

PAOLO PAGANI. JESUS MIRACULOUSLY HEALS A BLIND MAN

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ABSTRACT

Paolo Pagani (1655-1716) is an artist whose work has not yet been fully explored. Based on the study of Pagani's work, it is now possible to incorporate in his work an unknown preparatory drawing on the theme of the Miraculous Healing of a Blind Man by Jesus Christ. This rare drawing is of fundamental importance for the understanding of the style of the artist's first production and could shed new light on the dating of other works by Pagani.

KEYWORDS: Paolo Pagani; 17th century; Venice; Painting; Drawing

Paolo Pagani. Cristo miracolosamente ridona la vista al cieco

ABSTRACT

Paolo Pagani (1655-1716) è un artista la cui opera non è stata ancora completamente esplorata. Sulla base dello studio delle opere di Pagani, è ora possibile incorporare nel suo corpus grafico un ignoto disegno preparatorio sul tema della Guarigione miracolosa di un cieco attuata da Gesù Cristo. Questo raro disegno è di fondamentale importanza per la comprensione dello stile della prima produzione dell'artista e potrebbe gettare nuova luce sulla datazione di altre opere di Pagani.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Paolo Pagani; XVII secolo; Venezia; pittura; disegno

Paolo Pagani (Castello Valsolda, 1655 – Milano, 1716)¹ is an artist whose oeuvre has still not been fully explored, and it is thus still possible to add new works to it, both paintings and especially drawings. Pagani's work as a draughtsman, which has been discussed on a number of occasions², is scattered among a number of public collections of old drawings throughout the world, and in many cases among private collections, too. Nevertheless, the main starting-point for the study of Pagani's style as a draughtsman is the collection of his drawings in the Research Library in Olomouc, which contains the largest collection anywhere of drawings attributed to him. However, in only a few cases can these and other drawings be linked to a painting based on them. It is therefore up to researchers and experts on drawings by old masters to add more works to Pagani's so far incomplete oeuvre, search for further drawings, examine more closely the attribution of drawings thought to be by him, and thus build up a coherent picture of his artistic output.

Paolo Pagani came from the Lombard town of Castello Valsolda. In the 1660s, however he moved to Venice, where he undoubtedly acquired his basic artistic training in the local artists' workshops. There are records of Pagani as an active artist in Venice up until June 1690³. After this he left Italy and went to Central Europe, where he probably worked in Vienna and later, in the service of the Bishop of Olomouc, Karl II Lichtenstein-Castlecorn, in Moravia and in Kraków in Poland⁴. In 1696 he returned to Italy, and in the same year he started working on

¹ On the life and work of Paolo Pagani see for example: Burri 1982, pp. 47-72; Karpowicz 1991, pp. 103-117; Bianchi 1998; Morandotti 2000; Mollisi 2008, pp. 228-237.

² Togner 1997; Togner 2005.

³ Burri 1982, p. 50; Morandotti 2000, p. 158

⁴ Kapowicz 1991, pp. 103-117; Bianchi 1998, pp. 51-64.



1, Paolo Pagani, *The Healing of a Blind Man*, Turin, Galleria Nazionale Sabauda © MIC – Musei Reali, Galleria Sabauda

monumental ceiling frescoes in the Church of St Martin in his birthplace Castello Valsolda. He spent the remainder of his life as an artist in Lombardy, where his output included a number of works in the service of the senator Cesare Pagani and commissions from other patrons⁵.

One of the drawings which, on the basis of a contextual study of the output of Paolo Pagani as a draughtsman, it is now possible to include among his early work, is a so far unknown drawing kept in the Graphische Sammlung der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart⁶. This compositional study on the theme of a miraculous healing by Jesus Christ was hitherto attributed to Giuseppe Diamantini and included among a series of other drawings by him that are to be found in the collection. On the basis of a comprehensive study of Pagani's oeuvre and his drawing style, however, I believe that this drawing can undoubtedly be included among the early works of Paolo Pagani and, what is more, be connected with a resulting extant painting. As is indicated

by the unfinished state of the drawing and the minor changes that the artist made to it, it is a preparatory study for the composition of a hung painting today kept in the Galleria Nazionale Sabauda. At the same time, it is so far the only drawing made by Pagani during his early career in Venice which can be connected with a resulting painting.

