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AN UNUSUAL PORTRAIT OF EDWARD JENNER AND A POSSIBLE LINK WITH NAPOLEON

by

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INTRODUCTION

IN JANUARY 1967 there started the campaign organized by W.H.O. to eradicate smallpox totally. This campaign could not have hoped to succeed without a safe, effective vaccine. Although Edward Jenner probably did not “discover” vaccination, he is usually (and properly) given credit for testing the method and bringing it before the public.

Inevitably many engraved portraits of Jenner were published in the nineteenth century.¹ The most common are based on a portrait by John Raphael Smith; those considered a better likeness are based on a portrait by James Northcote.²

This paper is concerned principally with an engraved portrait of Jenner by Monsaldi which probably has not been reproduced previously.³ It is of interest because it is an ingenious and attractive combination of the Smith and Northcote portraits and also because it forms a possible link between Jenner and Napoleon Bonaparte.

THE SMITH PORTRAIT

This well-known pastel portrait now in the Wellcome Museum was done in 1800. Although the mezzotint of it, also in the Wellcome Museum, reproduced here (Fig. 1) is generally believed to be by Smith, his biographer supports a catalogue of 1810 which says that the plate was engraved by William Ward, Smith's assistant and apprentice.⁴ The portrait shows Jenner the prosperous country doctor leaning against a tree in a relaxed, comfortable pose. In the middle distance are cows and a milkmaid, and in the background is a view of Berkeley Castle and church.

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¹ Comparison of those listed by Renate Burgess, *Catalogue of portraits of doctors and scientists in the Wellcome Institute*, London, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1973, pp. 187–189, with those in an unpublished catalogue in the library of the Royal College of Physicians suggests that at least forty-nine engraved portraits were done up to 1840. A short list of the more popular portraits is given by W. R. Lefanu, *A bio-bibliography of Edward Jenner*, London, Harvey & Blythe, 1951, pp. 158–160.

² Jenner's views are preserved in his letters. J. Baron, *Life of Edward Jenner*, 2 vols, London, Colborn, 1838, vol. 2, pp. 335, 365. J. J. Abraham, *Lettsom, his life, times, friends and descendants*, London, Heinemann, 1933, p. 338.

³ It is not reproduced in the many works dealing with Jenner, vaccination, and Monsaldi which the writer has consulted. It is listed by Burgess, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, p. 188. The largest single collection of published portraits of Jenner (thirty-six) is in O. V. Guberta, *Ospa i ospoprivivanae*, St. Petersburg, 1898, a copy of which is in the library of the Royal Society of Medicine.

⁴ Julia Frankau, *John Raphael Smith—his life and works*, London, Macmillan, 1902, pp. 150–151.

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THE NORTHCOTE PORTRAIT

This portrait was painted in 1802 for the Medical Society of Plymouth.⁵ A popular mezzotint of it, reproduced here from the specimen in the Wellcome Institute (Fig. 2), was made by William Say. Jenner sits cross-legged at a table in a rather stiff, uncomfortable pose. On the table is an open book showing vaccination lesions after various time intervals.

The pose is probably not original. It is, for example, remarkably similar to James Gillray's formal portrait of William Pitt published in 1789.⁶

THE MONSALDI PORTRAIT

This large (37 x 28 cm) line engraving (Fig. 3) combines elements of Smith's portrait with a mirror image of Northcote's. The only features of the Smith portrait used are Jenner's head and the background scene.

The background view of Berkeley is clearly based on Smith's but is much changed. Only three cows are shown and their positions and that of the trees are altered. Also changed is the background view of church and castle. Although delicately engraved it is inaccurate.⁷

With the exception of Jenner's head, all the features of Northcote's portrait are present, but reversed. This, in the present writer's opinion has produced a more pleasing result. Jenner now has an air of relaxed authority rather than the uncomfortable stiffness of the original. The blank window is neatly filled with the Berkeley scene, which now balances the allegorical grouping on the opposite side.

