

Accademia Carrara presents *Dipinti Italiani 1300-1500 the complete catalogue* which carries on new evolutions and an extraordinary attribution to Andrea Mantegna.

The name **ANDREA MANTEGNA**, written by pen or using a very fine brush in an elegant capital script, which seems to date from the same time as the painting, appears on the back of the panel. It might suggest that the work can be traced back to the artist, but the ways of art and history are not always that simple and the alternating fortunes of a work, or rather of its attribution, may lead in other directions. For many years, the panel has been considered variously as by the studio, by the son of the great master, or as a contemporary copy.

The most recent studies, carried out in conjunction with the publication of *Accademia Carrara Dipinti Italiani 1300–1500 Catalogo Completo*, by **Giovanni Valagussa** (an art historian and curator of the Carrara collection in Bergamo), lead back to the straight and narrow, stating that *Resurrection of Christ* is by Andrea Mantegna, and that it was painted in about 1492-93.

description, collecting and attribution history

This panel, which is of remarkable quality, reveals the vertical veining of the wood, and has certainly been preserved in its original thickness, even though it is very thin. The words Andrea Mantegna are indeed confirmation of this, and no woodworm tunnels can be seen. It is quite probable, however, that the panel was reduced in size, possibly early on in its life, and we should imagine that it was considerably taller than what we see today, and probably also somewhat wider.

The scene it portrays is that of the Resurrection of Christ, at the moment when he triumphantly emerges from the sepulcher holding the banner with the cross, before the five bewildered soldiers who have astonished looks on their faces. In particular, the depiction of the overhanging rocky landscape, which forms a very high oblique spur looming over the figure of Christ, is of very interesting quality. So too is the projecting terrace in the foreground, held up by a sort of imposing natural arch, above which the entire scene plays out. There is no known restoration work after that one of 1846. The painted surface is in a good state of preservation, even though somewhat dulled by a conspicuously darkened and yellowed varnish, which makes the entire range of colors tend toward brown.

The paper label that indicates the entry of the work into the collection in Bergamo – “GALLERIA LOCHIS Proprietà del Municipio di BERGAMO” – dates from 1866. The name is that of one of the protagonists of this fascinating story: Count Guglielmo Lochis was the Podestà of Bergamo from 1840 to 1848, an extraordinary collector and one of the great donors of the Accademia Carrara.

It had been suggested that the purchase by Count Lochis took place in Milan and that it was recorded in a letter of 1842, but in actual fact this mentioned a painting by “Montagna” (Bartolomeo Cincani called Il Montagna, 1449/50–1523). Two documents of 1846 refer to expenses incurred for “... a painting representing the Resurrection by Mantegna / Silva”, indicating that Lochis purchased the work from Signora Silva for 24 zecchins, and for an initial restoration by Alessandro Brisson.

The painting then appears in the catalogue of the Lochis Collection, also of 1846, but only in the closing pages: “The Resurrection of Our Lord; six figures that are among the beautiful works by this illustrious master”. For a biography, reference is made to those that, at the time, Lochis considered to be other works by Mantegna in his collection.

A few years later, Sir Charles Eastlake (who was nominated president of the Royal Academy in 1850, and the first director of the National Gallery in London in 1855) saw the panel while visiting Bergamo. He gave a very positive opinion of it, stating: “Mantegna [...] Resurrection – genuine – a small part added on left side”. He was followed by Otto Mündler, an art historian and dealer, who noted that the “Mantegna, resurrection of Christ” was “most interesting”.

It was probably after receiving these favorable opinions that Lochis modified the entry in the new edition of the catalogue: “The Resurrection of Our Lord; painting of six figures that are among the most beautiful by this illustrious master”. The painting thus became one of the most beautiful works by Mantegna.

This opinion was, however, not shared shortly after by Giovanni Morelli (one of the most important art historians in Italy and another great donor of the Carrara collection: it was he who bequeathed the *Portrait of Lionello d'Este* by Pisanello), who mentions the painting in some handwritten notes as "... all ruined by restoration work". Shortly after, Morelli's doubts became explicit and the attribution to Mantegna less certain. The idea began to circulate that the painting was taken from an idea by the master, but actually made by someone else, and indeed in 1910 it was reproduced as a studio piece.

