

ANNIBALE CARRACCI  
(Bologna 1560 - Rome 1609)

The most famous member of the Carracci family, Annibale, together with his brother Agostino (1557 - 1602) and their cousin Lodovico (1555 - 1619), broke away from Mannerism and developed the naturalistic and classical strands of the Baroque style which were to pre-dominate in Italian painting in the 17th century. The Carracci worked in Bologna in the 1570s and 1580s, and their Academy, with its insistence on drawing from life, became the forming-ground for the new style. In 1595 Annibale left for Rome, where his 'grand style' - based on a study of Nature, the Antique, Raphael, and Michelangelo - is epitomised by his Assumption of the Virgin (1601) for the Cerasi Chapel in S. Maria del Popolo, and, above all, by the Farnese ceiling, painted between 1597 and 1604 for Cardinal Odoardo Farnese. His rare later works became increasingly austere and heroic in character, and were decisive elements in the formation of the severe classicism of Poussin and his followers; but his immediate influence, which operated in a more Baroque direction, was transmitted through the team of fellow-Emilians whom he had summoned to assist him in Rome - Albani, Domenichino, Reni, Badalocchio and Lanfranco.

Veronica

Oil on canvas

58 x 48

Stretcher inscribed: CCB

Various cloths bearing the miraculously implanted image of Christ's face have been venerated in the Christian world. The most famous of those in the West is the Mandyllion preserved in St. Peter's, veneration of which is supposed to have been instituted by the Greek Pope John VII (705-708). In the 13th century fresh impetus was given to its veneration by Roger Argenteuil, who supposed that the image of the Holy Face had appeared upon a sudarium given by St. Veronica (vera ikon = true image) to Christ to mop his sweat as he carried the Cross. After 1300 the logical step was thus increasingly frequently taken, of showing the head with a Crown of Thorns, such as Christ had had thrust on him in the Second Mocking, whilst the image itself (whether crowned or uncrowned) became known as a Veronica or "vernicle".

The devotional contemplation of Christ's Passion in late medieval mysticism made the thorn-crowned image of Christ's head particularly popular in Northern paintings and engravings, but it does not appear to have been until the 17th century that this image became common in Italy, where the traditional crownless and non-suffering image of the Mandyllion retained a greater hold. And even in the 17th century, the celebrity of replicas of the head of Reni's crucified

Christ prevented the suffering Veronica enjoying the popularity that it enjoyed in France - which was partly due to Mellan's celebrated engraving "d'un seul trait" - and Spain - where it was repeatedly painted by Zurbaran.

One of the earliest artists in Italy to paint the Veronica was Annibale Carracci. Malvasia (Felsina Pittrice<sup>1841 ed., I. 357</sup>) records "la testa di un Salvatore" in the Vigna Borghese, which was recorded in the Borghese collections by Marilli in 1650, but is now only represented by an inferior replica (Galleria Borghese: I Dipinti, ed. Paola della Pergola, vol. I (1955), cat. 13, pp. 19-20). Annibale also painted another Veronica - the present painting - which belonged to the Barberini. It is first recorded with an attribution to him in the inventory of Don Maffeo Barberini's possessions made around 1680 (cf. Marilyn Avonberg Lavin, Seventeenth-Century Barberini Documents and Inventories of Art, New York, 1975, Inv. VII, Alpha. 72+, p. 386, no. 582) as: "Una Testa di un Salvat.re Coronato di Spini alto p. mi 2 e larga 1½ con Cornice liscia Nera e Oro mano di Anibale Caracci", and recurs in the inventory of Cardinal Carlo's possessions drawn up in 1692 (op.cit., VI. inv. 92-04, p. 439, no. 273) as: "Un Salvatore in Tela da Testa Cornice nera, e oro opera del Caracci." But it seems fairly certain (although Lavin does not make the connection) that, it can be traced back to the earliest Barberini inventory, that of Cardinal Antonio of 1644 (op.cit., IV. inv. 44, p. 161, no. 70), as "Un quadro con un sudario di Cristo in tela bianca con suo cornice di ebano et suo anello di arg.o." The inventories also have other entries relating to paintings of the Volto Santo but none of them seem to refer to the present picture. The precious material of the frame (which has unfortunately since been replaced by another, albeit contemporary, one) shows both the esteem and the reverence in which the painting was held.

Hist: Cardinal Antonio Barberini, Palazzo delle Quattro Fontane, Rome  
Don Maffeo Barberini, Prince of Palestrina, *ibid.*  
Barbering family (by descent, until 1960s).