

*Venus and Cupid* from the Former Matsukata Collection:  
An Addition to the Œuvre of Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli

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The core of the present holdings of the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo (hereafter abbreviated as the NMWA) was, as is widely known, a part of the enormous collection formed by the wealthy Japanese collector Kojiro Matsukata (1865-1950).<sup>1</sup> Matsukata acquired several thousand works of art between 1916 and 1923 in Paris and other cities in Europe, but serious economic difficulties after the 1927 financial panic resulted in the dispersal of the bulk of his collection. This group of dispersed works is now commonly designated as “Ex-Matsukata Collection” or “former Matsukata Collection,” in distinction from the Matsukata Collection presently in the NMWA, namely the works sequestered by the French government during the Second World War and subsequently donated to Japanese government.<sup>2</sup> The numerous “former Matsukata Collection” works thus sold to private hands in Japan included a significant number of Old Master paintings, and one work, a sixteenth-century canvas representing *Venus and Cupid* (fig. 1) was acquired by the newly founded NMWA in 1962.<sup>3</sup> This painting was once exhibited in 1960 as “North Italian, middle of the 16th century,”<sup>4</sup> but since then has received little attention and to date remains in museum storage, entirely unknown to the public. The purpose of this short paper is to discuss the authorship of this painting – admittedly of rather mediocre quality but one of the rare examples of Italian Mannerist painting in Japanese public collections – and to propose an attribution to a Parmesan artist Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli (1533-1608), the son and heir of his more famous father, Girolamo Bedoli.<sup>5</sup>

The work in question, painted in oil on canvas measuring 104 by 62 centimeters, depicts a mythological theme with standing Venus and Cupid. The latter stands on a large, curious-looking basket containing leaves and fruits, and the left background is occupied by imposing columns whose high base is relief-carved with the image of a male figure in profile and a large vase. The painting is in much damaged condition: the entire surface has so suffered from abrasion and partial flaking as to make the overall design rather ill-defined and the details in darker areas almost illegible. The colors have lost their vividness and consequently the composition looks somewhat flattened. Nonetheless, its dominant style can easily be identified as Emilian, drawing inspiration from Parmigianino’s figural repertoire which is most evident in the



fig.1  
*Venus and Cupid* (here attributed  
to Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli),  
The National Museum of  
Western Art, Tokyo

relief figure of a man to the left. In fact, a piece of paper, most probably cut from an unidentified French sale catalogue in which the present painting figured as no. 182, was once attached on the back of the stretcher and designated the painting's authorship as the Parmesan school.<sup>6</sup>

A few published entries in Japan and several notes and letters conserved in the NMWA file show various opinions expressed in the past about the attribution of this work. When this *Venus and Cupid* was first exhibited in Japan as no. 99 at the *3rd Exhibition of the Matsukata Collection* in 1930, it was described, despite the above-mentioned label on the back, as "Italian work of the 17th century."<sup>7</sup> Then, as noted above, a more reasonable attribution to "North Italian, middle of the 16th century" was given at the 1960 Matsukata exhibition.<sup>8</sup> A laconic note dated 1973 in the NMWA file shows that Federico Zeri saw the painting at that time and assigned it to the school of Parma.<sup>9</sup> Zeri's view seems to have been the basis for the entry in the NMWA's 1979 *Catalogue of Paintings*, where a more limited chronological range of "second half of the 16th century" and a hypothetical attribution to Jacopo Bertoja are proposed.<sup>10</sup> Strangely, the museum's records do not specify who was the first to mention the authorship of Bertoja, but it is quite possible that the name was suggested orally by Zeri, perhaps only in an incidental manner. A letter by Everett Fahy dated 1983 then suggested that the painting might be by a 16th-century French



fig.2  
Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli, *The Holy Family*, Galleria Nazionale, Parma (photo: Soprintendenza B.A.S. di Parma e Piacenza)

artist,<sup>11</sup> but Sylvie Béguin's letter in the following year is negative on this possibility and returns the attribution to the Parmesan school.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, scholars' opinions have been divided between Parma and Fontainebleau, and the only specific name of artist proposed until 1980s was that of Bertoja. This attribution, however, seems to be on a quite obscure basis and far from convincing, especially in view of a rather negative aspect of the Tokyo work: its heavy-looking figure style and somewhat deformed proportions appear simply incompatible with the masterly elegance of Bertoja's figures.

