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A Rediscovered Drawing by Jean Boulanger (1608–c. 1680)

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The re-examination of a highly accomplished drawing depicting a *Holy Family with St John the Baptist* in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, has shed new light on the prolific French printmaker Jean Boulanger (fig. 302).¹ The son of the painter Olivier Boulanger, Jean was baptized in Troyes in Champagne on 24 January 1608, with the appointed godparents, and also painters, Jean Scavoix and Nicolas Verrat. This pattern was to be continued with the five children Jean had with Marie Judon: their godfathers were similarly painters, printmakers or engravers.² He had a colourful personality, judging by a receipt dated 17 March 1674 which records that he had paid Renée Masson 33 livres as compensation for a slap which she had received from the printmaker François Moreau on Boulanger's orders ('par ordre dudit Boulanger').³ First documented in Paris in 1645, Jean resided in the parish of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont – and was also the owner of an apartment in the Marais which he rented to a baker on 21 December 1648. He died in Amiens c. 1680 with his final work dated 1679.⁴ Jean is not to be confused with his cousin and namesake, also known as Giovanni Boulanger, who was born in Troyes in 1606 and died in Modena in 1660. Giovanni Boulanger left for Italy at a young age, where he later became court painter to the dukes of Modena, following a period of apprenticeship in the studio of Guido Reni in Bologna from c. 1628/30 until c. 1637.⁵

The drawing in question, executed in black chalk with white chalk heightening on cream paper, was attributed to an anonymous eighteenth-century Italian

artist by Hugh Macandrew in his catalogue of Italian drawings of 1980.⁶ However, the classicizing, academic aspect of the composition and the sophisticated treatment of the surfaces struck the present author as strongly reminiscent of Poussinesque models. Moreover, although Macandrew remarked upon the presence of stylus indentations along the outlines of the composition (fig. 303), he overlooked the red chalk rubbed onto the back of the sheet, probably because the drawing was attached to a secondary support at all four corners. The presence of the chalk and indentations indicate that the outlines were gone over with a stylus in order to transfer the image – probably onto a grounded plate in preparation for engraving.

In style and composition the drawing corresponds very closely to an engraving of the *Holy Family with St John the Baptist*, and when a tracing of its indented outlines was superimposed in reverse onto the engraving an almost perfect match was revealed (fig. 304).⁷ According to the inscriptions, the print was engraved by Jean Boulanger and published by François de Poilly I (1623–93). Inscribed in the lower right corner of the image is *FDe Poilly ex. / Cum privileg. Reg.*, along the lower margin *FDe Poilly ex. C. P. R. à Paris rue S.^t Jaques à l'Image S.^t Benoist. / JBoulanger Sculptit*, and in the centre *osculetur me osculo oris sui Can.1* (May he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth), the latter a quote from the first chapter of the Song of Solomon. The presence of the rue St Jaques address, where de Poilly resided from 1669 until his death, indicates a dating for the print.⁸ Considering

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1. R. A. Weigert, *Inventaire du fonds français. Graveurs du XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1951, II, pp. 1–51, especially pp. 1–2 for a brief biography and literature.
2. Documents du Fichier Laborde, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, manuscripts department, 7014–17.
3. Archives Nationales, Paris, Minutier central des notaires parisiens, XLIII–151.
4. Archives Nationales, Paris, Minutier central des notaires

parisiens, C–215.

5. For Giovanni Boulanger see A. Bigi Iotti, 'Per Jean Boulanger disegnatore', in *Modena barocca*, edited by S. Casciu, S. Cavicchioli and E. Fumagalli, Florence, 2013, pp. 163–72.
6. Inv. WA1863.987; H. Macandrew, *Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum: Italian School, supplement*, Oxford, 1980, IV, no. A379. The drawing forms part of Francis Douce's bequest to the Bodleian Library of 1834, transferred to the Ashmolean Museum in 1863.
7. British Museum, inv. U.1.76. On Boulanger's print see *De Durer a Warhol: les estampes dans les collections publiques du Jura*, edited by A. Dary et al., Dole, 2006, no. 3.
8. J. Lothe, *L'œuvre gravé de François et Nicolas de Poilly d'Abbeville, graveurs parisiens du XVII^e siècle: catalogue général*, Paris, 1994, p. 22.

that de Poilly published the print and was himself a competent engraver, one may ask whether he might also have been responsible for the drawing or the original composition behind the print. No drawings by

Poilly are known, and judging by his modest prints, this drawing would seem too accomplished to be by him. Furthermore, his figure types differ markedly from those in the *Holy Family* composition.



