

Executive Summary

1. Brief description of Item

Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola, called Parmigianino (1503–1540)

The Madonna and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene,
c. 1535–40

Oil on paper, laid on panel, 75.5 x 59.7 cm

A seated Madonna in a pink and blue gown—positioned to the right of the composition—looks down at the standing Christ Child and holds his left arm. The Child in turn looks towards the young Saint John the Baptist whose hands are together in prayer. Behind the Christ Child, and supporting him, is a seated young woman, almost certainly Mary Magdalene; she is identified by the jewellery chest in the foreground. What is probably her assumption appears in the top left – behind the verdant landscape and stream, and above a rocky outcrop – in the form of a figure atop a cloud. The work is in excellent, almost pristine condition.

2. Context

Provenance

Cardinal Antonio Barberini (1607–1671), Palazzo Barberini, Rome, first mentioned in the 1644 inventory, no. 308; and again in his posthumous inventory of 1671, no. 143; thence by inheritance to his nephew, Prince Maffeo Barberini (1631–1685), Palazzo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome, listed in the 1672 inventory of Cardinal Antonio Barberini's bequests to his brother, Cardinal Francesco Barberini, and nephew, Prince Maffeo Barberini, no. 62; and again in Prince Maffeo's posthumous inventory of 1686, no. 273; thence by descent to his son, Prince Urbano Barberini, Prince of Palestrina (1664–1722), listed in an undated inventory (probably 1686) of the paintings inherited by Prince Urbano from his father, no. 19; thence by descent in the Barberini collection until '*Brought from Barberini Palace, Rome, by Gavin Hamilton, for Sir John Taylor, Bart*' (according to a handwritten note by H. Isherwood Kay in his copy of the catalogue of the pictures at Basildon Park, held at the National Gallery Library); Sir John Taylor, 1st Bt. (1745–1786), of Lyssons Hall, Jamaica; his deceased

sale, London, Christie's, 27 April 1788, lot 66 ('*A Holy Family by Parmegiano, a Chef D'Oeuvre of this great Master, and esteemed One of the finest Pictures in Europe*') and described in the sale catalogue as '*The Madonna, with St. Catherine, the Infant Saviour and St. John, known and ever esteemed the most capital picture of this great master, and may vie with the best of Raphael's works*', £425.5s.0d to Fuhr (bought in); thence by descent to his son, Sir Simon Richard Brisset Taylor, 2nd Bt. (1783–1815); thence by inheritance to his sister, Anna Susanna (1781–1853), who in 1810 married George Watson of Erlestoke Park (who in turn assumed the additional surname of Taylor); George Watson-Taylor, M.P. (1771–1841), Erlestoke Park, near Devizes, Wiltshire; Erlestoke Park Sale, George Robins, 25 July 1832, lot 155 ('*The Virgin Mary, Elizabeth, Infant Jesus and Saint John*' by Parmigianino); James Morrison (1789–1857), Basildon Park, by 1845 (see Exhibition History) and where seen by Waagen in 1854 (see Bibliography); thence by descent to his son, Charles Morrison (1817–1909), Basildon Park; thence by inheritance to his brother, Walter Morrison (1836–1921), Basildon Park; thence by inheritance to his nephew, Capt. James Archibald Morrison (1873–1934), Basildon Park; thence by descent to his daughter, Mary (b. 1902), who in 1924 married Major John Henry Dent-Brocklehurst (d. 1949) of Sudeley Castle; thence by descent to their son, Mark Dent-Brocklehurst (d. 1972); thence by inheritance.

Exhibition History

British Institution, London, 1828: *Catalogue of pictures by Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch masters: with which the proprietors have favoured the Institution*, no. 22; British Institution, London, 1845: no. 51; Royal Academy, London, 1879: *Old Masters and deceased masters of the British School*, no. 143; Royal Academy, London, 1894: *Old Masters, deceased masters of the British School, Thomas Stothard RA, William Blake & John Pettie RA*, no. 116; Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1915: *Third National Loan Exhibition*, no. 21; P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London, 1982: *Discoveries from the Cinquecento*, no. 25; on loan to the National Gallery, London, Sep. 2011–Feb. 2015.

