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Nicholas Hilliard's trip to France (1576-1579) and its consequences on his work A holistic approach

This thesis is the result of more than two years of research. It is a two-parts research with a study of 167 pages and a comprehensive catalogue of Nicholas Hilliard's work, the first in French, of 273 numbers. The study is currently only available in French.

The study

Nicholas Hilliard's trip to France has regularly been boiled down to a no-consequence phase of his career by most of the specialists and scholars. However, sources and preserved works of art tell us another story : this period was indeed prolific and meaningful for the rest of his life. Although very few works of art are kept, circa twenty compared with the more than 200 authentic and attributed pieces, they are proofs of the plurality of his artistic production and the signs of the apex of his career thanks to the protection of the Valois court and most notably, thanks to the patronage of the French king's brother, the duke of Alençon.

Main issue

Through the renewed analysis of the available and discovered archival and iconographical sources, this thesis had for main issue to discuss the consequences of Hilliard's stay in France and the importance of it. To a lesser extent, it also questions Hilliard's part in the renewal of portrait miniatures production in France in the late sixteenth century.

Method :

Our intentional holistic approach aimed at analyzing Hilliard's trip to Paris in a global way, questioning on both Hilliard's artistic career and human path into French society. His relationships with the French court while maintaining strings in the English embassy and court have been studied in the light of the diplomatic sources ; most of them already published. Hilliard's place in the cosmopolitan French cultural sphere has also been analyzed : his tidings with the court and Parisian artists and scholars, but also his issues as a foreign and protestant goldsmith in a catholic and chauvinistic city like Paris have been developed. Hilliard's works of art have been compared with signifying French contemporary productions. Finally, some more technical elements on Hilliard's way and means of painting have been non-exhaustively added.

Results :

Nicholas Hilliard is on his way to France most certainly with the new English ambassador, Sir Amyas Paulet, in September 1576. He then arrives at the French court in Paris on October 3rd when he meets the king. He also finally meets his patron, the duke of Alençon, probably on November 9th when the duke is finally in Paris. His position in the duke's retinue is already settled as he is supposed to have been paid 600 *livres* on the 5th of August of the same year as tell us the *Mémoires du duc de Nevers*. He becomes the duke of Alençon's *valet de garde-robe*, then *valet de chambre* in 1577. His employment ends towards March 1578.

His knowledge of the French language and court *étiquette* gives him quick access to the court and some of the most renowned artists and scholars of this time : the French poet Ronsard as he says so in his treatise, *The Arte of Limning*, but also George de Ghent, painter to the queen Louise de Lorraine, and Herman Mezebrinck, flemish goldsmith settled in Paris and working for the king, among others. In 1577, he shares his charge as *valet de chambre* with the architect and draughtsman Jacques Androuet du Cerceau with whom he probably becomes acquainted with the use of perspective.

Few pieces have been kept from this period and most of them are linked with his presence at the French court : one portrait of the duke of Alençon (Kunshistoriches Museum, Vienna), one of King Henri III (private collection) but also two engraved portraits of the duke

and duchess of Nevers (National French Library). A portrait said-to-be Marguerite de Valois, queen of Navarre and first wife of later King Henri IV, proves that he regularly worked at the French court and has been commissioned many other portraits. His presence shows a renewed taste for portrait miniatures that had been quite extinguished since royal portraitist François Clouet's death in 1572.

Other pieces show that Hilliard also had an town production, certainly painted inside the workshop he settled in Saint-Germain des Prés, close to the Parisian walls : a self-portrait and two other likenesses of his father Richard and wife Alice (V&A), and five anonymous portraits are known.

On another hand, Hilliard preserves his friendships with the English embassy and court, as may testify the conservation of the portrait of Francis Bacon (NPG), the new discovery of two large paintings of Queen Elizabeth I and her ambassador Sir Amyas Paulet (Waddesdon Manor), as well as the knowledge of a jewel's commission from his long-time patron, the earl of Hertford, thanks to letters preserved in the National Archives.

Nicholas Hilliard comes back to England between the end of November 1578 and February 1579. A boat bringing the Sieur de Simiers, charged with the preparations of the duke of Alençon's trip to England, ashores on January the 3rd 1579. The artist may have arrived with this same boat. Early October of this same year, a second child is born in the Hilliard family.

Consequently, all these elements match with another tale of Hilliard's life and career : he was indeed an appreciated and rewarded artist of the French court, up to the highest level with the patronage of the French royal family, and then, by courtly mimetism, a fashionable painter in the Parisian society. The knowledge of so few pieces may be justified by their presence into French private collections, and probably a lot of them disappeared throughout the unrelenting French society evolution.

This brilliant period of his career opens up on a phase of apogee when the goldsmith is everywhere between court and town. He takes on several apprentices, of whom Isaac Olivier circa 1580, who will become his biggest rival, and is directing a flourishing workshop in London. The works he paints give us a clue of the subtle and digested French influence, confirming Hilliard's genius as an artist. This influence merges with the strong Flemish artistic presence who has always been predominant in the English cultural environment since at least the fifteenth century. These influences have particularly been exemplified in his goldsmith

production, thanks to the analysis of the very few original cases that are preserved today. With the circulation of European patterns thanks to the development of printing, these pieces show the influence of Baptiste Pellerin, Etienne Delaune and Jacques Androuet du Cerceau among others, but also of Flemish goldsmiths works, through the model of the case, but also in the ornament of the enamelled reverses.

Besides, some of his cabinet miniatures show a strong affiliation with the now stereotyped French full-length portraiture which has been settled by François Clouet, and can be more generally linked with European full-length portraiture, and be seen as its evolution. This stereotype is then adjusted to the Elizabethan symbolism and courtly production. Finally, our study ends with the analysis of Hilliard's way of painting landscapes and their fonctions, throughout the most famous *Young man among roses* (V&A) and his other masterpieces. There too can be seen a joint influence of French and Flemish art.

All these influences, of which the artist gives us some names in his treatise — like Rosso Fiorentino, active in Paris between 1530 and 1540, Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein — give us the portrayal of an educated and accomplished artist. He looked at his contemporaries' production and picked up the useful elements he needed to offer to the Renaissance English society a portrait that appeals to them, meticulous, clean and precious, aiming for his heart's ambitions : « fittest for the decking of princes bookes or to put in Ieuuells of gould ».

The comprehensive catalogue

The catalogue is thematically and chronologically constructed, as did Erna Auerbach in the first Hilliard's monograph, published in 1961. The miniatures are firstly observed, grouped together in the different periods of the artist's life : his juvenalia then early works, the pieces produced during his French trip then during the apex of his career and finally the last years of Elizabethan era and the Jacobean era. Inside each part, miniatures are been grouped iconographically, most generally beginning with the queen's or king's image, and then the other pieces kept, women on one side, men on another.

The paintings, and then drawings, seals, medals and engravings are analyzed in another part, following the same chronological and iconographical construction.

A non-exhaustive list of works produced after Hilliard's pattern are mentioned. Lost and rejected works are also notified.

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