“Portrait of an Infant Holding an Apple”, Gorhambury House, Herts.

A preliminary enquiry into its authenticity as a genuine portrait of Francis Bacon.

Among the magnificent collection of artworks on display at Gorhambury House near St Albans, there is a beautiful portrait of a baby boy. That the child in the picture is of noble birth is shown by the expensive slashed sleeves of his dark blue tunic, as well as by the two gold chains with dual lockets or pendants conspicuously draped around his shoulders. The boy’s unusually large cranium, the presence of the apple, a symbol of knowledge, and the gesture of his left hand touching his heart combine to convince us that this is no ordinary child. The portrait’s long association with the Bacon family’s country seat of Gorhambury has convinced many researchers that this is a portrait of none other than Sir Francis Bacon, anonymously painted in 1562-63.

One of the foremost living writers on the life and works of Francis Bacon, Peter Dawkins, has no doubt that the Gorhambury portrait is of Bacon as a child. He points out that, “Francis Bacon was known to have dark brown or hazel eyes and light brown or ginger hair, which this portrait shows.” Dawkins’ identification of the boy as Bacon is supported by another leading Baconian scholar, A Phoenix, who provides the following context:

> At Gorhambury House located on the (Grimston) family estate . . . there hangs on display a unique oil painting of Francis Bacon as a young child aged between one to two years old by an unknown artist. The oil painting was presumably commissioned by Sir Nicholas and Lady Anne Bacon (c. 1563) and it has very quietly passed down the descendants of the Bacon family during the last five centuries, overlooked by his orthodox editors and biographers. Its existence became known to a small number of Baconian scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, a few of whom reproduced it without providing any further commentary. It first received a detailed examination by Peter Dawkins in his work *Dedication to the Light* published by the Francis Bacon Research Trust in 1984, a work little known outside of Baconian circles. [A Phoenix, *The Pregnancy Portrait of Queen Elizabeth and the Secret Royal Birth of Francis Bacon, Concealed Author of the Shakespeare Works*, 2020]

If this is indeed a portrait of Francis Bacon, often referred to as the Father of the Modern World, it should be as well known and as widely reproduced as his other portraits, yet this is not the case. As one of the most intriguing and delightful pictures in the Gorhambury Art Collection of old masters, it deserves further investigation and wider appreciation.

Portrait of an infant thought to be Francis Bacon. Artist and date unknown. Oil on board, Gorhambury Estate, Hertfordshire

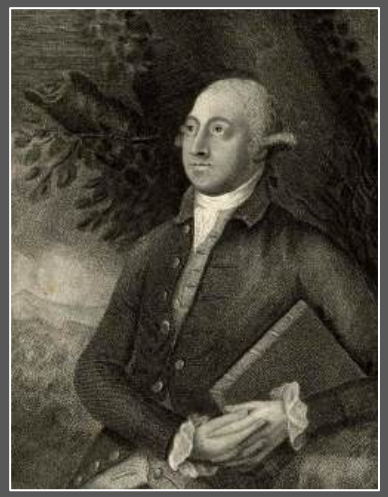
To date, no forensic work has been undertaken on the Gorhambury baby portrait in order to clearly determine its age. Is it earlier or later than 1562-63, when Francis Bacon was between one and two years of age? Similarly, the identity the artist who painted it remains a mystery.

What do historical records relating to Gorhambury and its art collection tell us about the portrait in question? In short, nothing. In his *Brief Lives*, John Aubrey makes no mention of having seen this portrait during his visit to Gorhambury House in the mid-1660s. Over a hundred years later, Thomas Pennant made an incomplete inventory of portraits he had seen during his tour of the property in the 1780s. If a painting of the famous Lord Chancellor as a baby was on display at the time, why would he not have referred to it? A more complete inventory of the art collection of Old Gorhambury was published by Lady Charlotte Grimston in 1821. That she would have failed to notice, or chosen not to mention, such a charming and intriguing portrait of a small child is hardly credible.

In late-Victorian England, a leading expert in the portraiture of Francis Bacon was Mrs Henry Pott, founder of The Francis Bacon Society. At a Baconian conference in March, 1893, she presented an illustrated lecture titled "The Portraits of Francis Bacon and of William Shakespeare." In her lecture notes preserved in *Baconiana** Mrs Pott makes no mention of the baby portrait at Gorhambury. However, we know from notes typed by Mrs Pott as talking points relating to her lantern slides that an image of the baby portrait was projected during her lecture.† Moreover, the note beside illustration 1A reads: "Bacon as a baby – from a portrait hanging in Gorhambury – now doubtful." No explanation is given, however, as to why there were reservations, presumably about the identitification of the sitter as Francis Bacon.

*[Vol. 1, New Series, May 1893, No. 1]
† Scans of Mrs Pott's 1893 slide lecture notes were kindly sent to me by the then President of The Francis Bacon Society, Susan McIlroy, in 2022.

