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## Neue Funde

A NEW BOZZETTO BY SEBASTIANO RICCI

(with four illustrations)

In the late 1720s, Sebastiano Ricci painted for the conventual church of SS. Cosma e Damiano on the Giudecca, Venice, three large canvases representing Old Testament subjects: *Solomon speaks to the people of Israel* (Abb. 3; Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice, at present in the Duomo of Thiene), *Moses Striking the Rock* (Accademia, Venice, at present at the Fondazione G. Cini, Venice), *The Ark of the Covenant Borne in Triumph to Jerusalem* (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, at present in the parish church of Somaglia/Casalpusterlengo. See: J. Daniels, *Seb. Ricci*, Hove 1976, nos. 520/464/408, pp. 149/135f./113f., Figs. 323-325/318-322/326-329; id., *L'opera completa di Seb. Ricci*, Milan 1976, hereafter cited as *Opera completa*, nos 356/357/360, p. 121; A. Rizzi [ed.], introd. by G. Bergamini, *Seb. Ricci*, exhib. cat., Villa Manin di Passariano/Udine 1989, no. 63, p. 184f.).

According to Ricci's contemporary Anton Maria Zanetti (*Della pittura veneziana*, Venice 1771, P. 441), the Solomon picture was the first of the three to have been painted. The exact date of this painting is still disputed. Daniels (1976, pp. 114, 149) dates the Solomon painting to about 1716-20 and the two other pictures to the period 1718-1720. However, N. Ivanoff's discovery (*Notizie da Pal. Albani* 1, 1977, pp. 68ff., cited in Rizzi 1989) of Sebastiano's signature and the date 1729 on the Ark of the Covenant has confirmed the dating of this painting by some earlier writers (J. von Derschau, *Seb. Ricci*, Heidelberg 1922, p. 120). If we accept the opinion, that all the three paintings belong to a single commission, or at least, were painted during the same period, and that they should be viewed together as a "trittico" (Rizzo 1989), then the first two paintings must have been executed in the late 1720s.



The subject of the Solomon picture has already been given by Lione Pascoli (*Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti moderni*, Rome 1736, p. 382) as "Salomone che parla al popolo nella dedicazione del tempio". The source of the shorter title "Salomone che parla al popolo", invariably used by all modern writers, is Zanetti (*Descrizione di tutte le pubbliche pitture della città di Venezia*, Venice 1733, p. 373; id., *Della pittura veneziana* p. 441). Although depictions of the building of the temple of Jerusalem occasionally appear in works of art, this particular biblical passage (I Kings VIII [= III Reg. VIII of the Vulgata], repeated in II Chronic. V-VII [= II Par., V-VII of the Vulgata]; hereafter, numbers appearing in parenthesis refer to verses of I Kings VIII), is rarely represented in Renaissance and Baroque art.

Ricci's painting represents, however, not only the dedication of the temple by its founder, King Solomon (63). It also includes references to several other events that took place before, during and after the dedication: the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle of the Congregation into the temple (4), the sacrifices that took place in the temple and the court (5), the cloud that filled the temple (10/11), Solomon's address to the people and his prayer (12/13), the blessing of the people (14 [cf. 55]), and the dedication of the forecourt of the temple by the king (64).

The main scene is represented as taking place not in the interior of the temple, but in the forecourt. Ricci thus refers to the hallowing, or dedication by Solomon of "the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord", in which the king sacrificed, "because the brazen altar... was not able to receive the burnt offerings" (64).

Ricci's painting also contains a clear reference to the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle of the Congregation into the temple. Although according to the biblical account, the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle of the Congregation had already been brought inside the temple and placed in the sanctuary (the "Holy Place", "the Holy of Holies", or the *devir*), before the dedication of the temple (4 and 6-8), in Ricci's painting the Ark (the lower structure in the middle ground, on the right) and upon it, the Holy Vessels appear not in the interior of the temple, but in the forecourt. Behind the tabernacle is the altar erected by Solomon in the middle of the forecourt, upon which a priest and another man are busy sacrificing animals.

