lining adhesive.[20] The purpose was to level out the loss by exploiting the thickness of the canvas and paint of the insert; ideally the canvas textures should match, further disguising the restoration. In the case of *Il Tramonto*, however, the only area where the canvas support may be missing is where there was a hole in the lower right corner. Pieces of painted canvas set into areas where only the ground and paint layers are lost would generally be too thick, producing an unsatisfactory result. Moreover, the weave of the patches as seen in the X-radiograph is considerably coarser and more open than that of the original canvas. Since the inset pieces are remarkably level with the rest of the painting surface, one possibility is that they are in fact fragments from a painting which has undergone the process of transfer, perhaps unsuccessfully, hence the cannibalisation of the remains. If they are fragments from a failed transfer, this would also explain their opacity to X-rays, since the new grounds applied as part of the process usually contained a high proportion of lead white. In places it can be seen that the inset pieces have a pinkish-brown preparation. (see FIG. 20).[21]

The two contiguous areas of loss in the clump of trees have been filled essentially with just two pieces of transplanted painting, the edges neatly shaped to fit the contours of the loss and with holes cut to accommodate



FIG. 7 NG 6307, digitally assembled X-radiograph mosaic (the visibility of the stretcher members has been reduced).

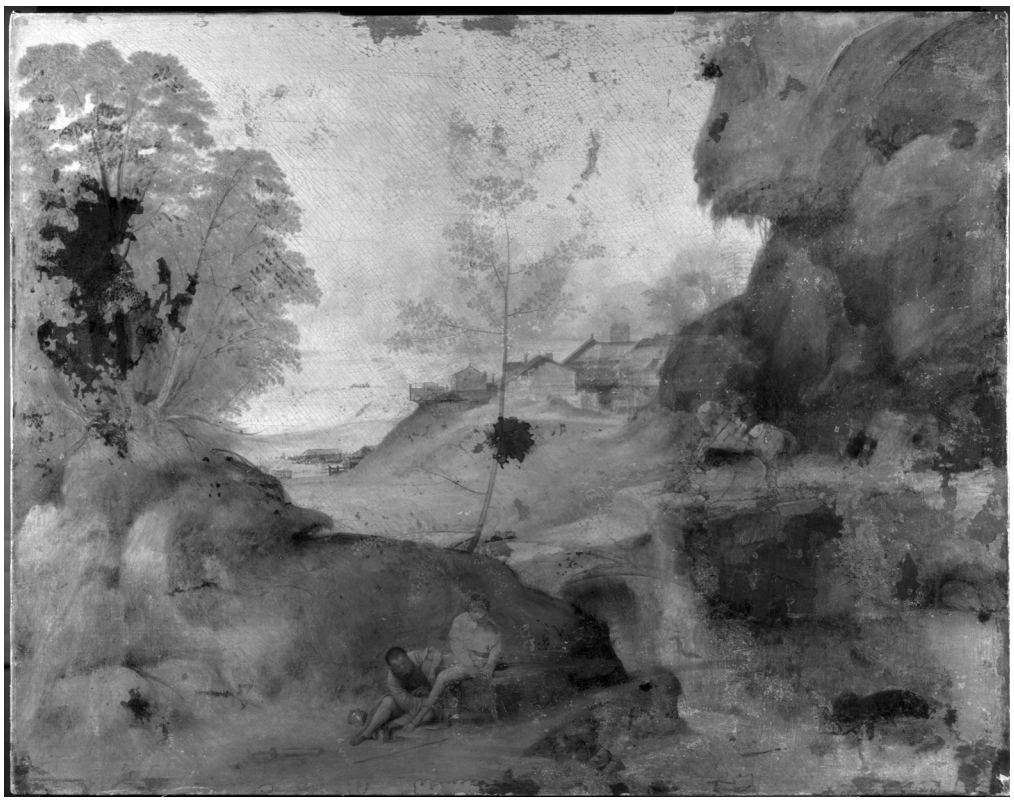


FIG. 8 NG 6307, digital infrared reflectogram.



FIG. 9 NG 6307, detail of X-radiograph.



FIG. 10 NG 6307, detail of the same area as FIG. 9.

small islands of original paint (FIGS 9 and 10). The dark green paint in a sample taken from the inlay (FIG. 11) does not have the character of a restorer's retouching; rather it confirms that the pieces were cut from a green area of the unwanted painting, which was then dotted over with retouching in imitation of the original technique. The sample shows two or possibly three layers, containing a copper green, lead white and earth pigments as well as a calcium compound rich in magnesium, probably from dolomitic limestone and a single particle of what appears to be a lead-tin antimony compound.[22] While the identification of these materials cannot give a precise date for the source painting, they confirm that it was of considerable age, perhaps from the later sixteenth or early seventeenth century. The original paint of the dark green foliage (FIG. 12) also contains a copper green, probably verdigris, but with lead-tin yellow and lead white, built up in a characteristic early sixteenth-century fashion, with multiple translucent and opaque green layers. The sample point is from where the leaves overlap the sky, painted with ultramarine and lead white and a small amount of red

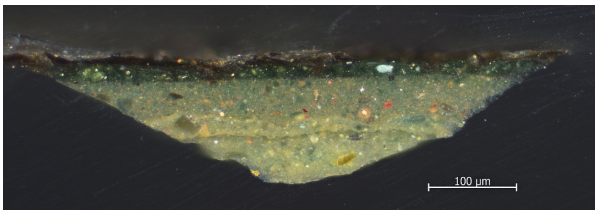


FIG. 11 NG 6307, cross-section of a paint sample from the restored area in the tree, showing two or possibly three layers, containing a copper green, lead white and earth pigments in varying proportions.