Pagani's painting on the theme *The Healing of a Blind Man* (?)⁷ from the Musei Reali, Galleria Sabauda in Turin (fig. 1)⁸, for a long time escaped the attention of researchers. Although the painting has been part of the collection probably since 1850, when it was acquired as a bequest from Ottavio Moreno (1777–1852)⁹, it was described in a series of inventories¹⁰ firstly as the work of Annibale Carracci and in recent years simply as an anonymous 17th-century work¹¹.

⁵ Geddo 1995, pp. 125–155; Pescarmona 1991, pp. 118–126.

⁶ *A Miracle of Jesus Christ*, Red chalk and brown pen and ink, 41.1×27.9 cm, Graphische Sammlung der Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, inv. no. 6286. Acquired by the Graphic Collection in 1872, previously part of the private collection of Giacomo Durazzo. Hitherto attributed to Giuseppe Diamantini.

⁷ *The Healing of a Blind Man*, oil on canvas, 203×145.5 cm, Turin, Musei Reali–Galleria Sabauda, inv. no. 748. Published in Cottino 1991, pp. 211–212; Morandotti 1993, p. 110 (note no. 2); Fossaluzza 1998, p. 37; Bianchi 1998, pp. 94–97, cat. no. 1; Morandotti 1998, p. 84; Geddo 1998, p. 196; Morandotti 2000, pp. 84, 87–89; Villano 2014.

⁸ Mollisi 2008, pp. 228–229.

⁹ Bianchi 1998, p. 94, cat. no. 1 (author of entry Federica Bianchi); Cottino 1991, p. 211, note no. 2; Villano 2014.

¹⁰ *Elenco dei quadri/ della Reale Pinacoteca/ Redatto nel 1851*, p. 21, n. 581; *Elenco dei Quadri/ della Reale Pinacoteca/ redatto nel 1853*, p. 28, n. 581. Quoted in Bianchi 1998, p. 94, cat. no. 1.; Villano 2014.

¹¹ Cottino 1991, p. 211; Villano 2014.

The first proposal to attribute the painting to Pagani came in an article by Alberto Cottino, who drew attention to the work not only because of its size, but especially because of the high quality of the execution¹². At the present time there is no doubt that Pagani was responsible for the painting, and it has been definitively included among his works¹³. According to studies of the work undertaken so far, it displays many features of Pagani's style as a painter, combining the monumental character that is so typical of him (*terribilità neotibaldesca*) with the elegant poses of curved figures reminiscent of the Lombard tradition, in contrast to the refined Venetian *chiaroscuro* painting and academic art¹⁴. Alessandro Morandotti places the painting in Pagani's early period, in the years 1680–1685, in other words the time when he was still working in Venice. However, Morandotti emphasises the journeys that Pagani may have made to other parts of northern Italy and his contacts with the Lombard tradition and local artists there¹⁵. Taking into account the style in which the work is executed and this proposed dating, it is possible that the painting in Turin is one of the oldest extant works by Paolo Pagani.



2, Paolo Pagani, *A Miracle of Jesus Christ, Stuttgart*, Graphische Sammlung der Staatsgalerie. © Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

In view of the theme of the painting, it may be supposed that it was part of a larger cycle celebrating the miracles of Jesus Christ¹⁶. The Gospels recount numerous examples of healing, but the traditional arrangement of the composition and the figure of the sick man, holding a stick and raising his eyes upwards, indicate that this is the gospel scene of *The Healing of a Blind Man*. The figure of Christ, depicted by Pagani in an elegant curve and with graceful gestures of the hands, is bending forward and placing his palm on the forehead of the blind man, miraculously returning his sight to him. The seated figure of the blind man clearly displays Pagani's tendency towards monumental figures, seen here especially in the execution of the bare body of the man and the expressiveness of his gestures. Attention should also be paid to the figures of two old people in the background who are observing the entire scene. Their facial type fully corresponds to the work of Paolo Pagani, and variations on it can be noted on a number of his other works.