It was in the Summer 1991 that the present author first noted the chance to save the Tokyo *Venus and Cupid* from anonymity, when I visited the Galleria Nazionale of Parma and saw there one among the handful of the secure works by Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli, the *Holy Family* (fig. 2).<sup>13</sup> Despite the entirely different thematic veins, the two works share common facial types and characteristically deformed proportions as well as several idiosyncratic details: the almost grotesquely mannered fingers (figs. 3-4), the coarse-looking large legs (figs. 5-6), and the same elaborate braids of hair of women. Further, the strong taste for meticulous rendering of precious objects, so conspicuous in the foreground of the *Holy Family*, is certainly present also in the depiction of the precious armlet worn by Venus. These stylistic similarities seemed to me specific enough to assign both of the works not only to the same

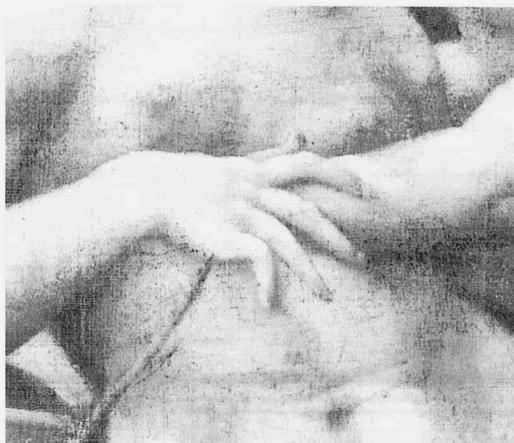


fig.3

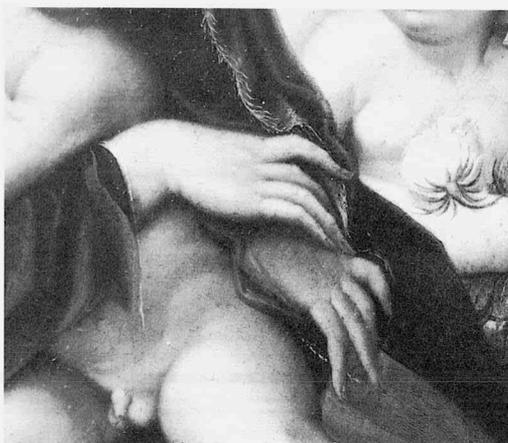


fig.4

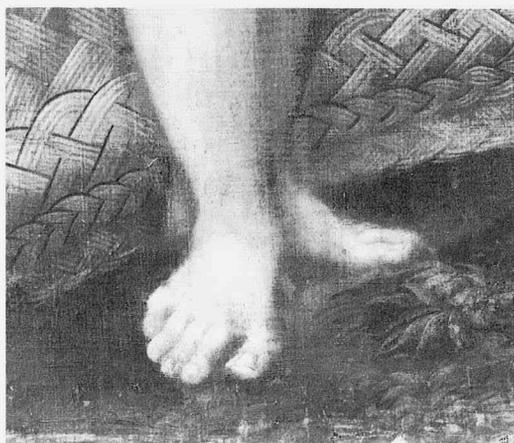


fig.5



fig.6

fig.3  
Detail of fig.1

fig.4  
Detail of fig.2  
(photo: Soprintendenza B.A.S. di  
Parma e Piacenza)

fig.5  
Detail of fig.1

fig.6  
Detail of fig.2  
(photo: Soprintendenza B.A.S. di  
Parma e Piacenza)

artist but, perhaps, to a relatively narrow range of execution date. My view on the attribution of *Venus and Cupid* was favorably accepted by Giovanni Godi,<sup>14</sup> and soon after, I came to know that Diane De Grazia, in her monograph on Bertoja and Mirola just published in 1991, rejected the attribution of the Tokyo work to Bertoja and commented that the artist should be “a follower of Parmigianino, probably Parmese, near to Bedoli.”<sup>15</sup>

The chronological nearness of the two paintings is supported by the fact that these works share a common formal source. The upper body of Venus obviously derives from Parmigianino's composition of Madonna and Child recorded in a chiaroscuro woodcut attributed to Antonio da Trento<sup>16</sup> (figs. 7-8). Then, if we compare the same woodcut with the Parma *Holy Family*, the former seems to have offered the model for the Parma work's cheek-to-cheek embrace of the mother and the child and the bust and the left arm of Jesus, although the angles of the Virgin's head are different (figs. 8-9).