Solomon, standing on a platform (not mentioned in the Bible), is addressing the audience on the left and is pointing with his right hand to the temple. The king's gesture may illustrate his words: "I have surely built Thee (God) an house to dwell in a settled place for Thee to abide in for ever" (13) (A Hebrew inscription appearing on the wall of the temple in Ludovico Mazzolino's *Christ and the Pharisees in the temple*, Gemäldegalerie SMPK, Berlin, quotes the same verse). Sacrifices are slaughtered and burned not only on the altar, but everywhere in the court, as well as on the stairs leading to the entrance of the temple.

For his large compositions Sebastiano Ricci usually painted smaller preparatory oil *bozzetti*, or *modelli*. However, until now, only *bozzetti* for one of the three



canvases painted by Ricci for the church of SS. Cosma e Damiano – the *Moses* painting – have been discovered (Royal Collection, Hampton Court. For this and two other versions see Daniels 1976, p. 47; *Opera completa*, no. 358, 359, p. 121).

In July 1993, during a routine inspection of the store-rooms of the Tel Aviv Museum, a *bozzetto* for the Solomon painting (*Abb. 1, 2a-b*) has been discovered by the author of this note. The dimensions of the Tel Aviv *bozzetto*, 101 x 131 cm, are almost the same as those of the *bozzetto* for the *Moses* picture in Hampton Court, 99.4 x 134.6 cm, and of two other versions (102 x 132 cm and 98.4 x 132.4 cm: Derschau, Fig. 95b.; F. R. Shapley, *Paintings from the S. H. Kress Collection, Italian Schools, XVI-XVIII Century*, London 1973, p. 131, Fig. 257; Daniels 1976, Fig. 317).

In an unknown date the Tel Aviv *bozzetto* found its way to a private collection in Amsterdam (Dr. A. Sternheim), from which it was lent to an exhibition: *Italiaansche kunst in Nederlandsch bezit* held at the Stedelijk Museum in 1934. In the catalogue entry (no. 303, p. 101) the painting was presented as an independent work (and not as a *bozzetto*) and its subject was erroneously identified as “The Profanation of the Temple by Heliodorus?”. The painting was later acquired (apparently from the Goudstikker Gallery, Amsterdam, for the painting still bears on the back of its frame stickers printed with the adress of the Goudstikker Collectie) by the late Mr. A. van Santen, who in 1954 donated it to the Tel Aviv Museum. In the museum’s inventory the painting was described as representing an “Allegorical scene”.

All the main iconographic components of the final version of the Solomon painting at Thiene (*Abb. 3*) as well as some of its compositional elements, already appear in the Tel Aviv *bozzetto* (*Abb. 2*). In both of the two versions the entire composition develops around the dominant figure of the king, who appears in the centre foreground. The architectural background consists of the temple and its annexes (left and centre). In the middle ground, on the right, appear the Ark and the supplementary altar erected in the forecourt. The centre of the composition of the *bozzetto* is dominated by a triangle in the foreground, which is formed by the king and two lateral figures: on the right, a soldier armed with a halbred sitting on the step of the platform (*Abb. 1b*) and on the left, a man clad in a yellow gown with his back to the spectator, striding towards the king (*Abb. 1a*). The relationship between the king and the sitting soldier is dynamically enhanced by the figure of a soldier stooping towards the latter. Unlike the youthful beardless Solomon appearing in the final version (*Abb. 3*), the king is depicted in the *bozzetto* as a mature, bearded man.

A bearded, turbaned oriental monarch, very similar to the Solomon of the *bozzetto*, and like him striding forward on a stepped platform covered with a greenish drapery, which is almost the same as the one in the *Solomon* picture, recurs in Ricci’s *Esther and Ahasverus* (Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome), and in the splendid *modelletto* for this picture (National Gallery, London; Daniels 1976, cat. 374, 179, Figs. 254, 255; *Opera completa* no. 524, 525, pl. LXIV; Rizzi 1989, no. 71, 72, pp. 201, 203-204: plates. Solomon’s attire is ultimately derived either from



representations of Turkish Sultans in Venetian paintings from Gentile Bellini onwards, or by images of oriental figures inspired by them).

From the right middle ground, where several men supervised by two priests and a soldier are slaughtering oxen in front of the Ark, a swarm of figures is ascending obliquely the stairs leading to the temple, reaching the upper centre of the background, and almost touching the turbaned head of the king. By means of this brilliant compositional device, the central points of the foreground and the background are subtly related to each other.