John Aubrey (1626-96)



Thomas Pennant (1726-98)

Charlotte Grimston (1778-1830)

Constance Mary Pott (1833-1915)

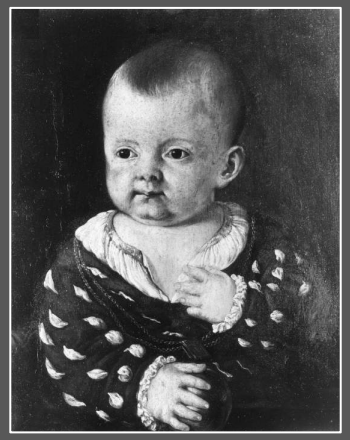
Gorhambury Estate

Private collection

Clark Art Institute

Royal Collection

Private Collection



Walters Art Museum

Fifty-five years ago, the National Portrait Gallery published a two-volume catalogue of *Tudor and Jacobean Portraits* conceived and written by the then director of the NPG, Dr Roy Strong. Although Francis Bacon's more familiar portraits are included in the catalogue, the baby portrait goes unmentioned. That one of the world's most authoritative experts in Elizabethan Art didn't include it in the NPG's major survey of English Renaissance portraits raises further questions about the picture's origins and the identity of the sitter.

During the nineteen-eighties, public knowledge about the portraits of Francis Bacon was advanced by two publications. In 1981, Jean Overton Fuller published "Sir Francis Bacon – a Biography" in which she devotes her second chapter to a personal survey of Bacon's contemporary portraits. An essential part of her research was her visit to Gorhambury House as a guest of the Grimston family, where she studied Francis Bacon's portraits at close quarters. Conspicuously absent from her account of the portraits on display at Gorhambury is the picture of the boy believed by many to be Francis Bacon. Is it not likely that she would at least mention such a singular portrait of the man she so admired, even if only to debunk it? The other publication, "Dedication to the Light" (1984) by Peter Dawkins, makes a strong case for identifying Francis Bacon as the sitter in the Gorhambury portrait, based on a study of the painting's symbolism.

Thus far, we have seen that the assumption that the sitter in the portrait is Francis Bacon is unsupported by available historical records. The question has been asked: Why, if this is a portrait of the great Sir Francis Bacon, has it been kept out of public view? We have also noted that a dendrological analysis to determine the picture's precise age has yet to be undertaken. Likewise, the question as to the artist's identity remains unaddressed.

Questions about the portrait only multiply when we examine the other versions that exist in major collections in England and the United States. Two other copies are in private hands and their location is unknown. Almost no information about any of these copies has come down to us today. This scholarly vacuum has led an amateur art enthusiast in Poland, Marcin Latka, to make what I believe to be an incorrect identification, which has been recently accepted as established fact by Wikipedia, and some auction houses and digital image providers. On the basis of the most tenuous of arguments, the subject in the portrait is claimed to be King Sigismund II Augustus of Poland. I hope to show that this identification is without any substance and amounts to wishful thinking on Latka's part. I return to this subject below.

First, however, we must examine and compare the six versions of the baby portrait in the light of the few facts that are known about them.

The first of the five portraits we shall examine can be dismissed immediately, on the ground that it cannot possibly be the original version. It was produced more than a hundred years after the other five portraits were executed. Nevertheless, this prettified Baroque variation of the baby portrait raises several important questions. What was a portrait of Francis Bacon as a baby, if that is who the subject is, doing in Rome, where this version seems to have originated? Who commissioned the artist to make a copy? From which earlier version of the portrait did the artist produce his romanticised copy?

In March 2023, the prestigious Parisian auction house Ader sold *Portrait ∂'un enfant tenant un fruit* to a private bidder for an undisclosed sum in the vicinity of two thousand euros. The auction catalogue lists the picture as "attributed to" Antonio Amorosi (1660-1738). This attribution is said to be supported by an old label attached to the back of the frame. A versatile Italian artist of the Baroque period, Amorosi painted portraits, frescos and altar pieces. Influenced by the work of the *bamboccianti* ("little babies") Amorosi found inspiration in ordinary people and scenes from day-to-day life in the back streets of Rome and its surrounding countryside as well as in the faces of little children.

> Amorosi trained in Rome in the studio of Giuseppe Ghezzi. While he produced portraits and religious works, he is best known for his genre paintings, which were influenced by a florid, late Baroque style and by the so-called *bambochadas*. His work reveals an interest in depicting everyday life and ordinary people, in particular the world of childhood, which he conveys in a tender, elegant and intimate manner.
> https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/amorosi-antonio

Portrait of a child holding a fruit stands out from Amorosi's numerous other paintings of small children due to the anachronistic style of clothing, which clearly belongs to the Northern Renaissance. In England, the aristocratic fashion for slashed sleeves came into vogue during the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I and continued into the first half of the seventeenth century.

The Amorosi portrait adheres to the template of the other five versions, while extending the tonal range and making the child appear older. The child's face and hands are less chubby. The face is fully lit. The colour scheme is richer and more in keeping with Baroque tastes. The fruit that the child is holding in his right hand looks more like a peach or an orange than an apple. The diamond-shaped pendant on the chains around the boy's neck is unique to this version.