The other identifiable formal sources of the Tokyo work also decidedly indicate the environment of Parma. The pose of Cupid leaning on Venus's chest is borrowed from Parmigianino's ceiling of the Rocca Sanvitale, Fontanellato (fig. 10),<sup>17</sup> and the motif of the basket on which he stands is certainly an adaptation of the similar motif in the frescoes, again Parmigianino's, in the Parmesan church of S. Giovanni Evangelista (fig. 11),<sup>18</sup> though it is enlarged

into a ridiculously giant size. As for Venus's pose, we easily note that her upper and lower parts of the body are not well joined, as if the artist awkwardly combined two different formal sources. As I showed above, Venus's bust was copied from Parmigianino's Madonna. On the other hand, the ultimate prototype of her lower body was Leonardo's *Leda* composition, which inspired the figure of Venus in Correggio's masterpiece, the *School of Love*, now in the National Gallery, London (fig. 12).<sup>19</sup> This tradition of elegant contrapposto in the female nude is vividly reflected in the statue of



fig.7  
Detail of fig.1



fig.8  
Attributed to Antonio da Trento,  
*Madonna and Child*, chiaroscuro  
woodcut



fig.9  
Detail of fig.2  
(photo: Soprintendenza B.A.S. di  
Parma e Piacenza)

Venus seen in the *Portrait of Anna Eleonora Sanvitale* by Girolamo Bedoli (fig. 13; Galleria Nazionale, Parma) which Alessandro certainly saw being painted by his father - or possibly even assisted the execution - in 1562.<sup>20</sup> Finally, another direct reference to Parmigianino's repertoire becomes evident when we compare the male youth in the left background with some characteristic figure types by Parmigianino, for example, *Adam* in the Church of Steccata (fig. 14).<sup>21</sup>

A chronological reconstruction of Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli's works is far from being established. The only attempt in this regard is Giovanni Godi's contribution published in 1973. Godi discussed as many as eighteen paintings by, or attributed to, Alessandro in chronological order,<sup>22</sup> though his argument loses some validity given the fact that some works attributed by Godi to the artist have been simply rejected by other scholars.<sup>23</sup> According to Godi, the *Holy Family* in the Parma Galleria is datable toward the end of the 1560s.<sup>24</sup> There is no documentary basis for this

fig.10  
Parmigianino, *Putto* (detail from the ceiling decoration representing the story of Diana and Actaeon), Rocca Sanvitale, Fontanellato (Parma)

fig.11  
Parmigianino, *Putto* (detail from the decoration representing the Martyrdom of St. Agatha), S. Giovanni Evangelista, Parma

fig.12  
Correggio, *The School of Love*, National Gallery, London



fig.10



fig.11



fig.12

fig.13  
Girolamo Bedoli, *Portrait of Anna Eleonora Sanvitale*, Galleria Nazionale, Parma

fig.14  
Parmigianino, *Adam*, S. Maria della Steccata, Parma



fig.13



fig.14

dating, but the idea to assign the painting to around the year 1569 when his father Girolamo died is, I believe, entirely reasonable.<sup>25</sup> While extensively relying on works by Girolamo, the Parma *Holy Family* reveals the characteristic tendency for deformation, but still to a more restricted extent than in later works by Alessandro. Further, the figures of the Virgin and Child in the *Holy Family* – especially the Virgin’s facial type – are strongly reminiscent of those in the fresco *Adoration of the Shepherds* (fig. 15) on the southern apse of the Church of Steccata, completed by 1568 by Girolamo. Ann Rebecca Milstein has plausibly indicated an extensive collaboration of Alessandro in this decorative scheme which included also the adjacent vault.<sup>26</sup>

What can be said for the *Holy Family* seems to apply in general terms also to the Tokyo *Venus and Cupid*. The Tokyo work does not yet reveal the high degree of deformation seen in, for example, the *Madonna and Child with Saints Agatha, Lucy and Agnes* (Parish Church, Colorno)<sup>27</sup> or the *Adoration of the Shepherds with St. Thomas* (fig. 16; S. Tommaso, Parma),<sup>28</sup> dated by Godi to 1570s and 1590s respectively. Therefore, the present author would propose a date, admittedly provisory, ranging from the end of 1560s to early 1570s for the Tokyo work.