Monsaldi's reversal of the Northcote portrait has led him into a rather obvious error. In Northcote's original Jenner's book is correctly set out with the caption at the top of the page and the contents reading down; the book can be read by Jenner but is upside-down to us. This has been reversed by Monsaldi. The caption, now in French, is at the *bottom* with the text, etc., going *up* the page. We can read the book, but it is upside-down to Jenner.

There is also one other error. The caption to the portrait reads "EDWARD JENNER M.D. E.R.S. &C. &C." Here Monsaldi has made a mistake in the abbreviation used to denote Fellowship of the Royal Society. At least one other example of similar carelessness by Monsaldi is known.⁸

Without more information it is pointless to speculate on why Monsaldi did the portrait in this way. Before discussing why and when it was made it might be appropriate to say a little about the engraver and in particular about the subject of another of his engravings.

ANTOINE MAXIME MONSALDI

Monsaldi (often Monsaldy) was born in Paris in 1768 and entered l'École de l'Académie Royale, Paris, in 1787. After a short stay in Rome he returned to Paris

⁵ Jenner was persuaded to sit for this portrait by his friend Richard Dunning who first introduced the term "vaccination" in *Some observations on vaccination*, 1800.

⁶ D. Hill, *Mr. Gillray the caricaturist*, London, Phaidon, 1965, pl. 24.

⁷ At Berkeley the church and its tower are separate; there is a river in front of the castle but it is too small for even the smallest boat.

⁸ Monsaldi's portrait of Isaac Newton taken from Seeman's painting is inscribed "d'après Sceman".



Figure 1.
Edward Jenner. Mezzotint by William Ward (?) from a pastel by John Raphael Smith, 1800. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Wellcome Trustees.)



Figure 2.
Edward Jenner. Mezzotint by William Say, from an oil painting by James Northcote, 1802. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Wellcome Trustees.)



Figure 3.
Edward Jenner. Line engraving by Antoine Maxime Monsaldi, 1811–1814 (?). (Author's Collection.)

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where he worked until his death in 1816.⁹ Very few of his engravings have been reproduced but some have been listed and described.¹⁰ His subjects were usually portraits or groups, often with a patriotic theme. Engravings by Monsaldi which have been reproduced include scenes of the 1899 salon,¹¹ and a portrait of Rochefoucauld-Liancourt¹² (see below).

Monsaldi was well thought of by the Imperial Court and his engraved portrait of the Empress Josephine, described as “. . . une charmante et rare pièce . . .”,¹³ was exhibited in her chateau at Malmaison.¹⁴

Monsaldi also presented to the empress three engraved portraits which linked together pioneers of vaccination in England, France, and Italy.¹⁵ The subjects were Edward Jenner, Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, and Onofrio Scassi.

ROCHEFOUCAULD-LIANCOURT

François Alexandre Frédéric, duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt et d'Estissac (1747–1827) was a member of one of the most noble and ancient of French families.¹⁶ A noted philanthropist, he was particularly interested in farming, medicine, education, and industry. He travelled widely in Europe and America from 1792 to 1799 when Napoleon allowed him to return to France. For many years he was Inspector-General of the Schools of Arts and Crafts founded in 1800 by his friend Chaptal, Minister of the Interior. He became a member of the Senate and in 1810 was awarded the cross of the Legion of Honour.

Liancourt was also instrumental in introducing vaccination into France early in 1800.¹⁷ He was appointed president of a committee organized by him to supervise vaccination in Paris. These facts are commemorated in Monsaldi's portrait. Although originally a private committee, it was given official status in 1804. Liancourt remained president until the Restoration and the committee functioned until 1823 when its duties were taken over by the Academy of Medicine.

Unfortunately there is no evidence in the biographies of either Jenner or Liancourt to indicate that they ever met or corresponded, and it is not known how Liancourt became aware of vaccination in general and of Jenner in particular.¹⁸ In any event

⁹ E. Bénézit, *Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*, Paris, Gründ, 1976, new ed., vol. 7, p. 492.

¹⁰ M. M. Hennin, *Inventaire de la collection d'estampes relatives à l'histoire de France*, Paris, Champion, 1882, vol. 4, pp. 186, 189, 199, 209, 224, 225, 230. H. Béraldi, *Les graveurs du XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Conquet, 1890, vol. 10, pp. 108–109.