Portrait of a child holding a fruit Attributed to Antonio Amorosi, Late-17th - early-18th century, oil on canvas, 48.2 cm x 37.5. Private collection

https://www.ader-paris.fr/en/lot/137169/20852300-attributed-to-antonio-amorosi-1660-1738-portrait-of-a-child

Located in Williamstown, Massachusetts, the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute is home to a large collection of American and European masterpieces, mainly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

One of the earliest oil paintings in the Clark Institute's collection is a version of the Gorhambury baby portrait, catalogued as dating from the sixteenth century and possibly of German origin. No further information about the picture is provided on the institute's website.

The first thing one notices is how faithful the Clark's version of the baby portrait is to the Gorhambury estate's version. The differences between the two portraits are so minimal that the same master drawing must have been used to pounce the outlines of the figure onto both canvasses.

> Artists often used a pin, needle, or other sharp implement to prick holes into drawings, in order to transfer that drawing onto another substrate. . . The artist transferred the pricked drawing onto the prepared timber support or canvas using a pounce, or fabric pouch filled with charcoal dust. We call this technique "pouncing." The dust would seep through the fabric and pass through the holes pricked into the drawing, leaving dotted lines behind on the prepared substrate.
> Cynthia Houng, *Old Master Drawings – Pricking and Pouncing*, 2022.
> https://itmightbeart.org/2022/05/16/old-master-drawings-pricking-and-pouncing/

Although the low resolution of the images of the baby portraits makes it difficult to compare them, there is sufficient clarity to make out subtle details that are unique to the Clark Art Institute's version of the picture. The child's shoulders, torso and hands have been lowered. The boy's embroidered shirt collar is more precisely painted. The left ear has been enlarged. The upper lip is more prominent in the Clark version.

In addition, in the Gorhambury version of the portrait, three embossed figures are just visible on the face of the upper pendant. The pendant in the Clark's portrait appears to have been rendered somewhat generically, thereby eliminating any symbolic significance that the object may have once had. More about the pendant must be said once we have examined all six portraits of the mysterious baby boy.

An Infant Holding an Apple,
Artist unknown, 16th Century, German School
oil on panel. 16 9/16 x 12 5/16 in. (42 x 31.2 cm.)
Clark Art Institute, 1955.945
Purchased before 1955

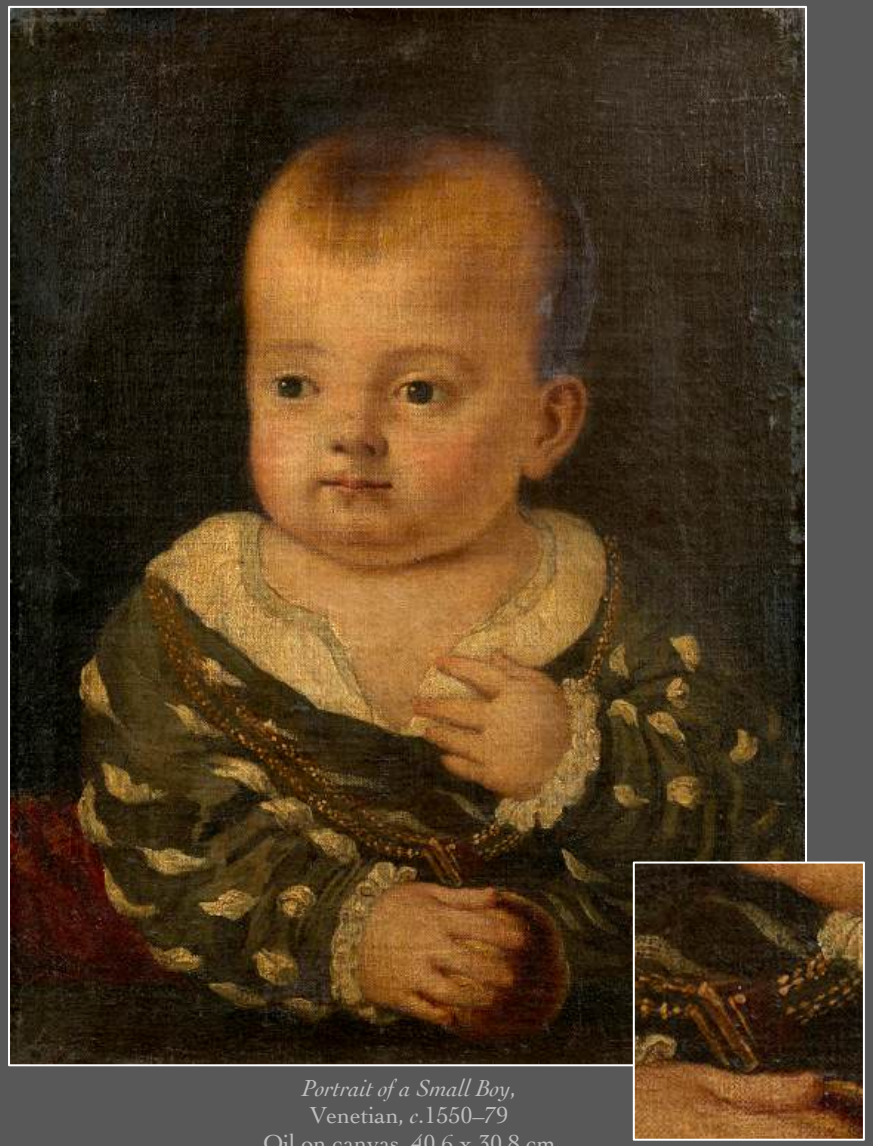
Another version of the Gorhambury baby portrait became the property of the British crown at the start of the Victorian era, and is part of the Royal Collection, the largest private art collection in the world. Franz August Karl Albert Emanuel, otherwise known as Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, is said to have acquired the picture at the age of nineteen while visiting Rome in March-April 1839, less than twelve months before he married the queen of England. The portrait was sold to the prince as a genuine work by the Venetian artist of the late-Renaissance, Paolo Veronese [1528–88]. A Victorian watercolour painting by James Roberts documented *Portrait of a Small Boy* on display in the Prince Consort's private rooms at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight in 1851.

