

## BIJUTSUSHI

*Journal of Japan Art History Society*

181, Vol. 66, No. 1, 2016, pp. 89–105

### **KURAMOCHI, Miki. *The Adoration of the Shepherds* by Poussin (London, National Gallery): A Consideration from the Viewpoint of the Work Made for Giovan Carlo de' Medici**

*The Adoration of the Shepherds* by Poussin represents a scene in which shepherds, who were summoned to the nativity of Jesus by an angel, come to adore the holy family at the site of some ruins. In the upper part of the painting, angels are scattering flowers to mark the celebration.

This work is thought to have been painted around 1633–1634 and first appeared in the inventory of Giovan Carlo de' Medici (2 August 1637), the brother of the then Grand Duke of Tuscany. For that reason, Humphrey Wine indicated that the shepherdess bringing a fruit basket on the left side of the painting had a connection with Florence; he also introduced the possibility that the woman was included so as to add the painting's appeal to Giovan Carlo. Wine noted, however, that this does not necessarily mean that the painter had such matters in mind when painting this work.

Drawing on this suggestion, this paper presents three new pieces of evidence that show the link between the painting and Giovan Carlo. First, it is noteworthy that as fruit is one of the attributes of 'Fiorenza', the personification of Florence, this motif symbolizes the affluence of the city. Second, research on the inventory of Giovan Carlo's villa reveals his fascination with flowers. Therefore, it can be pointed out that the angels offering flowers in the air are a motif that alludes to Giovan Carlo's taste. Third, some documents confirm that he had a relationship with Dal Pozzo, the patron of Poussin, and stayed in Rome in 1628. From the above examinations, this paper argues that the painting was commissioned by Giovan Carlo or by a nobleman living in Rome as a gift for Giovan Carlo.

Scholars have also indicated other characteristics of the painting, such as that it is rare for Poussin to use a vertical orientation and include a secondary scene in the background. Though these two features have not been investigated profoundly, the author provides a novel perspective in seeing these as devices that emphasize motifs that Giovan Carlo would have considered attractive. Focus should be directed to the fact that Poussin noticed a lean-to shed depicted in the woodcut *The Adoration of the Magi* (1511) by Dürer. By introducing this type of wooden architecture into his own work, Poussin constructed a three-dimensional space in which he distributed the scenes to depict a narrative. This method can be interpreted as a practice based on the advice of Leonardo da Vinci in *A Treatise On Painting* (Chapter: "Historical Subjects one above another on the same Wall to be avoided"), which shows a strong influence on Poussin at that time. In seventeenth-century paintings, the Nativity scene is often depicted in dark night. However, in line with Leonardo's recommendations, Poussin portrayed a continuous narrative with each scene in its appropriate setting. The background is presented as a night scene, while the foreground is under the light of day and contains the basket-carrying shepherdess and five angels holding flowers. The result is that he succeeded in making these motifs stand out brightly, making them worthy of detailed observations. In addition, Leonardo encouraged painters to paint angels in the air in order to make use of the upper part of the entire composition.

This paper aims to explain that the above-mentioned vertically-oriented print by Dürer offered a compositional scheme that allowed Poussin to introduce angels, and a motif of dedicating various flowers to satisfy Giovan Carlo who was known as an anthophile. From the above consideration, it can be proven that in the first half of the 1630s, the painter attempted to expand his market reach by building upon traditional subjects and tailoring the paintings to each specific customer.

THE JAPAN ART HISTORY SOCIETY

October 2016

All rights Reserved, Copyright © The Japan Art History Society