Bibliography

G. Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain* (London, 1854), vol. II, p. 262; A. Graves, *A Century of Loan Exhibitions, 1813–1912* (London, 1913), vol. II, p. 904; C. Whitfield, ‘A Parmigianino Discovery’, *The Burlington Magazine* vol. CXXXIV, no. 950 (May 1982), pp. 276–80; G. Briganti, in *Discoveries from the Cinquecento*, exh. cat. (London, 1982), no. 25; E.W. Rowlands, ‘A Parmigianino Provenance’, *The Burlington Magazine* vol. CXXV, no. 963 (June 1983), p. 362; E. Gardner, ‘Provenance notes: Parmigianino’, *The Burlington Magazine* vol. CXXV, no. 968 (November 1983), pp. 691–92; *D. DeGrazia, *Correggio and His Legacy: Sixteenth Century Emilian Drawings*, exh. cat. (Washington DC & Parma, 1984); *S.J. Freedberg, ‘Parmigianino Problems in the Exhibition (and related matters)’, *Emilian Painting of the 16th and 17th Centuries, A Symposium* (Bologna, 1987), pp. 46–47; M. Di Giampaolo, *Parmigianino. Catalogo completo dei dipinti* (Florence, 1991), p. 74, no. 24; *C. Gould, *Parmigianino* (New Haven & London, 1994), p. 195, no. C2; C. Scallièrez, ‘Une ébauche du Parmesan (1503–1540) pour le Louvre, un don de la Société des Amis du Louvre’, *Revue de Louvre Études* vol. 5/6 (1994), p. 33; *S.J. Freedberg, ‘Il Parmigianino’, *La pittura in Emilia e in Romagna. Il Cinquecento*, ed. V. Fortunati (Milan, 1995), pp. 85–86; D. Ekserdjian, in *The Dictionary of Art* vol. 24 (London, 1996), p. 199; *M. Di Giampaolo, *Girolamo Bedoli, 1500–1569* (Florence, 1997), p. 116, cat. 4; *M.C. Chiusa, *Parmigianino* (Milan, 2001), pp. 205, 213, notes 1–4; *M. Vaccaro, *Parmigianino – The Paintings* (Turin, 2002), p. 220, no. A8; V. Sgarbi, *Parmigianino* (Geneva & Milan, 2003), p. 195, no. 25; D. Ekserdjian, *Parmigianino* (New Haven & London, 2006), pp. 87, 272, notes 169–72. (*Denotes attribution to Bedoli).

3. Waverly Criteria

This picture meets the criterion stipulated under **Waverly 1** and **Waverly 2** as a work of art of outstanding aesthetic importance that is so closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune.

The Madonna and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene is a rare example of a religious easel painting from the last decade of Parmigianino's short career. Characteristic of the more highly finished paintings of his late years, it is one of the finest specimens by the artist remaining in private hands, beautifully painted and notable for the vivid and detailed rendering of the landscape. Furthermore, its iconography is highly unusual and merits further study. In superb condition, it is painted on paper, a support which may not have been as unusual in the sixteenth century as previously thought, but of which there are precious few survivals.

The work has been in the United Kingdom for nearly 250 years and was one of the first Parmigianinos to be bought by a British collector. Acquired from the Barberini Collection in Rome, it has passed through the collections of three of the country's major collectors of Italian Renaissance painting, and in their family homes remained in the same area of Britain for two centuries.

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of item if more than Executive Summary, and any comments

Nicknamed after his home town of Parma, Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola (1503–1540), was hailed by Vasari as Raphael reborn. Like his predecessor he came from a family of artists and was taught to paint by his father, Filippo Mazzola, and uncles. Although not a formal pupil of Correggio's, Parmigianino's early career in the city was strongly influenced by the presence of the older artist. On a deeper level, however, Vasari was right that his particular eye for flowing, harmonious form and intense colouring have close affinities with Raphael's, even if he is a highly original artist in his own right.

Parmigianino produced his first altarpiece, the *Baptism of Christ* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin), at just 16 years old. In 1524 he took his extraordinary *Self-Portrait in a Concave Mirror* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) to Rome to impress Pope

Clement VII. His move gave him opportunity to study and absorb complex figuration and ideal beauty in the Roman works of Michelangelo and Raphael. His major accomplishment there was the great altarpiece of *The Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist and Jerome*, or the *Vision of St Jerome* (National Gallery, London). The Sack of Rome in 1527 caused him to flee to Bologna, where he stayed for three years, painting numerous small pictures of the Virgin as well as portraits. Returning to Parma in 1530 he worked on the great fresco cycle at Santa Maria della Steccata and executed his eccentric, otherworldly masterwork, the *Madonna of the Long Neck* (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence).

Parmigianino is best known for his elegant, charming Madonnas, found in both large-scale altarpieces and small devotional pictures like this one. The young woman in this picture was at certain points thought to be Saint Catherine, who was depicted repeatedly by Parmigianino. However, the figure is now widely identified as Mary Magdalene due to the presence of the *stiletto* (for dressing hair) and pearls in the chest visible in the lower right foreground, and what is presumably her Assumption in the background.

The Virgin's pose is most comparable to Parmigianino's unfinished panel of the *Virgin and Child* in the Courtauld Gallery, London—another devotional easel picture, albeit from the artist's Bolognese sojourn. The major difference between the two is that the architectural background of the Courtauld picture has been replaced with a wooded glade in the Sudeley one. Parmigianino actually started painting an interior before changing his mind—the contours of a window frame remain visible to the naked eye to the left of the Virgin's head. In terms of the finish, which is smooth, even enamel-like in places, but handled boldly in others, the closest analogue is probably the artist's late *Lucretia* in the Capodimonte, Naples.