302. Here attributed to Jean Boulanger, *Holy Family with St John the Baptist*, 1669–80, black chalk, heightened with white chalk, squared for transfer, outlines indented, 400 x 358 mm (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum).

More plausible than de Poilly, the name of Noël Coypel (1628–1707) has been suggested as the designer.⁹ recall Coypel's painted *Holy Family with St Elizabeth and the Infant St John* at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in



303. Detail of fig. 302 seen in raking light.

Weigert, the first to propose this, may, however, have been doing no more than recording the traditional placement of the Bibliothèque Nationale's impression of the print. Admittedly, there are similarities with Coypel's work. The general orchestration of the motifs, although not the actual details, resemble his etching of 1664, *The Holy Family with St John the Baptist*, which was also published by de Poilly (it is inscribed at lower right, *F de poilly ex com* (sic, instead of *cum*) *Privil Regis 1664*; fig. 305).¹⁰ Furthermore, elements such as the elegantly coiffed Virgin and the physiognomy of St Joseph, with his thick head of hair, short beard and broad forehead,

Rennes, which was itself translated into engraving by Guillaume Chasteau (1635–83).¹¹ The peintre-graveur Coypel, however, proudly signed *N. Coypel in et sculp* at lower left of fig. 305, indicating that he was the cutter, but, significantly, also the inventor – information lacking on fig. 304. Like the Boulanger print, Coypel's etching pays homage to Raphael. Boulanger's composition appropriates the motif of the contemplative St Joseph from Raphael's painting known as *The Holy Family of Francis I*, now in the Louvre – one of the most imitated of Raphael's inventions – as well as the praying infant St John the Baptist. Coypel includes the same infant St

9. Weigert, op. cit., no. 43, as after 'Coypel'; D. Wildenstein, 'L'oeuvre gravé des Coypel', *Gazette des Beaux-arts*, LXIII, 1964, pp. 261–74, no. 11, as after Noël Coypel, with no reference to an original painting.

10. British Museum, inv. 1834,0804.310.

11. Inv. 94.2.3. For the Chasteau engraving see Wildenstein, op. cit., no. 12.



osculetur me osculo oris sui. (an. 1.)

304. Jean Boulanger, *Holy Family with St John the Baptist*, 1669–93, engraving, 445 x 365 mm (London, British Museum).

John the Baptist, but his figure of Joseph is closer to Raphael's *Madonna of Loreto*, the prime version of which

is at the Musée Condé in Chantilly.

No exact painted prototype has so far been identi-



N Coypel in et sculp

F de poilly ex com Privil Regis 1664

305. Noël Coypel, *Holy Family with St John the Baptist*, 1664, etching, 299 x 213 mm.



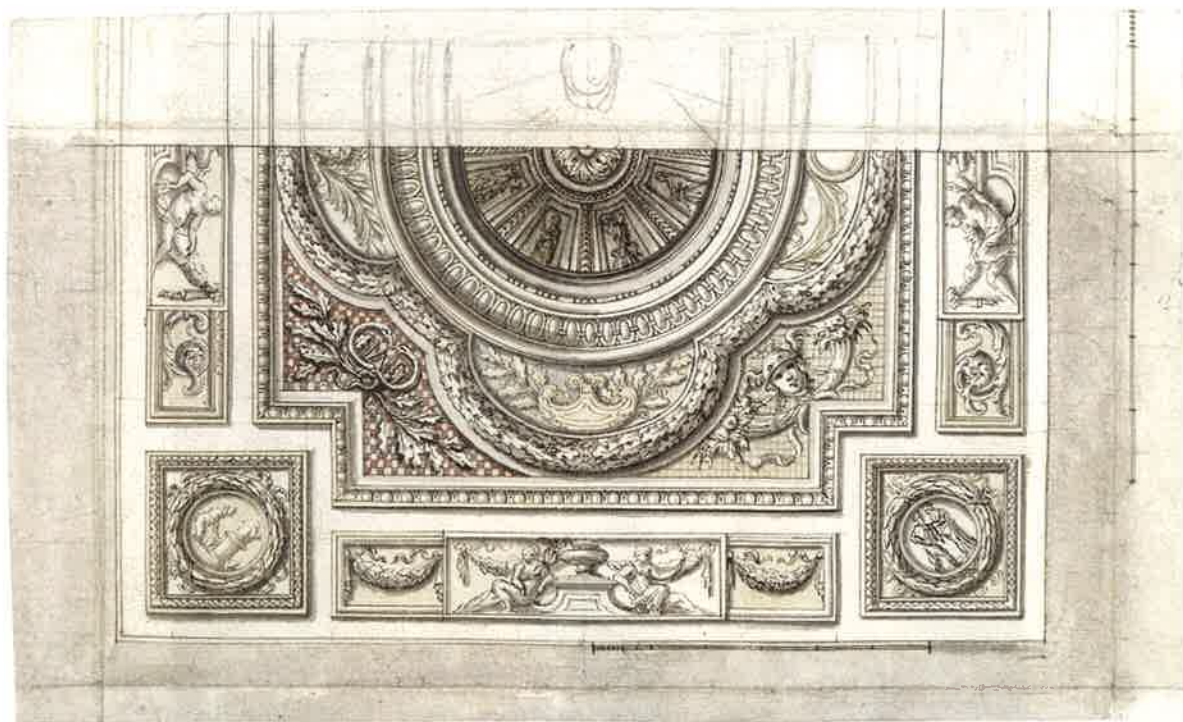
306. Anonymous British artist, *Holy Family with St John the Baptist*, eighteenth century, bodycolour, stippled, on vellum, laid on board, 174 x 133 mm (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum).