fig.15  
Girolamo Bedoli, *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (detail), S. Maria della Steccata, Parma

fig.16  
Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli, *The Adoration of the Shepherds with St. Thomas*, S. Tommaso, Parma



fig.15



fig.16

It should be noted that, if my attribution is correct, the Tokyo *Venus and Cupid* will be the only mythological painting among the known corpus of Alessandro’s works. It is difficult to tell whether it represents some particular mythological narrative. Venus in profile gazing intently towards the right might suggest the goddess asking her son to punish Psyche, but this interpretation is made rather improbable by the depiction of Cupid as a little child and by the fact that Venus stands on the ground. On a formal level at least, however, the compositional formula of Venus in profile with

closely leaning Cupid may draw some inspiration, directly or indirectly, from that established by Giulio Romano in Palazzo Te in Mantua.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the strong focus of the composition toward the right seems to suggest that this painting may have originally constituted the left part of a pair, or of a series.



fig.17

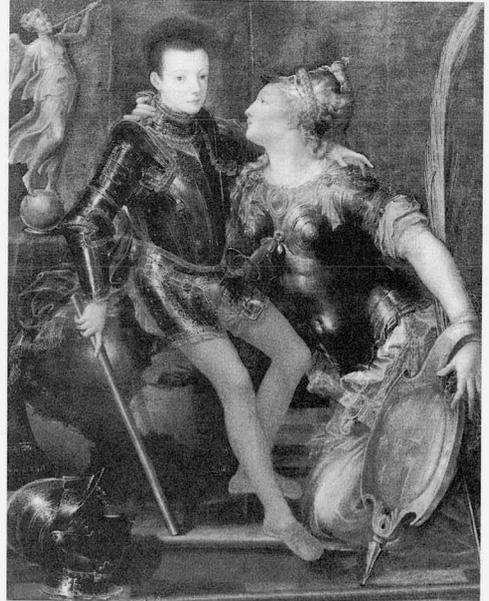


fig.18

fig.17  
Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli,  
*Portrait of Ranuccio Farnese*,  
Galleria Nazionale, Parma  
(photo: Soprintendenza B.A.S. di  
Parma e Piacenza)

fig.18  
Girolamo Bedoli, *Allegorical  
Portrait of Alessandro Farnese  
Embraced by Parma*, Galleria  
Nazionale, Parma

Despite the great qualitative distance, the type, format and function of the Tokyo work are reasonably considered as more or less similar to Correggio's prestigious pair of mythological paintings for Nicola Maffei, now in Paris and London (see fig. 12 above).<sup>30</sup> Then for whom was the Tokyo work painted? Here I have to enter a field of genuine hypothesis. It is certain that, unlike his father, Alessandro could hardly enjoy the patronage from the Farnese court, and almost all of his extant works are either small devotional pictures or works for local ecclesiastic institutions. However, the small *Portrait of Ranuccio Farnese* (fig. 17; Galleria Nazionale, Parma),<sup>31</sup> the only known portrait from Alessandro's hand, seems to be a secure sign attesting to the attempt of Alessandro, who had recently inherited his father's prestigious workshop, to gain the favor of the court. The portrait is convincingly dated to c.1573-74 based on the child's apparent age,<sup>32</sup> and the commission most probably came from Alessandro Farnese, the future 3rd Duke, who was the father of the depicted little prince and for whom Girolamo had once painted the famous *Allegorical Portrait of Alessandro Farnese Embraced by Parma* (fig. 18; Galleria Nazionale, Parma).<sup>33</sup> Besides the close stylistic affinity between the two portraits, the statues of Fame appearing in a very similar manner in both backgrounds underline the dynastic continuity of the models (Alessandro-Ranuccio) as well as the painters (Girolamo-Alessandro). The timing of the execution of the portrait of Ranuccio appears meaningful, since the date

corresponds exactly with that of the premature disappearance of the dominant artist of the Farnese, Jacopo Bertoja (1544-1572/73). In this context, here I would like to propose the hypothesis, though maybe unprovable, that the *Venus and Cupid* in the NMWA might be a remnant of Alessandro's ambition to take over the void in the court patronage, also indicating his ability in secular themes through the intentionally intense references to the style of Parmigianino, his mother's cousin.<sup>34</sup> This attempt was, however, destined to sheer failure.

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[Acknowledgments]

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[1] For a summary history of the Matsukata Collection and the NMWA in English, see S. Takashina, "Introduction," in *Masterpieces NMWA* 1998, pp.7-8.

[2] For the entire range of the works collected by Matsukata, see Kobe 1990.