The Royal Collection's version of the baby portrait closely conforms to the same compositional pattern as the Gorhambury and Clark Art Institute's portraits. The same pin-pricked master drawing on vellum, or a duplicate of it, must have been applied to the primed substrate which, in this case, was canvas. The paint is not as built up as in the other copies, which are painted on timber support panels.

There are several other differences between this version and the others. The colour of the child's garment with the slashed sleeves is not the same as in the Gorhambury portrait. In comparison with the latter picture, the size of the infant's head in proportion to the body has been noticeably reduced. The entire figure has been rotated slightly in an anti-clockwise direction, raising the height of the boy's left shoulder and ear. Thus, the posture of the subject in the Royal Collection portrait is more upright than in the other versions. Also, the image on the upper face of the child's pendant appears to have been either concealed by shadow or overpainted.

These distinctions are not sufficient evidence on which to base any opinion as to which of the remaining five portraits may be the original and which are copies. Only scientific analysis can reveal which is the earliest of the five portraits.

The Royal Collection's *Portrait of a Small Boy* is no longer regarded as the work of Paolo Veronese, but is catalogued as being of Italian origin and dating from the sixteenth century.



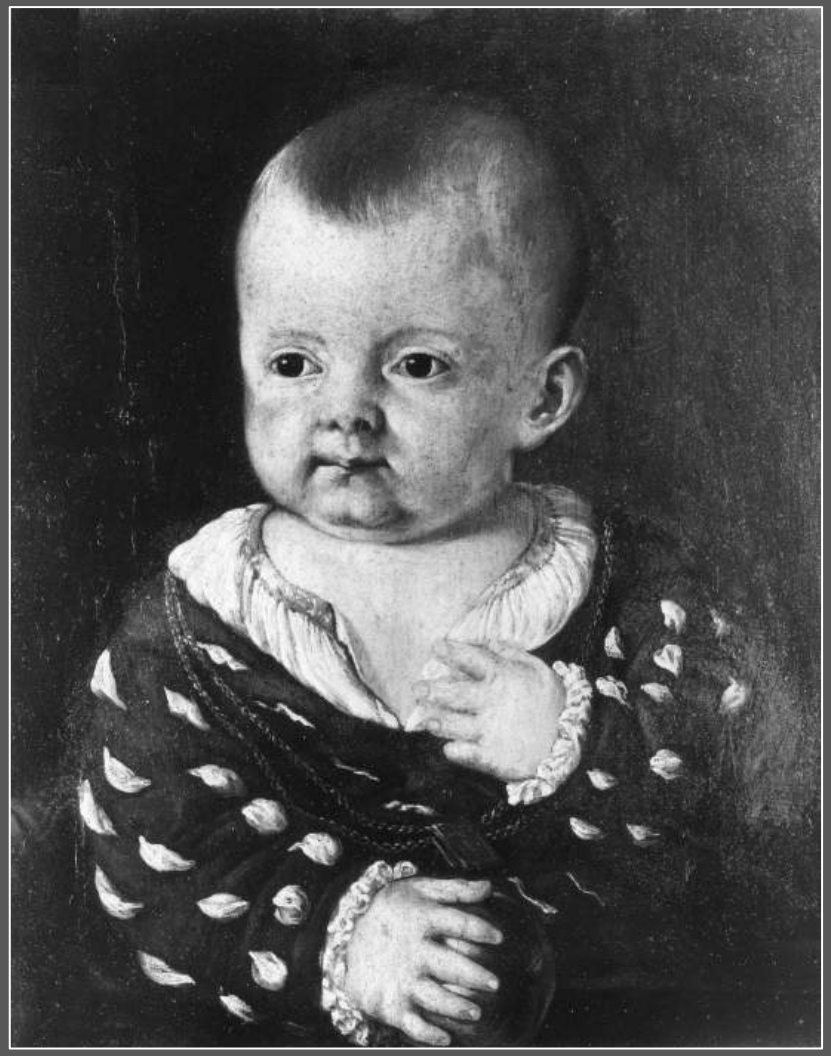
Portrait of a Small Boy,
Venetian, *c*.1550–79
Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 30.8 cm
Royal Collection, RCIN 406402
https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/26/collection/406402/portrait-of-a-small-boy