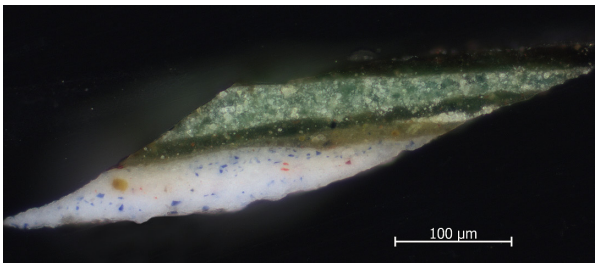


FIG. 12 NG 6307, cross-section of a paint sample from a point where the foliage crosses the sky. The dark green leaf is built up with alternating opaque and translucent layers containing a copper green, probably verdigris, and lead-tin yellow and lead white. The pale blue sky beneath contains ultramarine, lead white and a small amount of red pigment. The gesso ground is missing from the sample.

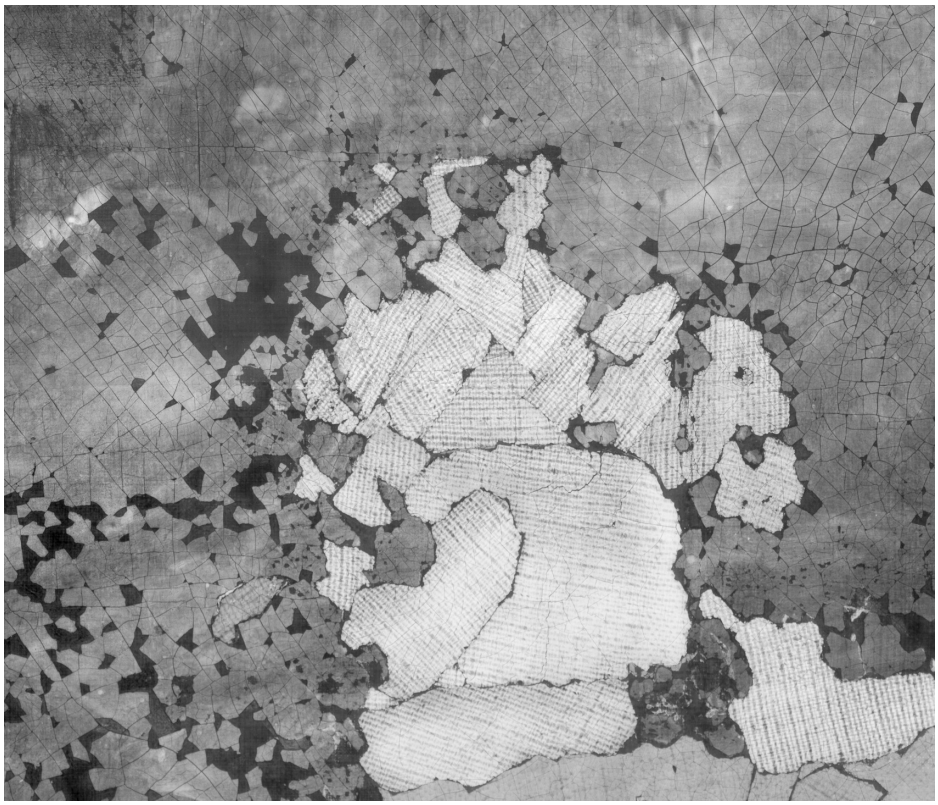


FIG. 13 NG 6307, detail of X-radiograph.



FIG. 14 NG 6307, detail of digital infrared reflectogram, showing the same area as FIG.13.



FIG. 15 NG 6307, detail, showing the same areas as FIGS 13 and 14.

pigment, and applied directly to the gesso ground (not present in the sample illustrated).

In contrast to the repairs in the trees, the X-radiograph shows that the large area of damage in the lower right corner has been filled with a bizarre patchwork of small pieces of painting. An explanation for this can be found by correlating the X-ray and infrared images with the painting in its present state (FIGS 13, 14 and 15). The most useful place to start is, in fact, the horse's green-blue saddlecloth, the revelation of the 1961 cleaning (FIG. 16). Under magnification, as with the naked eye, this area of paint, complete with genuine age cracks, gives every appearance of being old and could be taken as part of the original painting. Indeed the flickering highlights on the yellow gold decoration around the edge can even be compared with similar passages in paintings by Giorgione such as *The Adoration of the Kings* (NG 1160). Yet when the saddlecloth is located on the X-radiograph, it is clear that it coincides with an inset piece of exactly the same shape (FIG. 17). The piece must, therefore, have been taken from another painting, apparently of considerable age since the blue pigment is a copper-based blue, probably azurite. The yellow highlights, however, contain only a

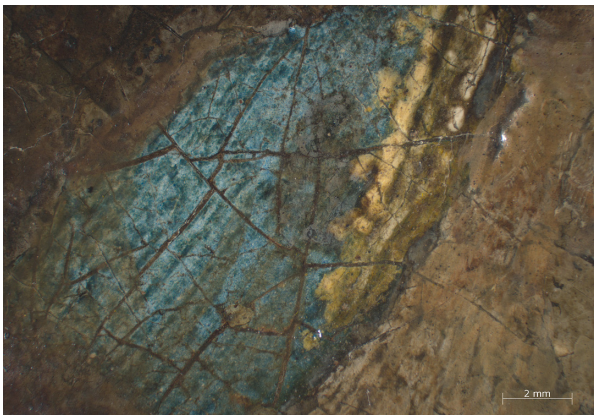


FIG. 16 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the saddlecloth.

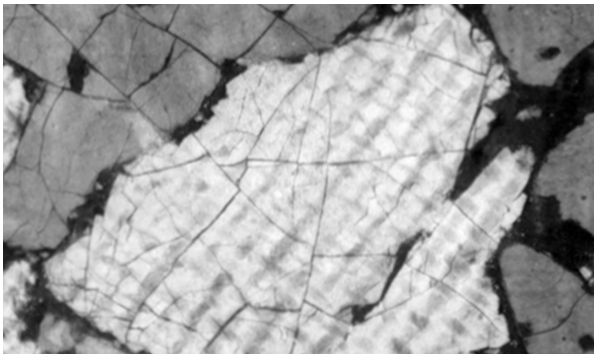


FIG. 17 NG 6307, detail of X-radiograph, showing the inset patch which constitutes the saddlecloth.

yellow earth, without the lead-tin yellow that might be expected in a work of Giorgione's time.[23]