The attribution of the Sudeley picture to Parmigianino has not been unanimous. The work was documented as Parmigianino in the Barberini collection and by Waagen in 1854, and exhibited under this attribution in London throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century. It was under this attribution that it was first published by Whitfield in 1982. He dated the work to Parmigianino's

period in Bologna, based on Vasari's description of a 'Madonna turning sideways with a beautiful air and numerous other figures' executed for a Parmese saddler-friend living in Bologna—a suggestive but not conclusive identification.

However, due to stylistic differences between this and other Parmigianino works of the 1520s, some scholars have attributed this work to Girolamo Mazzola Bedoli (c.1505–c.1570), a cousin of Parmigianino by marriage and a close imitator of his style. Ekserdjian has argued that it is indeed by Parmigianino, but dates it to the late 1530s, based on the women's flushed cheeks and the colouring of their draperies. This is agreed by a number of scholars, including Di Giampaolo and Vaccaro who previously gave the work to Bedoli. Moreover, recent analysis of the paper upon which the work is painted has shown it to have a watermark associated with Parmese paper from the 1520s, and most closely with watermarks from the mid-1530s. Another indicator as to the authorship is a landscape study in pen and brown ink, clearly by Parmigianino, which is close in detail to outcropping behind the Virgin (Uffizi, Florence).

Comparison with even the highest-quality works in Bedoli's generally accepted oeuvre, such as the *Annunciation* in the Ambrosiana or the *Sacra Conversazione* in Dresden, makes evident especially the differences in figure construction, with Bedoli's slightly flattening articulation of the body, his often rather awkward postures and the general absence of eloquent, flowing interaction between figures distinguishing him from Parmigianino.

The panel is the only late religious painting by the artist in the United Kingdom, and the only known picture still in private hands. There are six works in public collections. The two portraits—*Portrait of a Man with a Book* (York City Art Gallery) and *Portrait of a Collector* (National Gallery, London)—both date from the artist's early career in Parma. The large-scale altarpiece *The Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist and Jerome* (National Gallery, London) was painted in Rome. Of the devotional easel pictures, the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Courtauld Gallery, London) dates from just before his move to Rome, and the *Virgin and Child* (Courtauld Gallery, London) and *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* (National Gallery, London) were likely painted just before, and

after, the Sack of Rome, in Rome and Bologna, respectively. The sole mythological subject, *Pallas Athene* in the Royal Collection, was likely painted in the 1530s.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item

In 1787 *The Madonna and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene* was described as ‘One of the finest pictures in Europe’ and ‘known and ever esteemed the most capital picture of this great master, and may vie with the best of Raphael’s works.’ This entry in the sale of the collection of its first British owner, Sir John Taylor, 1st Bt. (1745–1786) reflects its distinguished provenance in the history of British art collecting, as well as its singular aesthetic significance.

Sir John Taylor had bought the work through the Scottish artist Gavin Hamilton (1723–1798), from the Palazzo Barberini in Rome. It had been in the papal Barberini family for the previous century, first recorded in the collection of Cardinal Antonio Barberini (1607–1671), nephew of Pope Urban VIII (elected 1623). When inventoried in the collection of Prince Urbano Barberini (1664–1722) who had inherited it from his father, the Cardinal’s nephew, the artist Carlo Maratta (1625–1713) valued it the highest of all the works. Taylor was a Fellow of the Royal Society and a major collector of sixteenth-century Italian pictures. He was included in Johann Zoffany’s *The Tribuna of the Uffizi* (1772–77, Royal Collection, London), gazing at Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*.

After Taylor’s death, the work passed, via descent and then marriage, to George Watson Taylor (1771–1841), who was recorded in Pieter Christoffel Wonder’s *Study for ‘Patrons and Lovers of Art’*, 1826–30 (National Portrait Gallery, London) where he kneels below the Sudeley Parmigianino. *Patrons and Lovers of Art* was commissioned by Sir John Murray, 8th Bt. (1768–1827) to celebrate the role of individual benefactors in the foundation of the National Gallery in 1824; Watson Taylor’s pose partially obscures Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne* acquired by the Gallery in 1826. An avid collector of old master painting, he also owned

Parmigianino's altarpiece *Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist and Jerome*, today also in the National Gallery, which he sold in 1823.

