



Veronese
Venetian, 1528 - 1588

The Finding of Moses

c. 1581/1582

oil on canvas

overall: 58 x 44.5 cm (22 13/16 x 17 1/2 in.)

framed: 81.12 x 67.95 x 7.3 cm (31 15/16 x 26 3/4 x 2 7/8 in.)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.38

ENTRY

The subject is taken from Exodus 2:3–10. According to the biblical account, the infant Moses was placed by his mother in a basket and hidden beside the river, to escape the edict of the king of Egypt that all the male offspring of the Israelites should be slain at birth. The basket was discovered by the king's daughter when she came to the river to bathe with her maidservants. Seeing the princess take pity on the child, Moses's sister Miriam, who had been keeping watch from a distance, approached and offered to find a nurse for him; in this way, Moses was saved and brought up by his own mother. Veronese imagined the event in contemporary terms and showed the princess wearing a magnificent robe of gold and silver brocade and copious jewelry, surrounded by a courtly entourage that includes a dwarf. In the immediate foreground, an African servant holds the now-empty basket. The kneeling woman holding the baby is presumably Miriam, and the older woman preparing to wrap him in a cloth is his mother. In the left middle ground, two other servants, apparently unaware of the remarkable discovery, have undressed to their shifts and are preparing to bathe in the river. Although in Christian tradition Moses was often interpreted as a prototype for Christ, Veronese did not seem to be concerned here with the possible theological, political, or moral implications of the story, but treated it, as observed by Kurt Badt, simply as a poetic idyll. [1]

Together with a near-identical composition in a private collection, [2] the picture is a close variant of Veronese's masterly *The Finding of Moses* in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid (57 x 43 cm) [fig. 1]. The Prado picture is not dated, but it is one of a number of versions of the subject painted by Veronese and his workshop that scholars agree are datable to the early 1580s. [3] These other versions, all of which

are considerably larger than those in the Prado and Washington and are painted in a horizontal rather than vertical format, include the picture in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, originally from the Palazzo Grimani at the Servi, Venice; that in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon; [4] that in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon; and that in the Galleria Sabauda, Turin, which was painted for Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy between 1582 and 1584. [5] The chronology of these and other versions, in which the workshop clearly played a substantial role, is a matter of some controversy. Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocchi, for example, argued that the Prado picture is the first of the series, on the grounds of its supreme quality; [6] for Howard Coultts, the Turin picture is the earliest, because the subject is likely to have been chosen by Carlo Emanuele for its dynastic implications, which would then have become less relevant as Veronese repeated it for the Venetian market; [7] for Richard Cocke, the first was the one in Dijon, because the double vista in the background resembles that of the *Rape of Europa* (Doge's Palace, Venice), which he dated to the early 1570s; [8] and for W. R. Rearick, the earliest was a now-lost painting of vertical format, recorded in a chiaroscuro woodcut of 1741 by John Baptist Jackson [fig. 2] and in a copy by Sebastiano Ricci (Royal Collection, Hampton Court), because he interpreted a sheet of studies in the Morgan Library, New York [fig. 3], datable for external reasons to 1581, as preparatory to this lost version. [9] According to Rearick, Veronese then developed some of the ideas adumbrated on this sheet in the Prado picture, which he saw as a small-scale, highly refined variant of the lost work, painted immediately afterward, and in advance of the series of horizontal compositions, most of which were executed with extensive shop assistance. His implied dating to circa 1581/1582, in any case, remains consistent with that already proposed by Pignatti and Rodolfo Pallucchini. [10]