The bold brush strokes highlighted against the dark ground may recall the style of Ricci's younger contemporary, Alessandro Magnasco. However, not only the handling of the highlights, but also the dynamic composition of the *bozzetto*, as well as its particular spatial effects, appear to have been no less inspired by Tintoretto's great canvases painted for the Venetian Scuola di San Rocco.

Although the close relationship between the Tel Aviv *bozzetto* and the Thiene painting may strike the observer at first sight, only rarely do we find among Sebastiano's œuvre such extreme differences between the composition of a *bozzetto* and that of the final version. Of the composition of the *bozzetto*, the central figure of Solomon, the crouching repoussoir figure on the left, and the figure stooping towards him, the altar and the Tabernacle on the right, the sacrifice scene in front of the Tabernacle, and the cloud emanating from the temple (which in both versions is surmounted by jubilant angels) have been retained, though modified in various ways, in the final version. All the other components of the composition of the *bozzetto* underwent extreme transformations, either in their form or their position, or were eliminated altogether. Radical changes in form can be seen in the architectural background: the frontal view of the Pantheon-like temple appearing in the *bozzetto* was substituted in the final version by a side-view of a Palladian building, a statue of Moses with the tables of the Law was added in the niche on the left, and the gabled arch on the right, between the temple and the altar was substituted by an elegant eighteenth century colonnade.

Particularly interesting are the changes that took place in the lower portion of the composition. The most remarkable change is the elimination of the two large figures flanking the platform in the foreground of the *bozzetto*, where they constituted the base of the central figural triangle. In the final version the groups of people on both sides of the king are not detached from the centre, as they are in the *bozzetto*, but form a continuous dense human mass, which surrounds the platform. The sitting soldier appearing in the *bozzetto* (Abb. 1b) was substituted by an elegant young soldier armed with a halberd, who is approached by a black page carrying a vase. The slaughtering group in the right middle ground, which in the *bozzetto* is pushed further back, fills in the final version the gap between the group of soldiers in the foreground and the right margin of the picture.

The crowded human mass, which occupies the entire lower half of the composition, is neatly separated from the architectural background by means of the horizontal lines of the steps leading to the temple and the colonnade.



The composition of the final version of Ricci's Solomon painting is thus more simple and static than that of the *bozzetto*. As if to compensate for the simplification of the composition, Ricci added to the final version numerous new details. He introduced among the audience several highly individualized figures, among which a stout man with a red beretto, who has attracted the attention of writers on this painting as a possible self-portrait (Daniels 1976, p. 149).

The simple stepped platform upon which Solomon is standing in the *bozzetto*, was elaborately redesigned in the final version and decorated with classical reliefs, and an ornate throne was added on its right side. The empty throne emphasizes the particular meaning of the standing-striding posture of the king, illustrating I Reg. VIII,22: "And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel" (see also 55). The altar and the Ark were decorated with classical motifs too, and carved Cherubim appear on the quoins of the latter, probably as an allusion to the decoration of the Tabernacle as it is described in the biblical account of the installation of the Tabernacle in the Holy of the Holies (6-8).

All these elaborate details could not, however save the Solomon painting from some negative remarks by later critics, from Cochin to Palluchini, to whom the dense composition appeared to be also confused and cluttered (Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Voyage D'Italie*, vol. III, Paris 1758, reprinted Geneve 1972, p. 103; Derschau 1922, p. 121; Rodolfo Palluchini, *La pittura veneziana del Settecento*, Venice-Rome 1960, p. 16, cited by Daniels and Rizzi).

Had Sebastiano followed more closely the composition of the *bozzetto* of the Solomon painting, he might perhaps have avoided the negative judgement of posterity.

Avraham Ronen

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## Tagungen

ARTE, HISTORIA E IDENTIDAD EN AMÉRICA:  
VISIONES COMPARATIVAS  
C. I. H. A. COLLOQUIUM XVII

Zacatecas/México, Museo Pedro Coronel, 22. bis 27. September 1993

In the last week of September 1993, approximately two hundred fifty scholars from twenty countries gathered in the colonial city of Zacatecas, Mexico, to