Likewise, large areas of the grey horse appear to be old and hence 'original' but the X-ray and infrared images confirm that these too are patched into the canvas, having been cut from an appropriate part of the donor painting. Retouchings, now discoloured, link the pieces, fill in any gaps and supply details such as the horse's eye and ears (FIG. 18). Sometimes painted cracks were added to give continuity to the craquelure across the patches. Retouching could not, however, disguise the fact that the brush strokes in the different pieces run in contrary directions (FIG. 19). The area below the horse, comprising the side of the pool and some of the water, was also filled in this way, but here the patches are generally larger than those needed to create the complex shapes of the horse and rider. The somewhat reticulated effect in this area may be the result of the thinning of Dumler's toned varnish in 1961. Nevertheless, the inset pieces were evidently chosen with considerable care, even if the different technique and crack pattern is easily recognised under magnification, especially at the junction between original and restoration (FIG. 20). The original paint, on the right in the illustration, is applied over a gesso ground and appears to have at least two layers, the lower layer being a light-green mixture containing occasional large particles of verdigris which have erupted through the upper layer of pale greyish brown. The patch can be distinguished by its single paint layer over a pinkish preparation.

This remarkable restoration technique raises the question of why Dumler should have gone to so much trouble, when the large loss could more easily have been filled and restored simply by painting in the missing parts. The only possible explanation is that the licence to export *Il Tramonto* from Italy having been granted, Bloch (and presumably his advisers) thought they would sell the work more easily if this area of the painting could be presented as damaged and restored but not totally missing, as is actually the case. What they seem not to have allowed for is the possibility that the canvas would be X-rayed, as it eventually was in the 1950s. Although X-rays had been used on paintings right from the moment of their discovery in 1896,[24] in the 1930s they were not yet in common use, in particular in the world of dealers and collectors in which Bloch was operating.

The other intriguing aspect of this attempted



FIG. 18 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the horse's head.



FIG. 19 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the horse's forequarters with Saint George's lance.



FIG.20 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the side of the pool.



FIG. 21 NG 6307, photomicrograph of Saint George's armour.

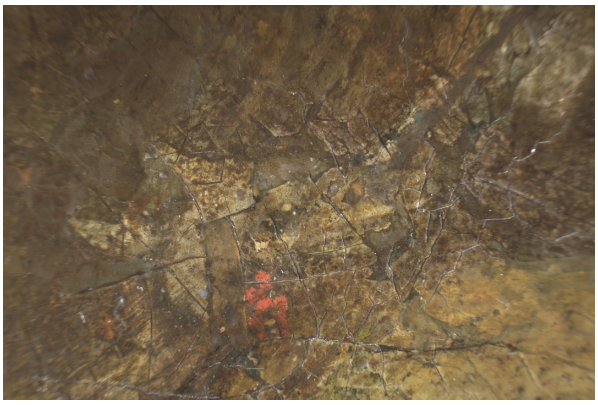


FIG. 23 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the dragon's head.



FIG. 22 NG 6307, photomicrograph of Saint George's helmet.



FIG. 24 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the dragon's tail.

deception is whether there were ever any traces of original paint to indicate that this area of the painting had originally been occupied by a mounted figure of Saint George with the dragon. As far as can be judged from the photographs taken following the painting's discovery, there is no sign of such a group. Close inspection shows that most of the figure of Saint George is a confusion of restoration (FIG. 21). The only details which appear to be part of the original painting are the highlight on his back and the shape which suggests a helmet (FIG. 22). The glint of light on armour is very much part of the Giorgione myth, originating perhaps with the classic 'paragone' tale told by Vasari in his *Lives of the Artists*, in which Giorgione counters claims for the superiority of sculpture with a painting in which different views of the same man were represented in a single painting by using reflective surfaces, including that of polished armour.[25] This may have suggested to Bloch or his associates the idea of inserting such a group. It is just possible that there are indeed the remains of an armoured figure, but under magnification there is a strong sense of the shape of the helmet having been made by manipulation of the brown paint surrounding it, and some of the paint of the highlight appears to skim across the cracks. Moreover, this part of the figure falls exactly in the area where the pale grey buildings in the middle distance have been partially covered by the edge of the cliff in a pentimento to be discussed later in this article. Some grey paint may have been exposed in this much-damaged part of the painting, becoming the basis for the probable invention.

In addition, the condition of the strange little dragon does nothing to support the case for it ever having been there. The head is part of the patchwork (FIG. 23), while the crossing tendrils that form its tail, which are partly original (FIG. 24), seem more likely to be vegetation than anything else. Long trailing roots are a feature of the clump of trees on the left. It can be concluded, therefore, that the figures of Saint George and the dragon were probably introduced to add extra, if spurious, iconographic interest to the painting. The status of some of the other figures and animals then



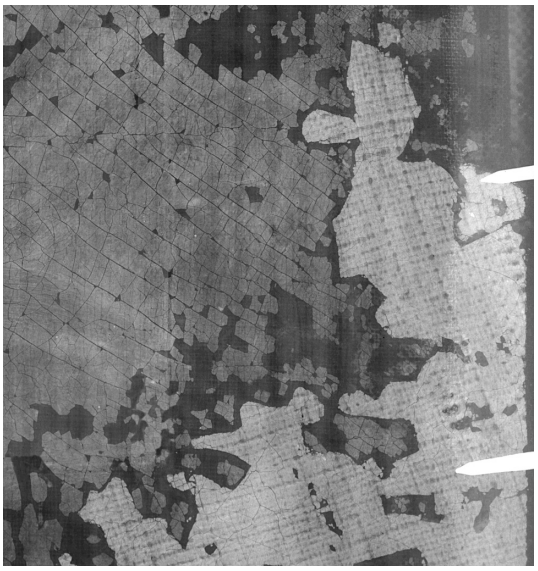






FIG. 25, top left, Detail of the figure in a cave on the right.
FIG. 26, top right, X-radiograph detail of the same area as FIG. 25.
FIG .27, middle, Detail of digital infrared reflectogram, showing the same area as FIGS 25 and 26.
FIG. 28, bottom, Photomicrograph of the head of the figure in the cave.

becomes open to question.