[3] Inv. no. P.1962-3. Oil on canvas, 104 x 62 cm. Prior to its purchase by the NMWA in 1962, the work had been on deposit at the NMWA from 1960. For the provenance, exhibition history and literature up to 1979, see *Catalogue NMWA* 1979, p.213, no.270.

[4] Tokyo 1960, no.144.

[5] Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli was born in Parma in 1533 and died there in 1608. See Godi 1973, pp.12, 20. (His life span was formerly considered as 1547-1612, a mistake repeated even in the recent exhibition catalogue, Fornari Schianchi and Spinosa 1995, p.349.) He was the second son of Girolamo Bedoli and Caterina Elena Mazzola, cousin of Parmigianino, and inherited the workshop upon his father's death in 1569. No modern monographic study on his works has been written, except the article Godi 1973. He is mentioned mainly in the studies on Girolamo Bedoli, e.g., Milstein 1978 and Di Giampaolo 1997.

[6] The label reads: "PARMESAN Vénus caressant l'Amour; elle est debout et semble demander quelque faveurs à son fils qui est appuyé sur un panier de jonc. Ce morceau est d'un dessin grandiose et d'un style élevé, et nous rappelle la grande École. (No.182)." I owe this information to Mr. Kimio Kawaguchi of the NMWA. Although I could not identify the sale catalogue from which this entry was cut, the label makes it highly probable that Matsukata acquired the present painting from a French dealer in Paris.

[7] Tokyo 1930, no.99.

[8] Tokyo 1960, no.144.

[9] The note is dated January 19, 1973, and indicates that Zeri's judgement was mainly based on the male figure in relief to the left of the canvas.

[10] *Catalogue NMWA* 1979, no.270.

[11] E. Fahy, letter dated November 18, 1983. Professor Jacques Thuillier who saw the painting in 1989 also expressed to the present author a view in favor of a French artist (oral communication).

[12] S. Béguin, letter dated January 3, 1984.

[13] Galleria Nazionale, Parma, inv. no. 63. Oil on canvas, 86 x 74 cm. See Quintavalle 1939, p.58; Fornari Schianchi 1996, p.25, repr. p.29.

[14] On the same day in 1991 I was able to visit Drs. Lucia Fornari Schianchi, Paola Ceschi Lavagetto and Giovanni Godi at the Soprintendenza of Parma and show them a small photograph of the NMWA *Venus and Cupid*. Their reaction to my attribution was generally favorable, though with due reservation. Later, I sent a better photograph of the work to Dr. Godi and he wrote to me on November 21 of the same year, confirming his acceptance of the attribution to Alessandro.

[15] De Grazia 1991, p.107, no.P/R 22. The comment does not specify which of the two

Bedolis is intended, but the index of the book (p.323) shows that the author indeed meant Alessandro Bedoli.

[16] B XII, p.36, 12; see Karpinski 1983, p.73, no.12(56).

[17] This borrowing was indicated to me by Dr. Godi (orally). For Parmigianino's frescoes in Fontanellato, see Di Giampaolo 1991, no.7; Gould 1994, pp.30-39. A preparatory drawing of this particular putto is in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (Popham 1971, no.313 recto).

[18] For the frescoes in S. Giovanni Evangelista by young Parmigianino, see Di Giampaolo 1991, no.5.

[19] For Correggio's London picture, see Gould 1976, pp.213-216; Ekserdjian 1997, pp.268-272.

[20] For Girolamo's portrait, see Milstein 1978, pp.241-242; L. Fornari Schianchi, in Fornari Schianchi and Spinosa 1995, no.40; Di Giampaolo 1997, no.46.

[21] For Parmigianino's frescoes in the Steccata, see Di Giampaolo 1991, no.45; Gould 1994, pp.126-139. Preparatory drawings for the figure of Adam are in the British Museum (Popham 1971, nos. 231-233). The head bent downwards with wild forelock is also typical of Parmigianino. See, for example, Popham 1971, nos.192 (study of a soldier), 468 (study for St. Andrew).