Nine years later Watson-Taylor sold his sold smaller Parmigianino. It was bought by another member of Parliament, James Morrison (1789–1857) who collected British pictures—his first major purchase was a Constable 'six-footer' *The Lock*, 1824—before amassing a distinguished collection of French, Dutch and Italian old masters. The picture remained at Basildon Park, remaining in his family until the marriage of Mary Morrison to Major John Henry Dent-Brocklehurst of Sudeley Castle in 1924. Of the works sold from the esteemed Morrison collection, some have remained in the United Kingdom, namely Poussin's *Triumph of Pan* and Rembrandt's *Portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels* (National Gallery) and Claude's *Adoration of the Golden Calf* (Manchester City Art Gallery) and Hobbema's *Wooded Landscape with Cottages among Trees* (National Galleries of Scotland) but many of the major pictures have been sold overseas.

The popularity of *The Madonna and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene* with its British collectors is indicative of the early and uninterrupted popularity of Parmigianino in this country. The first painting by Parmigianino to enter the UK was likely the *Pallas Athena*, presented to King Charles II in 1660. The first purchase was likely the *Madonna and Child* of Parmigianino's Bolognese period, acquired by Nathaniel Curzon, 1st Baron Scarsdale (1726-1804), in 1758. It hung in Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire for nearly 250 years until 1995 when it was bought from auction at Christie's London by the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth.

Parmigianino works acquired by William Ottley around the start of the nineteenth century, namely the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* and *Portrait of a Collector*, were acquired by the National Gallery in 1974 and 1977 respectively. The Sudeley picture is the only religious work by Parmigianino still in private hands, and the earliest Parmigianino acquisition by a British collector still in the United Kingdom. In addition to its national significance, it has a local one; from its arrival in Erlestoke Park in 1810, the picture's transfers to homes in Wiltshire, Berkshire and Gloucestershire have seen it travel fewer than 50 miles. The

relatively small distances travelled by the panel have helped ensure its outstanding condition, which makes evident its great aesthetic importance.

The composition is characteristic of Parmigianino's eloquent approach to the figure and its arrangement into groups, often in rather compressed space. The almost liquid elongation of limbs, the languid, expressively interacting hands with their softness of grip and touch, the characteristic turning of heads into *profils perdu*, the flushed cheeks, as well as the play between downcast eyes and a gaze—St John's—catching that of the viewer, and between wistfulness and playfulness. Just as characteristic are the women's gleaming tresses of hair, alternately unbound and meticulously braided, as well as the high key struck by the boldly highlighted blues and pink of the Virgin's dress. Providing contrast are the intense greens of the abundantly verdant surroundings. Vasari describes Parmigianino as a master of landscape, yet he only produced a few really expansive ones—what the biographer was describing is surely the sheer presence Parmigianino lends to plants, rocks, trees, fields and streams through colouring and detailing. He is not a painter not so much of sensual as of visionary reality, rendering everything with the intensity of spiritual, rather than physical experience.

Parmigianino's landscapes are crucial to his depictions of saints associated with the wilderness, in this case John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene. The presence of the river—also found in the *Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist and Jerome* in the National Gallery—could, as Whitfield has suggested, imply a conflation of the Magdalene's story with Saint Mary of Egypt, who retired beyond the river Jordan for her penitence.

Perhaps the most intriguing passage of the painting is the small scene in the upper left corner with a nude female figure exalted in heavenly light—most likely the Assumption of the Magdalen, which would corroborate the identification of the woman in the foreground and perhaps suggest that this picture was named for a patron devoted to the Magdalen or perhaps even named after her. According to Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*, following her withdrawal into the

wilderness, the Magdalen was elevated to heaven daily to feed on celestial music which sustained her instead of earthly food.

Probably most famously depicted in the woodcut by Dürer, the subject is a relatively unusual one, and inclusions of it as part of another scene are very rare. There are just two images of the Assumption of the Magdalen in UK public collections: *The Ecstasy of Saint Mary Magdalene* by Lo Spagna, a pupil of Perugino's, of 1500–20 (Wallace Collection, London) and *Saint Mary Magdalene borne by Angels*, by two pupils of Raphael, Giulio Romano and Gianfrancesco Penni, of about 1520–21 (National Gallery, London). These two images are more representative of Italian, and wider Western European, iconography.

Unlike these two pictures (and Dürer's woodcut), Parmigianino excludes angels and cherubs; the Magdalen ascends on a cloud beaming with rays of light. Her long blonde hair does not cover her body, but flows behind her, exposing her flesh which emanates light to show her transformation from mortal to divine.

The support is as rare as the iconography: the work is painted on paper laid down on panel. While unique to Parmigianino's oeuvre, it is not surprising as the artist was a prodigious draughtsman. Long overlooked in the scholarship, the study of paintings on paper in the sixteenth century is still an emerging field. Taking into account the understandably low survival rates of such work, the evidence nevertheless suggests that preparing or even finishing compositions in oil on paper was a considerably more common practice than has previously been assumed. In light of this, *The Madonna and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene* is an invaluable example, particularly exemplary for its condition.