The bearded old man who looks out from a cave in the cliff face at the right edge is immediately to the left of a patched loss (FIGS 25 and 26) and there are several smaller flake losses in the area. His head and shoulders seem to consist of original paint, but it can be seen in the infrared reflectogram (FIG. 27) that his features register as very dark, an indication that they are retouched. His surroundings also appear to be entirely repainted, creating the depth of the cave. Most, if not all, of the red-brown paint on the face (FIG. 28) is retouching (it can be seen to go into the cracks in the area to the side of his supposed nose), but it remains plausible that the head and arm are based on fragments of a hermit-like figure.[26] Either that or it has been conjecturally reconstructed from flicks and dashes of paint on the rock face, as is likely to be the case with the hog that appears to emerge from the edge of the pond, half submerged in the water (FIG. 29). The end of its snout coincides with a hole (FIG. 30), and indeed that part of Dumler's reconstruction was removed, but then replaced by Lucas in his exploratory cleaning in 1961. The dark line that defines its back is false, covering cracks in the original paint, and while it is tempting to read the red-brown flicks of paint as the ginger eyebrows of a boar (FIG. 31), the animal seems more likely to have been invented from a rock at the edge of the pool. This rock would be similar to those at the foot of the cliff and, since the steep straight-sided bank is totally reconstructed, there may once have been more such rocks at the water's edge.

The photograph of the lower right corner taken



FIG. 29 NG 6307, detail of the hog emerging into the pool.



FIG. 30 NG 6307, detail of digital infrared reflectogram, showing the same area as FIG. 29.



FIG. 31 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the 'eye' of the hog.

at the National Gallery during the partial cleaning in 1961 (FIG. 6) is sufficient evidence to show that the new restoration of this area, with dark mounds suggestive of another water-creature, is entirely fabricated. Nonetheless, at the left end of this 'monster' there are tantalising fragments of original paint (FIG. 32), including a petal or tongue-like shape of vermilion, which has been slightly affected by blackening, as have the other touches of vermilion in the painting such as the little red flowers on the grassy bank between the spindly tree and the clump on the left. The rounded 'head' of this semblance of a monster consists wholly of retouching, but the idea has clearly been suggested by the only creature that is unquestionably original, and almost undamaged: the sinister little beaked demon emerging from, or perhaps sinking back into, the water (FIG. 33).



FIG. 32 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the reconstructed 'monster' in the pool.



FIG. 33 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the original monster in the pool.



FIG. 34 NG 6307, detail of digital infrared reflectogram.

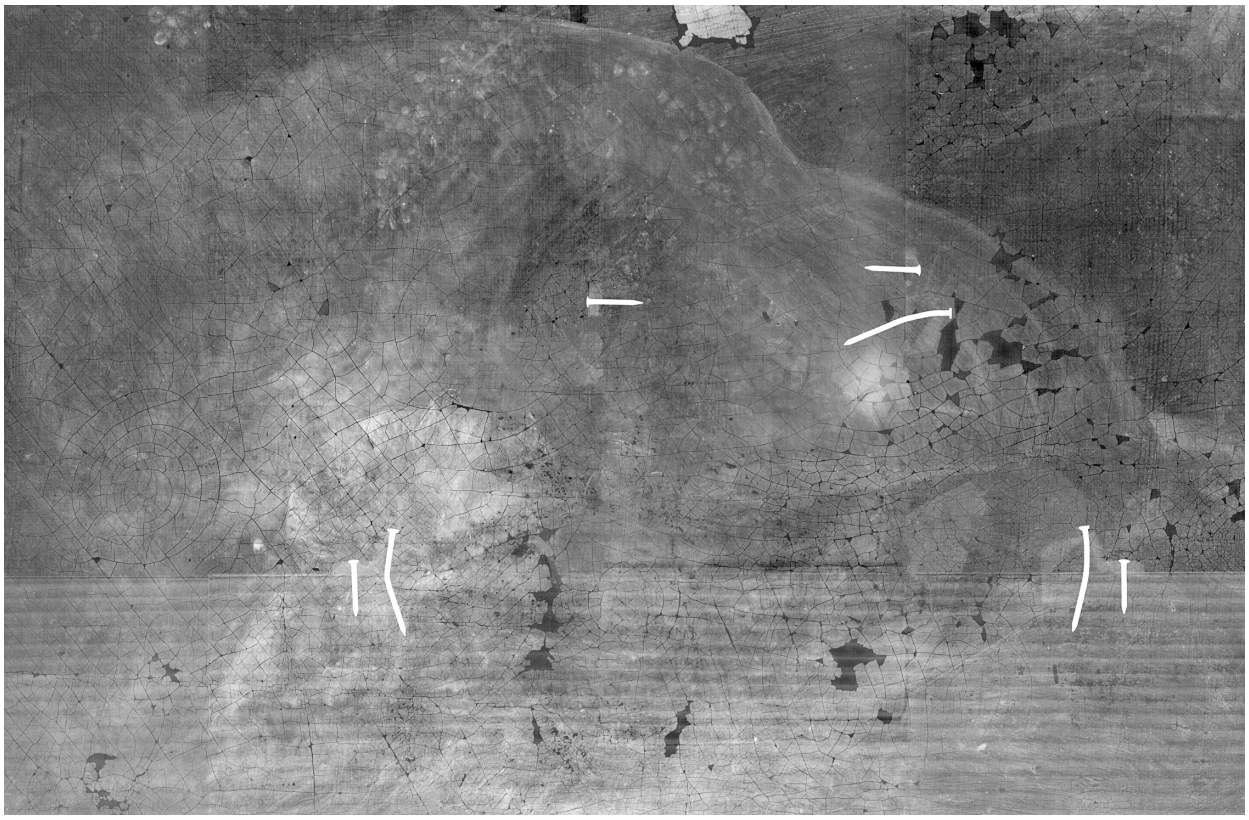


FIG. 35 NG 6307, detail of X-radiograph, showing the same area as FIG. 34.

