

Lesley Lewis, *The Thomas More Family Group Portraits after Holbein*. Leominster, England: Gracewing, Fowler Wright Books, 1998, xii + 55 pp., 6 illustrations, ISBN 0-85244-466-4, £ 4.99.

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This slim volume traces the fortunes of the lost Holbein group portrait of the More family, painted c. 1527 and destroyed by fire in 1752, and the most important Tudor copies of it. Originally begun as a leaflet for visitors viewing a copy of the More group installed in Chelsea Old Town Hall in 1996, the book in fact reads like a detective novel as the author tries to resolve the "gaps and discrepancies" (vii) in the story of the lost original and its famous copies by or attributed to Rowland Lockey in the closing years of the sixteenth century. As one of the few books devoted to treating More's iconography, it joins a short shelf, shared by earlier works like Stanley Morison and Nicolas Barker's *The Likeness of Sir Thomas More* (Fordham UP, 1963), J.B.Trapp and Hubertus Schulte Herbrüggen's catalogue for the National Portrait Gallery exhibit on More in 1977-78 entitled "*The King's Good Servant*": *Sir Thomas More, 1477/8-1535* (1977), *The Household of Sir Thomas More: A Portrait Described by Ruth Norrington* (Waddleston, England: The Kylin Press, 1984), and a handful of articles.

The volume opens with three pages of plates, each containing two high quality color (or in the case of the Holbein pen and ink study of the More family, black and white) reproductions (11.7 x 9.5 cm) of the Lockey copies discussed in the text. It closes with four appendices containing accounts of the More family in Essex, the destruction of Thorndon Hall in 1878 (in which one of the portraits was threatened), a genealogy of the More family, and a description of a life-size portrait of Sir John and Sir Thomas More, after Holbein, now in Cumbria. There is also a list of Lewis's sources.

Lewis begins with a discussion of Holbein's arrival and reception in England in 1526, and claims that the More group portrait

was the first major work he undertook in England. According to later descriptions of it, this work, of which now only the familiar pen and ink study in Basel remains, was painted in distemper, and Lewis argues convincingly that Holbein prepared a second canvas for a more permanent, oil version of the piece, but never finished it. He then traces this distemper portrait as it passes into the hands of More's grandson, Thomas More II, who commissioned Lockey to copy it, into the Arundel collection of Holbeins taken to the Continent in 1641, where it was inventoried in 1654, through a series of owners until it disappeared in a fire in the episcopal palace of Olmütz, now in the Czech Republic, in 1752.

In describing the five paintings, one of which is a miniature, and tracing their histories, Lewis establishes that at least three of the versions are by Lockey himself: the Nostell Priory, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Victoria and Albert Museum miniature. The other two—the Eyston and the Chelsea Old Town Hall—are contemporaneous with Lockey and not unreasonably attributed to him although in the case of the Eyston, centuries of damage and restoration have made any positive decision impossible.

Perhaps the most interesting conclusion Lewis reaches, based on the 1982 carbon dating of the linen on which the Nostell Priory version is painted, is that Holbein himself had probably begun this very painting as the permanent version of the More group he had earlier painted in distemper—the version lost to fire in 1752. In this one example, completed by Lockey c. 1593 at the urging of the More family, we have what began as Holbein's own work, "even if no work from that period [remains] identifiable after the restorations and overpaintings of four hundred years" (13).

Lewis's attractive book provides a very readable guide to the pedigrees of the famous More group portraits as well as the More family members they depict. It has richly exceeded its origins as a pamphlet, and is likely to serve as the standard reference for this group of pictures for a good many years.

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