None of these arguments on the chronological order are binding, however, nor is the relationship between the Gallery's picture and that in the Prado entirely clear. Once account has been taken of the slight enlargement of the former along all four of its edges (see Technical Summary), its dimensions are virtually identical to those of the Prado version (58 × 44.5 cm). Comparison between them reveals a number of minor differences, most obviously in the costume of the princess: in the fabric of her gown, in her waistline and neckline, and in her crown. Further, in the Gallery's version, her companion wears a striped gown, and the details of the city and hillside in the left background are different. While some scholars have judged the Gallery's picture to be an autograph replica of equal quality to the Prado original, [11] a persistent tradition regards the former as the weaker and later of the two. [12] Particularly severe in her verdict was Beverly Brown, for whom the Gallery's

version is a copy made in the workshop by an executant who did not always understand the master's intentions and whose alterations were consistently for the worse. [13] She interpreted the x-radiograph as showing that the copyist transferred the design mechanically from the original [14] and pointed to a number of unsatisfactory details in the execution, such as the coarsening of the princess's features, the transformation of two of the fingers of her companion's left hand into folds of drapery, and the elimination of the tree against which the foremost of the bathers steadies herself. Yet the recent treatment has revealed that in at least some of these instances, the unsatisfactory appearance was the result of later overpaint; [15] and from the evidence of infrared reflectography at 1.5 to 1.8 microns [fig. 4], [16] it is even possible to argue that the design of the Gallery's version precedes that of the Prado. In particular, the fact that the servant and dwarf at the right were painted over the striped fabric of the figure behind them suggests that the pair was newly invented for the Gallery's version, rather than simply representing a copy after the Prado picture. Furthermore, while the pointing gesture of the princess in the upper right of the Morgan sheet does indeed relate to the lost version recorded by Jackson and Ricci, it is just as valid to interpret the initial figure group on the left of the sheet, in which the princess's costume features diagonal bands across her chest, as directly preparatory to the Washington version. [17] In both the lost and the Prado versions, by contrast, she wears a currently fashionable bodice, and in the latter picture, she does not raise her left knee to step forward, but simply stands. On the other hand, the x-radiographs of the Washington painting [fig. 5] also show that originally the princess's dress more closely resembled the one in the Prado version. This cross-fertilization of ideas between the two versions may even imply that they were executed together, side by side, [18] and that it is a mistake to insist on the chronological priority of one over the other. In any case, it has been observed that the departure from contemporary fashion in the princess's dress in the Washington version, with the diagonal bands under the breasts, should not be interpreted as the result of any misunderstanding but as a deliberate attempt to invest the costume with a suggestion of the antique. [19] While, therefore, on balance the Prado version may be regarded as the finer and more sensitively executed picture, the Gallery's version may also be regarded as substantially autograph. Perhaps, if the former was painted on commission, the latter, as was first suggested by Remigio Marini, was retained in the workshop as a basis for future variants. [20] In support of this suggestion, Brown has pointed out that at least two of these variants—one in the collection of Robert Haagens, Walpole (MA) in 1973, and the other on the art

market in Lucerne in 1945 [21]—show features peculiar to it and not present in the Prado version.

Peter Humfrey

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Veronese, *The Finding of Moses*, c. 1580, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Prado. © Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado



fig. 2 John Baptist Jackson, after Veronese, *The Finding of Moses*, 1741, chiaroscuro woodcut in buff, light brown, light violet gray, and dark gray, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Rosenwald Collection



fig. 3 Veronese, *Studies for the Finding of Moses*, 1581, pen and brown ink, brown wash, on paper, The Morgan Library and Museum, IV, 81, Purchased by Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913) in 1909. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York



fig. 4 Infrared reflectogram, Veronese, *The Finding of Moses*, c. 1581/1582, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection



fig. 5 X-radiograph, Veronese, *The Finding of Moses*, c. 1581/1582, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

NOTES

- [1] Kurt Badt, *Paolo Veronese* (Cologne, 1981), 99–101 (with reference to the Prado version).
- [2] Published by Diana Gisolfi, “Collaboration and Replicas in the Shop of Paolo Veronese and His Heirs,” *Artibus et Historiae* 28, no. 55 (2007): fig. 4, as “Paolo Veronese Shop.” From the author’s reproduction, however, this looks as if it may be an 18th-century copy of the Gallery’s picture.
- [3] For a discussion of the artist’s treatment of the subject in the various versions, see Claudia Terribile, “Un figlio per due madri: Paolo Veronese e il tema del Mosè salvato dalle acque,” in *Paolo Veronese: Giornate di studio*, ed. Bernard Aikema, Thomas Dalla Costa, and Paola Marini (Venice, 2016), 79–88.