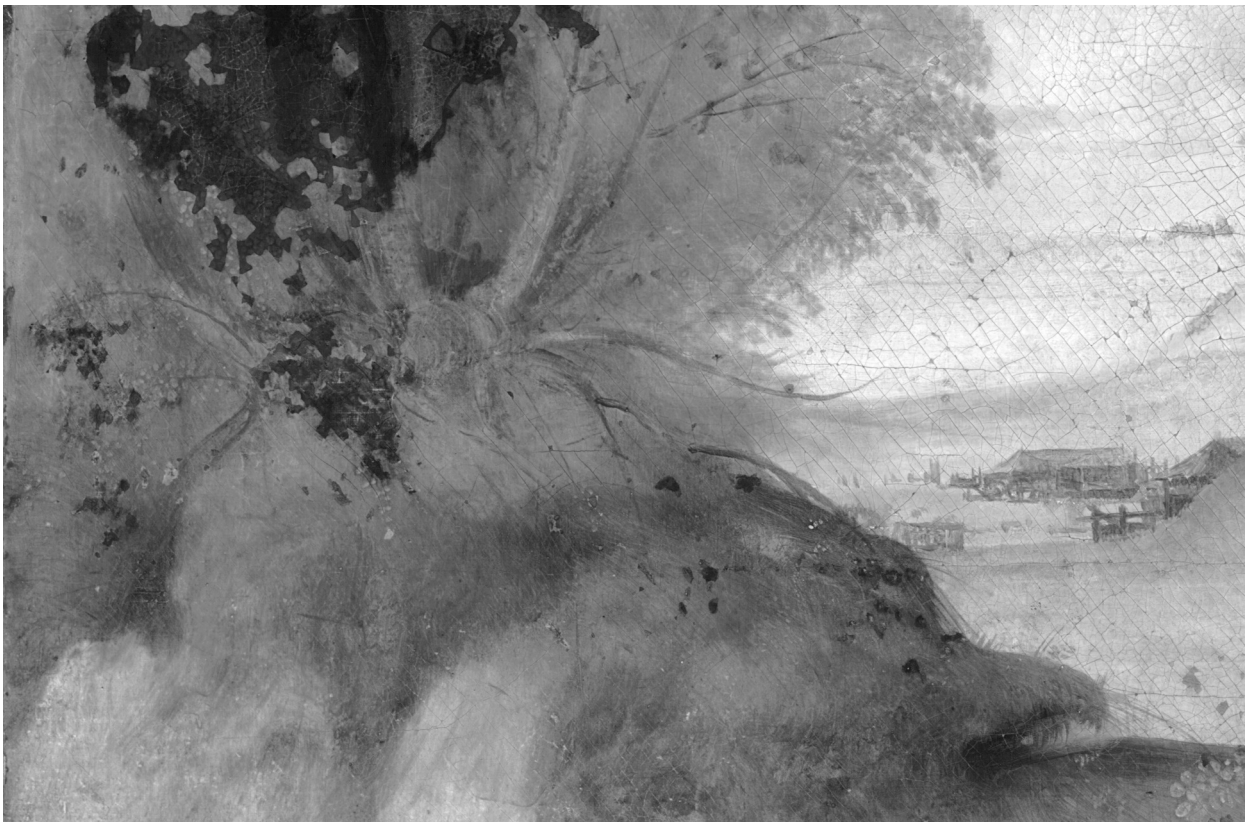


FIG. 36 NG 6307, detail of digital infrared reflectogram.

The condition of the two men is revealed most clearly in the infrared reflectogram (FIG. 34). There are many small retouched flake losses from the head, hands and thighs of the younger man, but the older one is well preserved. No underdrawing for these figures is visible, for the simple reason that they seem to have been introduced to the composition only once the painting of the landscape was under way. There are no reserved areas for these figures in the X-radiograph (FIG. 35) and the broadly brushed strokes of the first blocking in of the landscape forms clearly pass beneath the figures. Only where the figures are clothed in white do they register at all in the X-radiograph. This lack of planning in the positioning of figures which are assumed to have significance for the subject of the painting recalls the much-discussed alterations revealed by X-radiography of *La Tempestà* (Venice, Galleria dell'Accademia).[27]

In planning and executing the painting, most of the artist's attention would appear to have been given to the landscape. There are several changes. Behind and to the right of the bank on which the men sit there was a fallen tree, which was at least partly painted before it was eliminated. Although some of the dark outlines visible in the infrared reflectogram may be in the paint layers, the slightly sketchy quality of the marks suggests that the position of the tree was established in the underdrawing. Other faint lines can be detected just above the edge of the bank, particularly where the fallen tree meets it, and occasional segmental curves indicate roughly the morphology of the rocks below the clump of trees. Similar lines appear among the tree roots (FIG. 36); they are difficult to distinguish from the painted roots, but the upward curving line (perhaps for a branch rather than a root) at the left edge is unrelated to anything in the painting and is almost certainly part of the underdrawing. These fine and sometimes slightly wavering lines, drawn with a dilute liquid medium and the point of a brush, are comparable with the underdrawing found in the group of paintings also on a relatively small scale that includes *The Allendale Nativity*, *The Benson Holy Family* (both National Gallery of Art, Washington) and *The Adoration of the Kings* in the National Gallery.[28] This group is now widely accepted as being by Giorgione.

The most magical part of *Il Tramonto* is the distant landscape, and it is here that the painter concentrated



FIG. 37 NG 6307, detail of the painting.