In 1947, a fourth variation of the Gorhambury baby portrait was donated to the Walters Art Museum by Mrs. Frances Eaton Weld. The date assigned to the portrait by the Walters is c.1600. Without a forensic investigation of the age of the picture's timber supports, any attempt to date it can only be approximate. Going only by the boy's slashed sleeved tunic, the picture could have been painted anytime during the Tudor period. As to its country of origin, the museum has catalogued the portrait as Italian without providing any evidence or explanation,

Although the only image we have of the Walters portrait is in black and white, it is still possible to discern several slight alterations made by its anonymous artist that distinguish it from the other versions. By superimposing the Walters' copy on top of the Gorhambury portrait, taking care to align the eyes of both images, only minimal displacement can be detected. Once again, these subtle distinguishing features do not constitute a claim of precedence or originality.

The proportions of the head and body appear to be similar in both portraits. However, in the Walters' version, the boy's forehead has been enlarged; his right shoulder has been lowered, changing the position of the hand holding the apple. The embroidery on the shirt collar is more defined, while more of the child's chest is exposed. The chains in both paintings closely follow the same lines, however, in the museum's copy, the surface of the gold pendant is obscured by shadow.

This investigation suggests that, of all the versions we have seen, the Walters Art Museum's copy is the closest to the Gorhambury painting in terms of proportions, positioning and fidelity to fine detail. A high-resolution reproduction in colour of *Portrait of an Infant Holding an Apple* may confirm this, but only science could determine whether or not both pictures were painted by the same hand.



Portrait of an Infant Boy Holding an Apple
Artist unknown, Italian, late-16th century
Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, USA
oil on panel, H: 15 3/4 x W: 12 1/2 in. (40 x 31.7 cm)
https://art.thewalters.org/detail/9998/bust-of-a-baby-boy-holding-an-apple/

In October 2006, another version of the baby portrait was sold by Christie's in New York for $8,400, three or four times its estimated value. Although the name of the artist who painted this copy is unknown, the picture was catalogued as being the work of a follower of the Florentine Mannerist painter Bronzino, otherwise known as Agnolo di Cosimo (1503–72).

This designation of the portrait as being in the style of Bronzino is difficult to reconcile with the image we see to the right. Much more Renaissance than Mannerist in style and clothing, the picture sold by Christie's in 2006 exhibits none of the stylish formality we find in Bronzino's portraits. At this early stage of investigation, any reference to Bronzino in relation to this version of the baby portrait may be misleading. Where is the proof that it was painted in Italy? Perhaps it would be more accurate to attribute the Christie's portrait simply as "anonymous".

Comparing this version with the Gorhambury portrait, the child's head in the Christie's picture has been reduced in size. The shoulders and hands have also been lowered slightly in the frame. The gold pendant that the child is wearing does not appear to have distinct designs embossed on it, but the quality of the only available image of it is too poor to be certain. However, based on the premise that the image on the pendant in the Gorhambury portrait is of symbolic significance and may have a bearing on the identity of the subject, the loss or degradation of this detail in the other variations of the portrait could be an indication that they are copies, and not the original.

The Christie's portrait bears some resemblance to the Royal Collection's version of the picture, in that the proportions closely align and the dark olive colour of the boy's shirt is similar in both pictures. The main difference is that the Royal Collection's copy is painted on canvas, which enabled the artist to render the boy's features with a greater delicacy of brushwork.

The visible damage to the Christie's picture is due to the warping and expansion of the timber supports over the last four and a half centuries. Restoration by its current anonymous owner would seem to be urgently required.

Portrait of a boy, seated bust-length,
in a grey coat, holding a ball
Manner of Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572)
oil on panel, 15 5/8 x 12¼ in. (39.7 x 31.1 cm.)
https://www.christies.com/lot/manner-of-agnolo-bronzino-monticelli-1503-1572-florence-4788588?intObjectID=4788588&lid=1

The first thing to observe about the Gorhambury portrait is that the figure's right arm and hand have been partially severed by the frame. Perhaps the picture was cut down at some point in its long history. A more likely explanation for the awkwardness of the composition, however, is that the digital image of the portrait has been over-zealously cropped.