- [4] For the Dresden and Lyon pictures, see W. R. Rearick, in *Paolo Veronese: Disegni e dipinti*, ed. Alessandro Bettagno (Venice, 1988), 101–102; and W. R. Rearick, in *The Art of Paolo Veronese* (Cambridge, 1988), 143–145, respectively; Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese* (Milan, 1995), 2:396–398.
- [5] Howard Coutts, “Veronese’s Paintings for Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy,” *The Burlington Magazine* 127 (1985): 300–302.
- [6] Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese* (Milan, 1995), 2:394–395.
- [7] Howard Coutts, “Veronese’s Paintings for Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy,” *The Burlington Magazine* 127 (1985): 300–302.
- [8] Richard Cocke, *Veronese* (London, 1980), 100; Richard Cocke, *Veronese’s Drawings* (London, 1984), 241.
- [9] W. R. Rearick, in *The Art of Paolo Veronese* (Cambridge, 1988), 142–144, 147–148. The existence of the lost work was first deduced by Howard Coutts, “A Ricci Pastiche or a Copy of a Lost Veronese?” *Arte veneta* 36 (1982): 230–232. It could be argued that its composition and preparatory drawings represent a development of a design for a version of the subject, executed in the 1560s by the workshop as part of a series of four from the life of Moses, which belonged to the Medici collection in Florence by the early 17th century. For this series see Marco Chiarini, “Una serie di tele con storie di Mosè di Paolo Veronese e della sua bottega,” *Artibus et Historiae* 31, no. 61 (2010): 77–82.
- [10] Terisio Pignatti, *Veronese* (Venice, 1976), 1:90, 146; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Veronese* (Milan, 1984), 126, 184.
- [11] Remigio Marini, *Tutta la pittura di Paolo Veronese* (Milan, 1968), 113; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Veronese* (Milan, 1984), 184; Richard Cocke, *Veronese’s Drawings* (London, 1984), 242; Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese* (Milan, 1995), 2:317, 395–396.
- [12] Lionello Venturi, “Saggio sulle opere d’arte italiana a Pietroburgo,” *L’arte* 15 (1912): 211; Ralph Fastnedge, “Two Italian Pictures Recently Restored at Liverpool,” *Liverpool Libraries, Museums, and Arts Committee Bulletin* 3, nos. 1–2 (July–October 1953): 19; Giuseppe Fiocco, *Paolo Veronese: 1528–1588* (Bologna, 1928), 198; Giuseppe Fiocco, *Paolo Veronese* (Rome, 1934), 121; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:529; Kurt Badt, *Paolo Veronese* (Cologne, 1981), 101; Diana Gisolfi, “Collaboration and Replicas in the Shop of Paolo Veronese and His Heirs,” *Artibus et Historiae* 28, no. 55 (2007): 81. W. R. Rearick, in *The Art of Paolo Veronese* (Cambridge, 1988), 144, implicitly included the Gallery’s picture in his reference to “a series of careful replicas of the Madrid picture allotted to other, younger members of the shop.” David Alan Brown has orally suggested that the picture may be by the same

hand as the *Holy Family with Saint Mary Magdalen and a Female Donor* in the Louvre, Paris (no. 140), where it is attributed to the workshop of Veronese.

