Oil painting - Edward VI

Object: Oil painting
Place of origin: England (painted)
Date: c.1570-1610 (painted)
Artist/Maker: Scrots, William (artist)
Materials and Techniques: Oil on English oak panel
Credit Line: Bequeathed by John Jones
Museum number: 493-1882
Gallery location: British Galleries, Room 58, case 8

Public access description
This painting of is one of several known profile portraits showing Edward VI as Prince of Wales. The original was painted shortly before he acceded the throne at the age of nine. Despite his brief reign of only six years, a relatively large number of portraits of Edward survive, reflecting his importance as the long-awaited legitimate male heir of Henry VIII. This panel was probably part of an Elizabethan set of portraits of English monarchs, commissioned to demonstrate the owner's loyalty to the Crown. During Edward's short reign (1547-1553) Protestantism was established for the first time in the English church.

Descriptive line
Oil Painting, Portrait of Edward VI, Follower of William Scrots, Anglo-Netherlandish School, c.1570-1610

Physical description
Oil on oak panel depicting an early example of the English profile portrait. Edward VI (who had a short reign from 1547 to 1553) is shown as Prince of Wales, in half length, dressed in a dark, fur-lined robe, wearing the Prince of Wales pendent and holding up a flower in his right hand, possibly a rose or a Pink. It dates from just before Edward's accession to the throne at the age of nine.

Dimensions
Height: 44.2 cm Panel, Width: 31.6 cm Panel, Height: 54 cm Frame, Width: 43 cm Frame, Depth: 6 mm Panel

Museum number
493-1882

Object history note
Bequeathed by John Jones, 1882.

Historical context note
Despite his brief reign of only six years, a relatively large number of portraits of Edward VI survive. This painting of is one of several known profile format portraits of Edward. The earliest example (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 49.7.31), dates from around 1546, shortly before Edward acceded the throne aged only nine. The other known versions can be divided into two distinct groups (see Strong, R., Tudor and Jacobean Portraits, vol. 1, London: 1969). The first group relate to a drawing formerly attributed to Hans Holbein in the Royal Collection at Windsor (RCIN 912202), extended to half-length with the right hand holding a flower. An example of this type can be found in the Wilton House collection (WLN69561). The second group, of which the V&A's portrait is one, also shows Edward in half-length, holding a flower in his right hand. However the costume in this second group of portraits is entirely different from those in the first. In addition to the V&A's painting, there are three other known portraits of this second type – one at the National Portrait Gallery, London (NP442), one lesser version at Knole (National Trust) and one expanded version at Compton Verney (CVCSC:0337.B).

It is from this latter group that William Scrots (active 1537-1553) developed his anamorphic portrait of Edward VI, now in the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG1299). It is plausible that all of the known profile portraits of Edward VI relate back to a pattern or design by Scrots, who was first recorded as the King's Painter in 1545-46. However the different versions are by various artists and are not apparently identical with the autograph Scrots anamorphosis. The first printed profile portrait of Edward VI was engraved by Domenico Zenoi for Imagini quorumdam principum et illustrium virorum Ritratti di alcuni prencipi, et huomini illustri in 1569 and appears to be most closely related to Scrots anamorphic portrait (NPG 1299).

Dendrochronological tests carried out on the V&A's portrait of Edward VI indicate that the panel on which it is painted came from an English oak, possibly grown in the Midlands, which was felled between 1570 and 1606 (see dendrochronological report held on departmental object file). As such, the painting is one of the later known examples of the second group of portraits. It has previously been suggested that the V&A portrait and the version held by the National Portrait Gallery, dated c.1546, may have been by the same artist. However, the results of the dendrochronological testing throw this into doubt, as it would suggest that the portraits were made at least twenty-four years apart.

Portraits such as V&A 493-1882 represent some of the earliest examples of the profile format in English royal painted portraiture. The profile portrait, initially inspired by ancient medallions, evolved in Italy in the 15th century and spread throughout Europe in the early 16th
century. Holbein established an early precedent in England. His portrait of ‘Simon George of Cornwall’ (Stadel Museum, Frankfurt, inv. No. 1965), dated c. 1535-40 shows the sitter in profile to the left, holding a flower in his right hand and may have served as a prototype for the profile portraits of Edward VI.

It is possible that V&A 493-1882 was painted during the reign of Edward’s successor Elizabeth I as part of a set of royal portraits. During Elizabeth’s reign a significant market developed for sets of painted portraits of notable people. The fashion for portrait sets emerged around the middle of the 16th century and reached its peak between 1580 and 1625. Originating amongst the court nobility, sets subsequently became fashionable among the wealthy gentry. Surviving examples suggest that portraits of the kings and queens of England were the most common type. In her essay for Painting in Britain 1500-1630 (2016) Catherine Daunt writes that “these served to celebrate the lineage of the reigning monarch, as well as to proclaim the owner’s loyalty to the Crown”.

Another factor in the popularity of portrait sets during the period was the great interest in familial, national, and institutional history, which saw the emergence of a new trend for antiquarianism among the intellectual elite. Genealogy was of profound importance in Elizabethan society, particularly to the noble classes and the display of sets of royal portraits alongside family groups could suggest a personal or familial connection to national history. In this way, sets of royal portraits functioned as both decorative and symbolic objects, representative of loyalty, lineage, power and learning.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O125580/edward-vi-oil-painting-scrots-william/