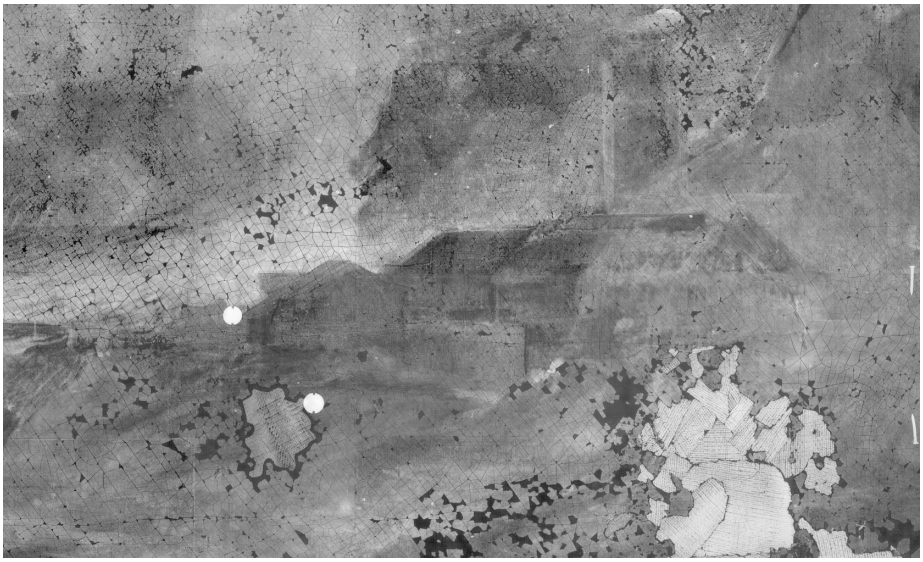


FIG. 38 NG 6307, detail of X-radiograph, showing the same area as FIG. 37.



FIG. 39 NG 6307, detail of digital infrared reflectogram, showing the same area as FIGS 37 and 38.



FIG. 40 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the tower in the distance, showing fingerprints.



FIG. 41 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the foot of the young man in the foreground.

much of his attention (FIG. 37). The X-radiograph (FIG. 38) reveals that originally the group of buildings included a much taller tower rising almost to the height of the second branch of the spindly sapling in the centre of the painting. This would have made more sense when the building on the right continued further across. In the infrared image (FIG. 39) it can be seen that it had been finished with windows and other architectural detail before the decision was made to extend the rocks in front of it. The carbon black in the grey paint of the rocks registers strongly in infrared, resulting in a distinct junction with the pale mossy green of the slopes in the middle distance. Small adjustments were made to the height of the roofs and the building with the gabled end and its platform has been added over the sky, which, further to the right, was painted around the roof lines. Finally, a shorter tower was positioned to the left of the original one, the grey paint brushed on thinly and blotted with fingers or thumb to lift off the surplus and create a sense of distance (FIG. 40). The impressionistic lack of definition of the little vertical strokes of paint on the buildings appears in the backgrounds of other paintings associated with Giorgione. In the foreground figures, on the other hand, there are delicate and minutely executed details such as the bare foot of the young man, complete with indications of toenails (FIG. 41).

While the handling of oil paint in *Il Tramonto* has none of the breadth and boldness seen in the early works of Titian or Sebastiano del Piombo, the properties of the medium are nevertheless explored in interesting ways. Sometimes colours were built up in layers, as in the trees on the left, where the light green leaves were dotted over a darker green and then thinly glazed with

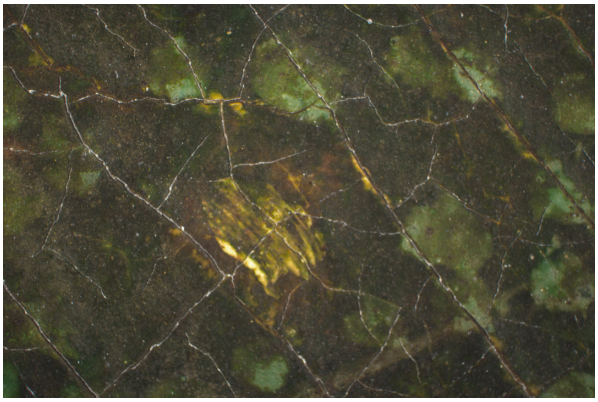


FIG. 42 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the foliage of the trees on the left.

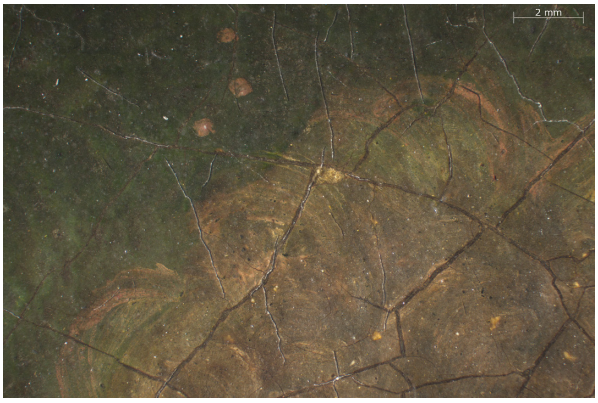


FIG. 43 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the young man's hair.

more green, now slightly discoloured. Flecks of white were added to make small breaks in the foliage to show the sky, but might then be glazed down again (FIG. 42). In other places the paint was worked wet-in-wet, for example in the curly hair of the young man, where the red-brown locks blend into the dark green paint around the head (FIG. 43).

The handling of the paint in making alterations



FIG. 44 NG 6307, detail of the X-radiograph.

to the scooped-out banks of the river with the watermill is particularly distinctive (FIGS 44 and 45). In the X-radiograph it can be seen that the opening was wider, with the trees later brought in from the left, and that the promontory which projects into the water was a different shape. The dark scribbled marks in the X-ray image in the area now occupied by the mill seem to be where the soft paint has been scraped away with a blunt tool, perhaps the end of a paint brush. More such marks appear in the side of the bank, at the top, level with the horizon, and also, less prominently, in the sky just above, where they also show slightly in the infrared reflectogram (see FIG. 36). This scraping technique must have been used as a way to mark revisions to the landscape, although the zigzag scratches in the sky seem inexplicably random. Once the shape of the river had been established, the water mill was painted in with rapid deft strokes, but even then the infrared image shows that the section of fence at the left end of the weir was painted over with more water; a tiny detail, but important as it helps separate the distant landscape from the foreground.