The newly discovered drawing in Stuttgart depicts the entire original layout of this scene with slight modifications, and documents Pagani's artistic approach (fig. 2). He first captured the

¹² Cottino 1991, p. 211.

¹³ Cottino 1991, pp. 211–212; Bianchi 1998, pp. 94–97, cat. no. 1; Morandotti 2000, pp. 84–89.

¹⁴ Bianchi 1998, p. 96.

¹⁵ Morandotti 2000, pp. 84–85.

¹⁶ Bianchi 1998, p. 94, cat. no. 1.

original idea in rapid energetic lines using red chalk, and then elaborated the figures in more detail in pen and ink. The red chalk lines only define in outline the surrounding figures and the drapery of Christ's clothing. Christ's face was then executed in greater detail. It can be seen that while he was making the drawing Pagani decided to change the direction in which Christ was facing. The figure of the blind man, with the details again elaborated in pen and ink, is reminiscent of other drawings by Pagani and displays his traditional style. Although the drawing style gives the impression of great restlessness, there is no doubt that the drawing can definitively be attributed to Pagani. The characteristic execution of the face of the blind man, with the detailed elaboration of individual parts in pen and ink, is similar to that of other drawings known to be by Pagani and to the techniques used in them. The details of the execution of the blind man's face can be seen to be the same as in the faces in the extant drawing of *The Miracle of St Theodore*¹⁷, which has been preserved in a set of drawings in the Research Library in Olomouc, and which also belongs to Pagani's early period¹⁸. The execution of the two studies is comparable in the use of rapidly drawn lines, which in the case of the drapery are typically briefly sharply broken.

Until now, the drawing of *Christ's Miracle* has not been linked with the resulting painting in Turin. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that it is a preparatory study for the composition, which underwent several changes in the resulting work. In the layout in this preparatory drawing the figure of Christ is already perfectly portrayed in an elegant stance. The figure of the blind man is interpreted by Pagani in the resulting painting in a more dynamic way with an open gesture. In view of the dating of the painting and the style of the study it can be assumed that the drawing was made no later than 1685 and thus also belongs to the period when Pagani was in Venice. At the same time, it is connected with one of the earliest extant works of Paolo Pagani and thus undoubtedly illustrates his early Venetian output. The extant drawing is evidence of Pagani's early activity as a draughtsman, and, thanks to its connection with the painting made from it, represents a significant part of his oeuvre. It makes us familiar with the early drawing style which was the starting point for Pagani's work and which in his later output developed into the drawing technique that was so typical for him. This connection between a drawing and a resulting painting is exceptional in Paolo Pagani's oeuvre as a whole, because drawings known to be by him can be linked to a final work only by chance. The drawing in Stuttgart thus represents a work of fundamental importance for the understanding of the artist's early output, and may throw fresh light on the dating of other works by Pagani.

¹⁷ *The Miracle of St Theodore*, pen and ink wash drawing, red chalk underdrawing, Research Library in Olomouc, alb. 38, fol 39r, sign. J III 51.727. Published in Togner, 1997, pp. 43–44, cat. nos. A9–A10; Togner 2005, pp. 259–261, cat. nos. 189–190.

¹⁸ The iconography of this drawing, with St Theodore, the patron saint of Venice, and an inscription referring to this local saint, was the main reason why Milan Togner connected the work with the Venetian milieu. See Togner 1997, pp. 43–45; Togner 2005, pp. 259–261. This compositional drawing was evidently intended as a study for a commissioned hung painting. Unfortunately, no mention can be found in Venice of a resulting painting on this theme by Pagani. Nevertheless, the theme and the connection with the local patron saint may indicate a commission for one of the local churches or even point towards the famous *Scuola grande di San Teodoro*, in the decoration of which Pagani may have been involved at this time. On the basis of the available sources, there is so far no evidence for any connection between Pagani and the *Scuola grande di San Teodoro*, and this hypothesis requires further study of the archive sources and the sources relating to the history of the Venetian *Scuola*.

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