fied for fig. 304. On the other hand, there exists in the Ashmolean Museum a miniature painting on vellum identical to Boulanger's composition, except that the scene is set against a landscape rather than an interior and it is smaller in size (fig. 306).¹² This modest painting, attributed to an anonymous eighteenth-century British artist, may indicate the existence of a lost, or not yet identified, painted model after which both Boulanger and the anonymous painter worked.

In conclusion, both Coypel and de Poilly can safely be excluded as the inventors of the print engraved by Boulanger. The high degree of finish of the Ashmolean drawing, its near exact correspondence to the composition of the print and their remarkable closeness in style, strongly suggest that this is Boulanger's own drawing for the print rather than another master's modello. Little is known about Boulanger's training and life. He was extensively active as a reproductive engraver, with works

12. D. B. Brown, *Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum. The Earlier British Drawings: British Artists and Foreigners Work-*

ing in Britain born before c. 1775, Oxford, 1982, IV, no. 237: 'In a miniaturist technique; if a copy, no prototype has so far been identified'.



307. Jean Cotelle, *Design for a Ceiling*, pen and dark brown ink, with watercolour over graphite, 193 x 318 (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum).

by Raphael, Guido Reni and Parisian painters of the seventeenth century serving as models. Our knowledge of Boulanger's work as a printmaker still relies on Weigert's survey. He lists 352 prints. Apart from book-plates and frontispieces, where the dating can be deduced from the publication date of the book, the great majority of Boulanger's single-sheet engravings are undated. A systematic study of the artist's activity in the context of the publishing industry of the time would assist in establishing a chronology of his work, as well as clarifying some of the attributions put forward by Weigert. Five prints by Boulanger are listed by Weigert as published by de Poilly at the same address in Paris, but no date is given for any of these.¹³

Mariette, in his *Abecedario*, praised Boulanger highly for his ability to render subtle chiaroscuro effects

through a pattern of dense dots obtained by flicking the burin on the plate, in a manner akin to stipple engraving. The print here published represents a superb example of this technique. The squaring in light chalk of the preparatory drawing, which appears to be over the design rather than under it, probably served as an additional aid in the transposition of the highly detailed composition. An indication of the early reception of the Boulanger print can be seen in the work produced by the print workshop of Johannes Teyler (Nijmegen 1648–c.1709), which specialized in colourful prints inked *à la poupée*. Various details from Boulanger's engraving, such as the head of the Baptist and the motif of the Virgin kissing the Christ Child, recur in prints produced by Teyler's workshop. The prints are undated and unsigned.¹⁴ Boulanger's painterly image must have

13. Weigert, op. cit., II, nos. 11, 40, 43 (fig. 304) and 54 were published by de Poilly.

14. *Johannes Teyler and Followers* (working title). *The New Hollstein Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts (1450–1700)*, edited by S. Turner, compiled by A. Stijnman, forthcoming, list as in reverse after Boulanger's *Holy Family*, *Head of Boy*, attributed to Johan van den Aveele, etching inked *à la poupée*, 123 x 100 mm (trimmed), impression in Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-

1955-175 and *Mother and Child in a Roundel*, also attributed to Johan van den Aveele, etching inked *à la poupée*, plate 263 x 246 mm, diameter of roundel 192 mm, impressions in Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-1955-187 and RP-P-1939-904; Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Brunswick, JTeyler AB 3.3; Kupferstichkabinett Dresden, A126594; and British Museum, London, 1871,1209.5009. I thank Ad Stijnman for generously sharing this as yet unpublished information.