Details of the landscape such as the ultramarine blue of the distant trees and the water falling over the



FIG. 45 NG 6307, detail of the painting, showing the same area as fig. 44

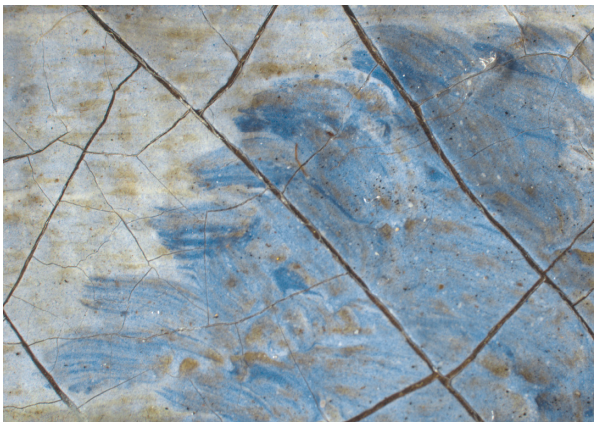


FIG. 46 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the trees in the distance.



FIG. 47 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the water pouring over the weir.

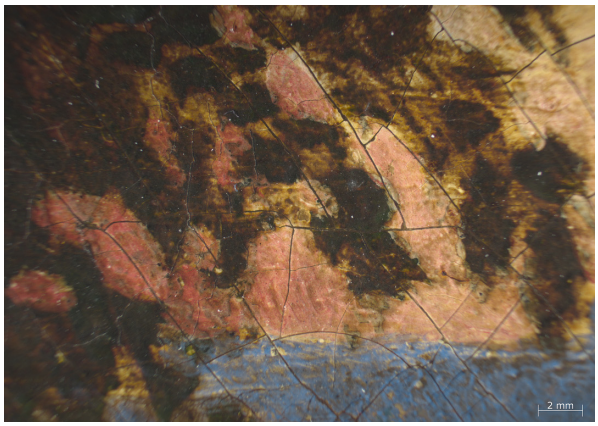


FIG. 48 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the red sunset (or sunrise) behind the trees.



FIG. 49 NG 6307, photomicrograph of the buildings on the distant horizon.

weir are painted with short stabbing strokes of stiff oil paint (FIGS 46 and 47). The foaming water at the base of the weir is depicted with stippled points of white. Flecks of white paint also indicate the water bubbling out of the spring in the rocks beneath the trees on the left, and ripples on the few surviving original parts of the pool on the right, for instance around the little beaked monster. The foreground is dotted with pebbles, exactly as in other paintings attributed to Giorgione, most importantly *La Tempestà*, but also *The Allendale Nativity* and *The Adoration of the Kings*. The construction of the landscape, as well as the figure types (discounting the imposters on the right), can also be related to these works. Perhaps most characteristic of the painter, however, is the ambiguity of the subject. Even the supposed sunset which gives the painting its present title may be a something of an afterthought. The leaves of the branches that hang in front of the far ridge were fully painted, including the final copper green glazes, against a golden yellow sky, as were the deep blue roofs and belfries on the skyline (FIGS 48 and 49). Only at the very last stage did Giorgione add the glimpses of the blazing red sky, working the paint carefully around the foliage and spreading the pink flush along the distant horizon.

Acknowledgements

This article has been written in parallel with one by Nicholas Penny and Elena Greer for *The Burlington Magazine* and draws extensively on the results of their research into the rediscovery of the painting and its acquisition by the National Gallery. I am grateful to Elke Oberthaler for commenting on the article and I would also like to thank Helen Howard and Ashok Roy for their work on the paint samples, both from the original painting and from the restorations, and Rachel Billinge for the infrared reflectograms and the photomicrographs that illustrate the condition of the painting. Finally I would particularly wish to acknowledge the contribution of Joe Padfield in developing the imaging tool that has made possible precise comparison of the different digital images.

Notes

1 For an account of the rediscovery and acquisition see N. Penny and E. Greer, 'Giorgione and the National Gallery', *The Burlington Magazine*, CLII, June 2010, pp. 364–75, esp. pp. 364–6.

2 The Trustees made it a condition of the purchase that a clear diagram of the areas of damage was to be illustrated in the Gallery's annual report and included in a special exhibition. National Gallery Archive NG1/14, Board Minutes, 4 May 1961, p. 117. The diagram – which is somewhat approximate – is reproduced as Plate 1 (opposite p. 80) of *The National Gallery Annual Report*, January 1960–May 1962, London 1962.

3 The infrared reflectograms and the photomicrographs were made by Rachel Billinge.

4 The luminosity of the ultramarine blue and the pale yellow horizon set against deeper blue hills and mountains has much in common with the early morning scenes in paintings by Giovanni Bellini, especially *The Baptism of Christ* for the church of Santa Corona, Vicenza, which was begun in 1501. The long shadows

cast by the mounted figure, presumably Saint George, and the dragon, which might suggest a sunset scene, are not original.

5 C. Gould, *National Gallery Catalogues. The Sixteenth-Century Italian Schools*, London 1975, p. 106, titled the painting '*Sunset Landscape with S. Roch (?), S. George and S. Anthony Abbot*', in which case the older man would be Gothardus, who tended the wound on Saint Roch's thigh. The wound, however, is not exposed in the painting and the old man's attention is focused on the young man's calf. J. Anderson, *Giorgione. The Painter of 'Poetic Beauty'*, Paris and New York 1997, pp. 182 and 301, explored Antonine associations, identifying the hermit as Saint Anthony because of the presence of the hog, and commenting on the rare juxtaposition of Saint Anthony with Saint George (also seen in the National Gallery's small panel by Pisanello, *The Virgin and Child with Saints Anthony Abbot and George* [NG 776]). This suggestion was repeated in the catalogue entry in D.A. Brown and S. Ferino-Pagden, *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 2006, pp. 160–3. Pignatti, who took little account of the condition, thought that the creature on the right 'has the shape of a large rat' (T. Pignatti, *Giorgione*, English edition, London 1971, p. 107). Most recently, the subject has been suggested as *Philoctetes on Lemnos*; see the catalogue entry in E.M. Dal Pozzolo and L. Puppi (eds.), *Giorgione*, exh. cat., Museo Casa Giorgione, Castelfranco Veneto, Milan 2009, pp. 431–3, which also summarises the many other proposals for the subject of the painting.

6 For the discovery, probably in 1931 or 2 rather than 1933 as has previously been stated, see Penny and Greer, 2010 forthcoming (cited in note 1), p. 364.