Turning to the figure itself, the child in the Gorhambury painting has the largest head of all the versions. The face is fuller and the eyes are larger. Far from being an exaggeration on the part of the unknown artist, the proportion of the boy's head in relation to his body, roughly a quarter of his body length, is anatomically normal for a child less than eighteen months old. Well known London-based art dealer, Philip Mould, who specialises in sixteenth and seventeenth century English portraiture, has noted how unusual it is for babies to be depicted accurately in paintings from the Tudor period. "English sixteenth century portraits of children are rare, and when they were portrayed the child's maturity was often exaggerated." That the proportions of the child's body are more accurately portrayed in the Gorhambury portrait is an indication that it may have been sketched directly from life. In the future, infrared reflectography may confirm this by exposing the artist's original preparatory drawing beneath the paint's surface. Should it be the case that the artist has made various corrections to the under-drawing, it would add weight to the claim that this may be the original version of the painting. This tentative conclusion is supported by the impression that the painter of the Gorhambury portrait has captured more than just a physical resemblance of a child. There is a look of calm attention in the boy's face, as if engrossed in something outside the frame. The *presence* of the infant is more palpable in this version of the portrait than in the others.

Perhaps the most revealing feature of the portrait are the two gold pendants suspended on a double chain between both hands. Only in the Gorhambury version are the three relief figures visible on the upper pendant. We know that coded information in the form of visual allegories was a commonly practiced form of communication in the sixteenth century. The fact that the picture on the pendant is clearly visible only in the Gorhambury version of the picture is another indication that it may have been painted from life and may be the prototype of the others. We will return to this question at the conclusion of this enquiry.

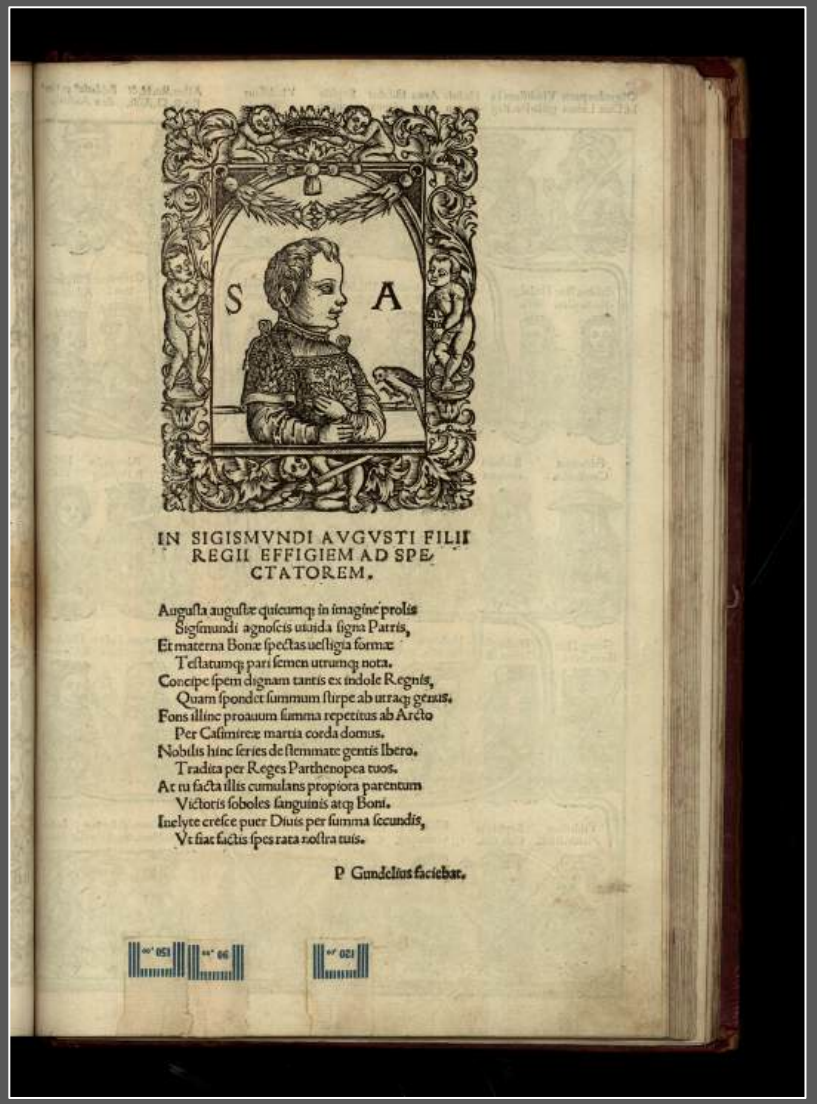
Portrait of Francis Bacon as a Baby
Artist unknown, c.1562.
Gorhambury Estate, St Albans, Hertfordshire
Oil on board, dimensions unknown (image cropped)

We must now deal with a problem that has only recently arisen concerning the identification of the infant portrayed in all six versions of the picture.

The ever-expanding internet presents everyone who publishes research online, including art historians, with a choice: to adhere to the facts of the matter or to invent them to suit one's agenda. Art historians are bound to honour the records on which their work is based. Amateur art enthusiasts with no institution behind them, however, may be tempted to give their imaginations free reign.