[22] Godi 1973. The works discussed by him are: *St. Cecilia*, S. Giovanni Evangelista, Parma (repr. Milstein 1978, fig.193; for related drawings in Rennes and Naples, see Di Giampaolo 1980); *The Holy Family with St. Francis*, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (repr. Di Giampaolo 1997, no.3, as Girolamo Bedoli); *Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist*, Sebõ Collection, Budapest (repr. Witt coll. from *Cronache d'Arte*, vol. 3, May-June 1928, p.209); *The Immaculate Conception with Sts. Lucy and Omobono*, S. Maria Assunta del Castello, Viadana (repr. Milstein 1978, fig.208); *Madonna and Child with Sts. Peter and Luke*, S. Alessandro, Parma; *St. Roch*, S. Margherita, Colorno (repr. Godi 1973, fig.1); *The Annunciation*, Oratorio della SS. Annunziata, Colorno (repr. Godi 1973, fig.3); *The Holy Family*, Galleria Nazionale, Parma (here fig.2); Decoration of the aisles with scenes from the Old Testament, Duomo, Parma; *Madonna and Child with St. Jerome and Two Angels*, Galleria Nazionale, Parma (repr. Witt coll. from *Tesori nascosti della Galleria di Parma*, Parma, 1968); *Madonna and Child with Sts. Agatha, Lucy and Agnes*, Parrocchiale di Colorno (repr. Godi 1973, fig.4); *Portrait of Ranuccio Farnese*, Galleria Nazionale, Parma (here fig.17); *St. John the Baptist*, S. Sisto, Piacenza (repr. Milstein 1978, fig.204 as a Cremonese close to Malosso); *Madonna and Child with Sts. John the Baptist, Catherine and Francis*, private collection, Cremona (repr. Godi 1973, fig. 5; Milstein 1978, fig.160, as not by Alessandro); *Madonna and Child with Sts. John the Baptist, Francis, Joseph and a Donor*, Galleria Estense, Modena (repr. Milstein 1978, fig. 159 as the same artist as the preceding item); *The Adoration of the Shepherds with St. Thomas*, S. Tommaso, Parma (here fig.16); *Madonna and Child with Sts. Elisabeth, Blaise and a Dominican Saint and Angels*, Galleria Nazionale, Parma; *The Redeemer with Sts. Antony of Padua and Mary Magdalene*, S. Maria della Steccata, Parma (repr. Ghidiglia Quintavalle 1967, p.360, fig.2; Milstein 1978, fig.196).

[23] Among the works listed by Godi as Alessandro, Milstein (1978) rejects the Budapest *Holy Family* (as authentic early Girolamo Bedoli; see also Di Giampaolo 1997, no.3); the Piacenza *St. Roch*; and the two *Madonna and Child* in Cremona private collection and in Modena. On the other hand, Milstein attributes to Alessandro the copy after Correggio's *Madonna della Scodella* (repr. *ibid.*, fig.191; Galleria Nazionale, Parma) and the six female figures on the vault preceding the southern apse of S. Maria della Steccata (*ibid.*, pp.225-226; see also Di Giampaolo 1997, no.36). Di Giampaolo (1980, p.88, note 11) rejects the *Madonna and Child with St. Jerome* in the Galleria Nazionale, Parma, as Orazio Samacchini, while he proposes as Alessandro a *Coronation of the Virgin with Sts. John the Evangelist* (location not specified); *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* (private collection, Vienna; repr. Witt coll.); *Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist* (Minneapolis).

[24] Godi 1973, pp.15-16.

[25] Milstein (1978, pp.225-226) accepts the dating of the *Holy Family* as 1560s.

[26] See above note 23.

[27] Godi 1973, fig.4, p.17.

[28] *Ibid.*, fig.6, p.18.

[29] See Hartt 1958, fig.229.

[30] For the commissioning patron of the London *School of Love* and the Paris *Venus and Cupid with a Satyr*, see Ekserdjian 1997, pp.268-269.

[31] Quintavalle 1939, p.255.

[32] Ranuccio Farnese, the future 4th Duke of Parma, was born in 1569. Quintavalle (*loc. cit.*) had dated the portrait to c.1576, but Ghirardi (1995, p.173) plausibly proposed a slightly earlier date of c.1573-74.

[33] The portrait is generally dated to c.1555-58. See Fornari Schianchi and Spinosa 1995, no.39; Di Giampaolo 1997, no.45. The head of the figure of Parma-Minerva in Girolamo's allegorical portrait is obviously an imitation of Parmigianino's *Lucretia*, now in the Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples. (The attribution of the Naples *Lucretia* has oscillated between Parmigianino and Bedoli, but Di Giampaolo now considers it as Parmigianino. See Di Giampaolo 1991, no.5A and *id.* 1997, no.51.) It is significant in our context that the Naples *Lucretia* is recorded in the 1587 inventory of Ranuccio Farnese's *Guardaroba* (Bertini 1987, p.205).