7 Some of the photographs from the 1930s held by the National Gallery and labelled as 'copy photographs' may come from this publication – others were sent in 1956 (see note 26). The article also presents Giorgio Sangiorgi as the discoverer of the painting, when in fact he was the first to attribute it firmly to Giorgione. Significantly, the subject is identified as Æneas and Anchises in the Elysian Fields, a subject which would make little sense of the other figures now visible.

8 One reason for believing that the painting must have been discovered earlier than 1933 is that the restorer would have had an impossibly short time to repair and restore the painting to the state in which it appears in publications from the end of that year.

9 Augusto Vermehren was the son of the painter and restorer Otto Vermehren, who also worked in Florence.

10 It was also reproduced in this condition in G. Sangiorgi, 'Scoperta di un opera di Giorgione', *Rassegna Italiana*, XXXIV, November 1933, pp. 789–93.

11 Penny and Greer, 2010 forthcoming (cited in note 1), p. 364.

12 How much Bloch knew (or perhaps wanted to know) about the restoration is far from clear. In a letter to Sir Philip Hendy dated 14 October 1956 (National Gallery Archive NG14/193/1) he described the two photographs that he enclosed. The first is the source for fig. 1 in this article, and the second for fig. 3. This photograph is just as likely to have come from the first restoration campaign, but the need to justify the introduction of the figure of Saint George, apparently discovered as a result of further cleaning, led Bloch to claim that 'one can clearly distinguish the back of the figure, his helmet, his lance and the upper part of the horse's head, its back and the dragon.' This information was used by Gould in his report to the Trustees; see National Gallery Archives, C. Gould, 'Notes on the Tramonto of Giorgione', pp. 1–3, Board of Trustees papers, 26 October 1956, NG 25/28), p. 1. In spite of Bloch's claim, it would be strange for Vermehren to have carried out so much work on the painting without removing the overpaint in the damaged area. Moreover, as a restorer for the Uffizi he is perhaps more likely to have documented his restoration by photography than Dumler. Dumler seems to be a less known figure, but Mauro Pelliccioli worked on many celebrated paintings, including Leonardo's *Last Supper*. In 1934 he was restoring Mantegna's San Zeno Altarpiece in Milan and so his supervision of the restoration of *Il Tramonto* can only have been occasional.

13 R. Longhi, *Viatico per cinque secoli di pittura veneziana*, Florence 1946, pp. 21–2.

14 P. Hendy, Director's Report, Board of Trustees' Papers, 8 November 1960, National Gallery Archives, NG25/32.

15 Examination report by Arthur W. Lucas, 31 October 1956, Board of Trustees' Papers, National Gallery Archives, NG25/28.

16 The third may have been in the area of the spring coming out of the rocks on the left, but variations in the printing of black and white photographs mean that this is not certain.

17 Recorded on the page of the Conservation Record dedicated to a 'Brief History of Condition and Treatment': April 1961 Partly cleaned & restored by A. Lucas'. The photograph taken on completion of treatment is dated 11 April 1961.

18 *The National Gallery Annual Report*, London 1962 (cited in note 2), p. 65, and Gould 1975 (cited in note 5), p. 106. It was also reported in an article on the acquisition and restoration in *The Times* of 15 June 1961.

19 This was displayed in the small exhibition about the painting following its acquisition (see also note 1).

20 Examples in the National Gallery include the ruined portrait of *Sultan Mehmet II* (NG 3099) attributed to Gentile Bellini, believed to have been restored by Giuseppe Molteni for Sir Austen Henry Layard, and *The Adoration of the Kings* (NG 3098), attributed to the workshop of Giovanni Bellini, also part of the Layard bequest, which was restored by Luigi Cavenaghi in 1881.

21 For an example of a transferred painting given a new pinkish-brown preparation see A. Roy and G. Mancini, '"The Virgin and Child with an Angel" after Francia: A History of Error', p. 73 of this *Bulletin*.

22 SEM–EDX mapping of the samples was carried out by Helen Howard.

23 SEM–EDX analysis of the blue and yellow pigments from the saddle cloth and its golden yellow decoration confirmed the presence of copper and lead (for the blue) and lead, calcium and iron (for the yellow). This suggests the presence of a copper blue pigment and yellow earth, both mixed with lead white.

24 For the early history of X-radiography of paintings see C.F. Bridgman, 'The Amazing Patent on the Radiography of Paintings', *Studies in Conservation*, Vol. 9, No. 4, November 1964, pp. 135–9.

25 G. Vasari (ed. P. Barocchi), *Le vite de più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, Verona 1976, IV, p. 46.

26 The figure would not necessarily represent Saint Anthony. It is worth noting that a little hermit-like figure – unlikely to be a saint – appears in the cave high up in the rocky outcrop on the left of the Giorgionesque *Homage to a Poet* (NG 1173), sometimes claimed as an early work by Giorgione himself; see, for example Dal Pozzo and Puppi 2009 (cited in note 5), pp. 413–5.

27 For the X-raying in 1939 of *La Tempestà* and its consequences for the interpretation of the painting see S. Settis (trans. E. Bianchini), *Giorgione's 'Tempest'. Interpreting the Hidden Subject*, Cambridge and Oxford 1990 (first published as *La 'Tempesta' Interpretata*, Turin 1978), pp. 72–6. Interestingly, given his earlier involvement in the restoration of *Il Tramonto*, it was Pelliccioli who had the Venice painting X-rayed.

28 See J. Dunkerton, 'Giorgione "The Adoration of the Kings"', in D. Bomford (ed.), *Art in the Making: Underdrawings in Renaissance Paintings*, exh. cat., National Gallery, London 2002, pp. 136–43.

29 Elke Oberthaler has kindly drawn my attention to the fact that the final touches of paint to the glowing yellow sky of the *Three Philosophers* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) were also applied around the branches and leaves of the trees. In common with *Il Tramonto* the landscape underwent several adjustments during painting; see E. Oberthaler and E. Walmsley, 'Technical Studies of Painting Methods' in Brown and Ferino-Pagden 2006 (cited in note 5), pp. 286–300, esp. p. 294.