308. Jean Boulanger, after Jean Cotelle, *Design for a Ceiling*, plate 17 in Cotelle's *Livre de Divers Ornemens*, c. 1647, engraving, 146 x 270 mm (Oxford, Bodleian Library).

appeared particularly suitable to be translated in colour.

Jean Boulanger also engraved a group of ornament drawings by Jean Cotelle the Elder (1607–76), now in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum (figs. 307 and 308).¹⁵ The engravings were published in Paris c. 1647 under the title *Livre de divers ornemens pour plafonds, cintres surbaissés, galleries et autres de l'invention de Jean Cotelle, Peintre Ordinaire du Roy* (Book of various ornamental designs for ceilings, segmented arches, galleries and other [designs], invented by Jean Cotelle, Principal Painter in Ordinary to the King). For this publication Boulanger and de Poilly worked side by side as engravers, with Cotelle, a Parisian painter, identified as *inventor* on all the plates.¹⁶

The drawings form part of an album that predominantly contains sheets by or associated with Cotelle, assembled by the architect James Gibbs (1682–1754). Gibbs also owned a copy of the book of related engravings now at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.¹⁷ The Cotelle designs engraved by Boulanger differ from the rest of

the drawings in the album in that they have been pasted down onto the album pages, thus obscuring the versos, whereas the other drawings have been carefully inlaid. Transmitted light has, for the first time, revealed that with the exception of two sheets, all the versos of the drawings in the album preparatory for Cotelle's book have been rubbed with red chalk and the rectos indented. The indentations are often difficult to detect and hence the tracing with a stylus has previously been noted only for some of the drawings.¹⁸ Overlaying tracings of the drawings onto the related prints shows yet again a close correspondence, proving almost beyond doubt that this group of drawings was employed in the printmaking process.

The existence of a coherent group of preparatory drawings helped to ensure a uniform standard of quality for all the plates in the book, even though several printmakers were involved in making the engravings as careful analysis reveals. Among them, Boulanger emerges as a fine interpreter of Cotelle's drawings. The

15. Inv. WA1925.298.1 to 130; J. Whiteley, *Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum. French School*, Oxford, 2000, nos. 265–336.

16. For the prints see Weigert, *op. cit.*, nos. 328–38; P. Fuhring, *Ornament Prints in the Rijksmuseum II: the Seventeenth Century*, Rotterdam, 2004, II, nos. 8671–92. Lothe, *op. cit.*, nos. 20–22, which are the

title-page, frontispiece and plate 3.

17. Inv. Radcl. d.34.

18. WA1925.298.95 is reddened, but not traced, and significantly shows several differences from the print. WA1925.298.1 is the only one not in reverse to the print and not showing any signs of transfer; see Whiteley, *op. cit.*, no. 300.



309. Jean Boulanger after Jean Cotelle, *Detail of a Design for a Ceiling with a Roundel with a Scene of Sacrifice*, from plate 19 in Cotelle's *Liures de Divers Ornemens*, c. 1647, engraving (Oxford, Bodleian Library).

four plates, numbered sixteen through nineteen, signed by him as an engraver are among the most accomplished in their confident and deftly controlled handling of the burin (figs. 308 and 309). A different hand is, for instance, most clearly discernible in plates 9 and 10, executed with coarser and broader lines (fig. 310). Boulanger's images, more technically accomplished in the use of swelling parallel lines conveying volume and solidity, stand out for their crisp and elegant aspect. Such variation in style is not surprising, because the recourse to less established and therefore less expensive printmakers was common practice in order to meet the production costs of a project.

The two case studies presented here enhance our understanding of Jean Boulanger, but also demonstrate how the systematic use of analytical techniques and taking into account questions of working practice are revelatory when used in conjunction with discussions of style.¹⁹



310. Anonymous artist after Jean Cotelle, *Detail of a Design for a Ceiling with a Cupid Resting on a Volute*, from plate 9 in Cotelle's *Livre de Divers Ornemens*, c. 1647, engraving (Oxford, Bodleian Library).

19. On the question of the relationship of drawings to prints see also *Dessiner pour graver, graver pour dessiner, I*, edited by D. Cordellier, Paris, 2012, and *Dessiner pour graver, graver pour dessiner, II*, edited by D. Cordellier, Paris, 2013, reviewed in *Print Quarterly*, xxxii, December 2015, pp. 433–34.