[34] It can be plausibly supposed that during the 1560s and early 1570s the Bedoli workshop received some favor from young Alessandro Farnese. I wonder if the *Holy Family* by Alessandro Mazzola Bedoli (fig.2) can also be inserted in this context. In the

1587 inventory of Ranuccio's *Guardaroba*, there is an entry which reads: "Un quadretto a olio sopra un'assa con una Madonna e S. Giuseppe con N. S. et S. Gio. Battista et due angeli con l'ornamento d'hebano con una foglia d'argento in cima et un anello" (Bertini 1987, p.205). It is tempting to identify this item with the Parma *Holy Family*. Although the support does not coincide, the iconography is exactly the same. Quintavalle (1939, p.58) notes that the *Holy Family* was purchased by the Galleria of Parma from the Church of Pizzolese near Parma in 1846, but its earlier provenance seems to be unknown. In any case, the extreme preciousity of the work's style suggests that it was done for some important private patron.

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越川倫明

旧松方コレクションに属し、国立西洋美術館の開館早々に個人コレクションから購入された作品に、作者不詳の《ウェヌスとクビド》(fig.1/inv. no. P.1962-3)がある。1960年に展示されて以降、その存在は知られながらほとんど一般に公開される機会もなく、収蔵庫に保管されてきた作品である。これまでこの作品の作者については「16世紀なかば、北イタリア画派」「16世紀後半、パルマの画家」「16世紀フランスの画家」などの推定がなされてきた。唯一特定の画家名が提案されたのは、1979年刊行の『国立西洋美術館絵画総目録』において仮説的にヤコポ・ベルトイヤの名が示唆されたケースである。

しかしながら、本作品の様式はベルトイヤのそれとは一致しない。本作品の人物像に見られる人体デッサンの不確かさや特徴的なデフォルメは、ベルトイヤの作品が常にもつ優美なデザイン感覚とは相容れないものである。筆者は1991年に、16世紀後半にパルマで活動した画家アレッサンドロ・マツォーラ・ベードリ(1533-1608)の作品を実見した際、本作品が同画家の作品である高い蓋然性を認識した。

アレッサンドロは、コレッジョやパルミジャーノの流れを汲むパルマの後期マニエリスムの画家である。彼の父ジローラモ・ベードリ(1500頃-1569)は、パルミジャーノの叔父にあたるピエル・イラリオ・マツォーラの工房に入り、1510年にピエル・イラリオの娘(つまりパルミジャーノの従姉妹)カテリーナ・エレーナと結婚した。マツォーラ工房はこうしてジローラモによって受け継がれ、アレッサンドロは1569年にジローラモが没したのち工房の主となる。パルミジャーノ、父ジローラモの伝統に依拠しつつ1608年の没時にいたるまでパルマおよび周辺の諸聖堂のために制作を続けたが、その芸術的力は凡庸の域を出るものではなかった。今日彼の手に戻せられる絵画作品は、父のデザインに基づく作品や見解の分かれる作品を含めて、20点あまりと思われる。

本稿は、特にパルマ国立美術館に所蔵される《聖家族》(fig.2)——異論なくアレッサンドロ作と認められている代表的作例である——との比較を通じて、《ウェヌスとクビド》の作者をアレッサンドロとする見解を提案するものである。また、本作品の多くのモチーフが、パルミジャーノ、コレッジョ、ジローラモ・ベードリの諸作品に由来するものであることを具体的に示す。

アレッサンドロの絵画様式の編年的展開については、これまでに確立した見解は存在せず、本作品の制作年代の推定は容易ではない。しかしながら様式的比較および典拠作品の検討に基づき、ここでは暫定的に1560年代末～1570年代初頭と推定しておく。もし筆者のアトリビューションが正しいとすれば、本作品は現在知られるアレッサンドロの作品中、唯一の神話画である。1569年に名高いベードリ工房を相続したのち、アレッサンドロは1573/74年にパルマ公爵家ファルネーゼの幼い公子ラスッチョの肖像を描いている(fig.17)。純粹に仮説的見解ではあるが、1572/73年にファルネーゼ家の宮廷画家であったベルトイヤが早逝した直後、アレッサンドロは宮廷からのパトロネージを獲得する目的で国立西洋美術館の《ウェヌスとクビド》を描いたのではなかろうか。