One such enthusiast is Marcin Latka. To his credit, this enterprising young art lover has done much in the way of providing worldwide access to many thousands of digital images of Polish paintings, both ancient and modern, across all genres.

Unfortunately, this commendable public service is marred by unsupported speculation. In his huge inventory of Polish art works, Latka briefly lists the six baby portraits, but instead of adhering to attributions made by the various institutional owners, Latka makes the extraordinary claim that all the versions, with the exception of one by Amorosi, were produced around 1521. Without presenting a shred of corroborating evidence, he tells us that a 1521 engraving of the future king of Poland, Sigismund Augustus, made when he was one year old, is the prototype from which all six versions of the portrait are derived. On the basis of this dubious claim, in less than two pages, Latka spins an unconvincing web of suppositions and postulations that are collectively misleading. He concludes: "The hypothesis that Holbein's workshop in Basel, Flemish, Venetian and Florentine painters received a drawing of a royal child from Krakow to copy is very probable. The fact that the portraits were created by different workshops is another indicator that they were commissioned by the multicultural Jagiellonian court." This appropriation of the identity of the subject of the baby portraits is all the more misleading online, due to the limited scholarly attention that has so far been brought to bear on this intriguing group of sixteenth century paintings.



Sigismund Augustus. 'Jodocus Ludovicus Decius, 'De Iagellonum familia liber II', 1521.

Apart from the position of the hands in the engraving being vaguely similar to the pose in the six variations of the baby portrait, the printed image doesn't resemble the oil paintings in any way. The head of the engraved portrait is in profile; neither fruit nor pendant is anywhere to be seen; the costume the child is wearing in the print could not be more different from the garments represented in the oil paintings. In short, on the evidence provided, there are no visible grounds for the identification of the subject of the baby portraits as Sigismund Augustus.

Latka confidently assigns the date of 1521, or thereabouts, to all six baby pictures partly based a portrait of the Dauphin Francis II (1518-c.1536) by Jean Clouet, despite the fact that it is thought to have been painted in 1525. Clouet portrays the future king of France wearing a slashed yellow shirt. In the six versions of the baby portrait, as we have seen, the child's outer garment is also fashionably slashed. This is the only feature that the portrait of Francis II as a baby and the Gorhambury type portraits have in common. It would seem, therefore, that Mr Latka's conviction that the child in the six portraits is Poland-Lithuania's great Renaissance king Sigismund Augustus amounts to little more than wishful thinking.

A more appropriate painting to compare with the baby portraits is a recently uncovered variation of the Badminton portrait of Elizabeth I, [c. 1562–63]. It shows the queen early in her long reign wearing a full-length coat with sleeves slashed in much the same pattern as the young boy's sleeves in the Gorhambury painting. The Badminton portrait was painted when Francis Bacon, who was born on January 22, 1561, was between one and two years of age, the same age as the infant in the six variations we have looked at.

In his book, *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (1963), Roy Strong, identified a group of as many as twelve extant standardised and official portraits of Queen Elizabeth I, including the Badminton portrait, as the 'Barrington type.' According to Strong, all the portraits in this group were derived from the same set of master drawings, in accordance with Elizabeth's 1563 decree that all representations of her had to conform with strict, pre-established guidelines.

Sigismund II Augustus, c.1521

Francis II, by Jean Clouet, c. 1525

The Badminton portrait of Elizabeth I, c. 1562-63

Recently discovered variation of the Badminton portrait of Elizabeth I, c. 1564

The most significant of the Barrington type portraits is the Hampton portrait, which was painted in 1567. Originally attributed to Steven van der Muelen, it is now believed to have been painted by George Gower. Here the queen wears a similar slashed garment, but it is red rather than black. The Hampton portrait, which presents Elizabeth surrounded by symbols of fertility and tokens of love, is the crowning glory of the Barrington type.

By the early-1560s, slashed clothing had reached the height of fashion among the aristocracy, as can be seen in the earliest-known portrait of the queen's favourite Robert Dudley. Attributed to Steven van der Meulen's workshop, it is said to have been painted when the Earl of Leicester was twenty-eight [1560–61]. It was at this time that secret correspondence between the court of Philip II and the Spanish ambassador to the English court, Álvaro de la Quadra, was preoccupied with news of the love affair between Elizabeth and Robert Dudley.

> Rumours became worse and worse in England, culminating in the Spanish Ambassador's sending a report to his king openly stating that: "The Queen is expecting a childe by Dudley." By November 1560, it was rumoured that Elizabeth and Dudley had been married in the Chapel at Wilton Place, the Earl of Pembroke's residence. In January the Spanish dispatch repeated this rumour of a secret marriage, adding that it was performed "before witnesses at the house of Lord Pembroke. ["Jon Benson, *All Is Not Gold That Glisters*", *Baconiana*, 1978, Vol. XLI, No. 178, p. 52]

Is it possible that the original portrait of an infant holding an apple was painted in the early-1560s and could it be of English origin? These questions could be answered relatively easily by determining what timbers were used in the construction of the Gorhambury picture's support panel. If they are of walnut or fruit woods, it would suggest that the work is of Continental origin. But if they are of English or French oak, then the portrait is almost certainly English. Once this is established, it is then a matter of dating the picture through dendrological laboratory analysis.