- [13] Beverly Louise Brown, "Replication and the Art of Veronese," *Studies in the History of Art* 20 (1989): 120–121.
- [14] For the x-radiograph see also Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:530.
- [15] See Technical Summary. Removal of the overpaint during the treatment revealed the missing tree on the left side.
- [16] Infrared reflectography was performed with a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.
- [17] For the Morgan drawing, see John Marciari in Rhoda Eitel-Porter and John Marciari, *Italian Renaissance Drawings at the Morgan Library and Museum* (New York, 2019), 249–251. I am grateful to John Marciari for showing me his entry in advance of its publication. For more on the relationship between the Morgan drawing, the Prado's version, and the Gallery's painting, with particular attention to findings from the technical analysis, see Joanna Dunn and John Marciari, "Paolo Veronese's *Finding of Moses*: A Reassessment," in *Fracture*, vol. 4, *Series, Multiples, and Replicas*, ed. Daphne Barbour and Suzanne Quillen Lomax (Washington, DC, forthcoming).
- [18] As suggested by Joanna Dunn of the department of conservation, NGA.
- [19] Rembrandt Duits, "'Abiti gravi, abiti stravaganti': Veronese's Creative Approach to Drapery," in *Paolo Veronese: A Master and His Workshop in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Virginia Brilliant and Frederick Ilchman (Sarasota, 2012), 68.
- [20] Remigio Marini, *Tutta la pittura di Paolo Veronese* (Milan, 1968), 119.
- [21] Beverly Louise Brown, "Replication and the Art of Veronese," *Studies in the History of Art* 20 (1989): 121. See also Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:530.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The picture is painted on a relatively finely woven fabric, which remains in good condition. The painting has been lined, and the tacking margins have been removed. The x-radiographs [fig. 1] show additions of approximately 1.5 centimeters, which are not original, around all four edges. The ground is a dark, reddish-brown color, and from microscopic examination, it appears that the execution of the sky and background preceded that of the foreground and that

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reserves were left for the figures. The paint was applied fluidly and relatively quickly, with variations in thickness from the very thin shadows to a moderate impasto in the highlights. X-radiographs and infrared reflectography at 1.5 to 1.8 microns [1] [fig. 2] show that no reserve was left for the two figures at the right and that they were painted over the striped robe of the servant behind them, as if they were not part of the original design. The x-radiographs also show changes to the princess's dress; originally, it more closely resembled the one in the Prado version of the painting.

The painting is in good condition apart from some staining in the sky. It was treated between 2008 and 2011, at which time extensive retouching that covered the additions and extended approximately 2 centimeters into the picture plane was removed. This revealed a tree on the left side that had been painted out, probably when the additions were added.

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination reports by Michael Swicklik and Susanna Griswold and the treatment report by Joanna Dunn

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TECHNICAL COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 X-radiograph, Veronese, *The Finding of Moses*, c. 1581/1582, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection



fig. 2 Infrared reflectogram, Veronese, *The Finding of Moses*, c. 1581/1582, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Infrared reflectography was performed with a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.

PROVENANCE

Louis Michel Vanloo [1707-1771], Paris; (his sale, Paris, 14 December 1772, no. 2); purchased by (Augustin Ménageot, Paris) through Denis Diderot [1713-1784], Paris, for Catherine II, empress of Russia [1729-1796], Saint Petersburg; [1] Imperial Hermitage Gallery, Saint Petersburg; purchased November 1930 through

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(Matthiesen Gallery, Berlin; P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London; and M. Knoedler & Co., New York) by Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.; deeded 1 May 1937 to The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh; [2] gift 1937 to NGA.

[1] The title page of the 1772 Vanloo sale catalogue indicates the sale was to be "à la fin de Novembre" (at the end of November), but the listing by Frits Lugt (no. 2083 in volume 1 of Fritz Lugt, *Répertoire des Catalogues de Ventes Publiques*, 4 vols., The Hague, 1938-1964), refers to his no. 2086, which indicates the Vanloo sale took place 14-17 December. The details of Ménageot's role in the sale to Catherine II are outlined in a letter of 19 January 1997 from Dr. Nicole Willk-Brocard, and her article "Augustin Ménageot (ca. 1700-1784), Marchand de Tableaux. Quelques Jalons," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (April 1998): 161-182 (both in NGA curatorial files).

[2] Mellon purchase date and date deeded to Mellon Trust are according to Mellon collection files in NGA curatorial records and David Finley's notebook (donated to the National Gallery of Art in 1977, now in the Gallery Archives).

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1998 A Collector's Cabinet, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1998, no. 63, fig. 23.

2012 Paolo Veronese: A Master and His Workshop in Renaissance Venice, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, 2012-2013, no. 21, repro.

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