In 1912, the attribution went to Francesco Mantegna, Andrea's second-born son and pupil, but the hypothesis was ignored by Bernard Berenson, who in the 1930s introduced the idea (adding the letter "c" next to the painting) that it was to be classified among the "copies of lost works". The panel was considered as such from then on, and it was not even put on show in the display set up after the Second World War, remaining as a "copy" in the list.

From the late 1970s and in the 1980s, the suggestion that the work was by Mantegna's son became a certainty, even though in 1988 it was once again catalogued as a school work. It was as such that we also find it in Federico Zeri's photo library. Recently, the panel has mainly been considered as derived from an idea by Mantegna himself that has not come down to us in its original form, but only through copies. These include the panel in the Museo Civico in Padua and a print now in the Uffizi in Florence.

evidence and attribution

A little cross on the lower edge of the panel has at last solved this long and convoluted history of attributions, both real and alleged. Meticulous direct observation of the work has made it possible to recognize the high level of quality of this painting. This would, on its own, point to Mantegna himself but – as is the case with works and artists of such importance – it is still in need of certain proof.

A little cross on the lower edge, beneath the stone arch, could not have been without a continuation, and thus indicate that a portion of the painting is missing. Investigations were thus carried out to find a cut section and the hypothesis that the panel must have been taller has now been confirmed and is further proof of the attribution. Furthermore, the little cross is identical to the one on Christ's banner at the top. It is therefore highly likely that the panel really was very tall and narrow, and that there was space for another standing figure below. This figure would probably have been in Limbo, and thus presumably could only have been of Christ. After a series of comparisons, the continuity between the cross and the pole it is on (as well as the perfect correspondence in the powerful definition of the rocks of the arch, which begins in the upper panel and continues below) has made it possible to identify the lower half as *Christ's Descent into Limbo*, formerly in the Barbara Piasecka Johnson Collection in Princeton. The little cross is therefore the key and it can be concluded that the Accademia Carrara Resurrection is a painting by Andrea Mantegna himself.

dating

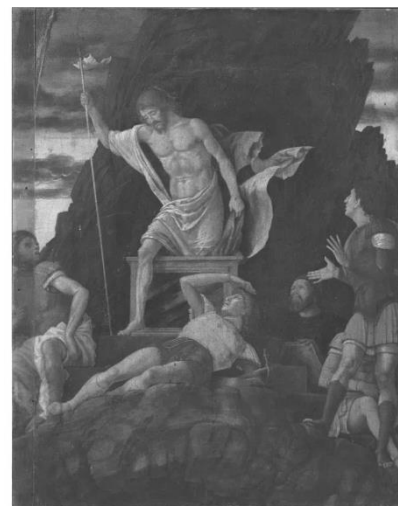
Christ's Descent into Limbo is a subject that appears a number of times in Mantegna's work, dating from the early 1490s. The panel appeared between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but there is little information about it until the exhibition at the Royal Academy in London in 1992. It is recorded in an auction at Sotheby's, thus with a change of ownership, in New York in 2003. Now, thanks to the dating of the lower part, and comparison with a copy now in Milan, the date of execution of the Resurrection of Christ is established as 1492-93.

iconography

It is very interesting to see that the iconography of this scene – which is superimposed on two levels in a single painting – existed at that time, for it is found in some rare examples in the German-speaking world. The most significant parallels can be seen in a remarkable panel, now in Frankfurt, which is attributed to an anonymous master in the circle of Lucas Cranach, dating from 1520-25. This work compares precisely to what must have been Mantegna's original, before it was cut into two parts. The similarity needs to be examined in greater detail, but it is further evidence of Mantegna's ties to the German-speaking world, especially in terms of his graphics. Any doubts may possibly be overcome by future restoration, which has so far been put off partly due to its likely complexity.



Resurrection of Christ by Andrea Mantegna, 1492-93, tempera and gold on wood, 48,5 x 37,5 cm, Bergamo, Accademia Carrara



reconstruction of the panel by Andrea Mantegna:
Resurrection of Christ and Christ's Descent into Limbo