* French Baconian researcher Yann le Merlus pointed out the similarities between the queen's outfit and the child's tunic on the SirBacon.org research forum in March 2022.

(Detail) The Hampton Portrait of Elizabeth I, c. 1567

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, c. 1560-1564, Wallace Collection

Details of slashed sleeves in the Barrington type portraits (left) and in the Gorhambury baby portrait (right).

As far as we know, Francis Bacon never wrote a memoir as such. He seems to have viewed writing as *medicine* for humankind. He certainly never committed to paper anything related to any of the sixteen or so portraits that he seems to have commissioned during his lifetime. It isn't surprising, therefore, that he makes no mention of the baby portrait in any of the literary works he left behind. Francis Bacon's assiduous biographer James Spedding made no mention of the Gorhambury baby portrait in his magnum opus on Bacon's life and works, which leads one to question whether he was aware of it or not.

A fog of historical uncertainty continues to surround the multiple versions of this rare portrait of an Elizabethan baby. One of the goals of this presentation is to bring this unresolved issue to the attention of the relevant custodians of four of the six variations: the Royal Collection Trust, the Clark Art Institute, the Walters Art Museum and the Gorhambury estate. Only by sharing their considerable cultural and technical resources can there be any hope of uncovering the identify of the mysterious child depicted in the portraits.

Questions that remain to be answered include, which is the oldest of the four variants? Are any of the versions English in origin, or do they derive from the Continent? Under X-ray examination, are there any signs of *pentimenti* or over-painting? When was the Gorhambury portrait acquired by the estate? Above all, who was this baby boy, who was of sufficiently-noble birth to warrant five known copies to be commissioned by various artists?

Until a collaborative study of the various versions of the baby portrait can be undertaken, speculation may contribute to the confusion that already surrounds these six paintings. Nevertheless, a few observations can be made based on the findings of this report.

Detail of the ornate gilded frame selected by Prince Albert for the portrait he purchased in Rome in 1839. Phot credit: Victoria and Albert Museum

It cannot be denied that the six portraits that we have briefly examined are inextricably linked by their pictorial composition, along with the child's features, gestures and the clothes he wears. This assessment is supported by digitally superimposing each of the other versions on the Gorhambury portrait, revealing only slight displacements in each case. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that a common set of master drawings on perforated vellum could have been used by different artists as the basis of their individual reproductions of the baby portrait. This excludes Amorosi's Baroque version, which is of little help in identifying either the sitter or the origins of the others in the series.

However, until further dendrological (tree-ring) analysis has been conducted, possible clues to their respective dates and countries of origin must remain unknown. In addition, photomicrographic analysis could reveal subtle differences in the application of brushstrokes and other idiosyncratic artistic techniques in each version of the baby portrait. Analysis of the latter kind may allow researchers to determine whether two or more of the portraits are by the same artist. Infrared reflectography analysis would allow scientists to see the original underdrawings and any changes to the composition made during execution. The presence of heavy underdrawing and corrections to the composition might constitute evidence as to which, if any, of the versions is the original.

By establishing which, if any, of the of the baby portraits is based upon drawings made of the subject himself or painted from life, the primacy and, therefore, the authenticity of one of the versions would be revealed.

We have already seen that the Gorhambury estate version of the portrait has several features that distinguish it from the others.

[1.] The ratio of head height to body length proportions in an infant less than two years old is represented most convincingly in the Gorhambury estate's version. In the other versions of the portrait the size of the head has been reduced. As we have already noted, this could be an indication that the portrait belonging to the Right Honourable Earl of Verulam, John Grimston of Gorhambury, was drawn and painted from direct observation.

[2.] We have also noted that in the Gorhambury portrait the boy exhibits a freshness of expression, even an awareness, further suggesting that this version was produced from an original drawing of a living child.

[3.] Another distinctive feature of the Gorhambury portrait is the detail of the imprint on the upper face of the gold pendant suspended between the boy's hands. Close examination of this detail made possible by high-resolution photography could assist in the identification of the sitter. Be that as it may, the fact that the image on the pendant is displayed most clearly in the Gorhambury estate's version of the portrait is significant in and of itself.

In summary, we have several good reasons to infer that the Gorhambury portrait may have been the progenitor of the five other versions. However, without scientific studies of the portraits, this tentative inference remains unprovable and this unique group of sixteenth-century portraits must continue to remain a baffling mystery.

If an investigation were to proceed, holding institutions would benefit from shared resources and knowledge, while art lovers may gain a better appreciation of this series of depictions of a sixteenth century child of noble birth. Above all, a scientific investigation of the various versions of the portrait could potentially make an important contribution to the study of Elizabethan portraiture and to biographical studies of Francis Bacon.

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