¹¹ C. Aulanier, *Histoire du palais et du musée du Louvre—le salon carré*, Paris, Musées Nationaux [n.d.], pp. 44–45 and pl. 19–20.

¹² *Grande Larousse Encyclopédique*, Paris, Larousse, 1962, vol. 6, p. 612. This shows head and shoulders only. The Wellcome Museum has a copy of the whole portrait, Burgess, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 206.

¹³ L. Deltail, *Manuel de l'amateur d'estampes de 19^e siècle*, Paris, Dorbon-Aîné, 1925, vol. 1, p. 31.

¹⁴ A. M. Lescure, *Le chateau de Malmaison*, Paris, 1867, p. 235.

¹⁵ Bénézit, op. cit., note 9 above, p. 492.

¹⁶ F. G. de la Rochefoucauld, *Vie du duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt*, Paris, Delaforest, 1827. F. Dreyfus, *La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, un philanthrope d'autrefois*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1903.

¹⁷ Rochefoucauld, op. cit., note 16 above, pp. 52, 71–72. Dreyfus, op. cit., note 16 above, pp. 371–377.

¹⁸ Liancourt's principal English correspondent was Arthur Young the agriculturalist, whose English correspondents numbered “half the peerage”. It is possible that Young's wide circle of friends included friends of Jenner who also corresponded with various members of the House of

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it was inevitable that a man with Liancourt's interests would quickly appreciate the benefits of vaccination.

ONOFRIO SCASSI

Scassi (1768–1836) plays an unimportant role in the present story. He studied medicine in Pavia, London, and Edinburgh and introduced vaccination into Liguria. His *Riflessioni sulla vaccina* (1801) was an important early guide to those using vaccination.¹⁹

DISCUSSION

Not all of Monsaldi's work was dated. However it is probable that the three engravings were done as a set.²⁰ That of Liancourt was done after 1811 since the vaccination of the King of Rome in May 1811 is commemorated in it. Josephine died in 1814, so the portraits were probably done between 1811 and 1814.

Finally, we may perhaps speculate on how Jenner's reputation became so quickly established with Napoleon. A Napoleonic medal was struck in Jenner's honour,²¹ and the stories of Jenner's intercessions to secure the release of British captives have been told many times.²²

Among English visitors to France were antivaccinationists as well as pro-vaccinationists, some of whom were not always sympathetic to Jenner.²³ At the same time French doctors visiting England interviewed Jenner's opponents as well as Jenner himself.²⁴ Consequently for Jenner in particular to be accepted not just by French doctors but by Napoleon himself, it is likely that a special route to Napoleon's ear was used. It is possible that Liancourt was this link although no direct evidence for this has been found. His friend Chaptal was Minister of the Interior at the time. More significantly Liancourt's second son was married to Empress Josephine's sister-in-law and principal Maid of Honour. The two women were extremely close, and important diplomatic posts were obtained for Liancourt's son.²⁵ It is therefore

Lords. Baron, op. cit., note 2 above, vol. 1, p. 391, is wrong when he says that Liancourt observed the effect of vaccination in England. Liancourt was in England from 1792–1794; the first vaccination was done in 1796 and Jenner's monograph published in 1798.

¹⁹ *Enciclopedia Italiana*, Rome, 1936, vol. 31, p. 15.

²⁰ The portraits of Jenner and Liancourt are the same size and there is a general similarity between them. Liancourt sits in an upholstered chair by an open window through which can be seen a farm-yard indicating his interest in agriculture. That the portrait commemorates his involvement with vaccination is shown by the fact that he holds a paper which lists the achievements discussed here.

²¹ Baron, op. cit., note 2 above, vol. 2, pp. 35, 457.

²² Perhaps the most accessible and concise account is in J. A. Nixon, 'British prisoners released by Napoleon at Jenner's request', *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 1939, 32: 877–883.

²³ J. G. Alger, *Napoleon's British visitors and captives 1801–1815*, Westminster, Constable, 1904, pp. 80–81. One of these early visitors was William Woodville who had been invited to bring vaccine to France, *Rapport du comité central de vaccine*, Paris, Richard, 1803, p. 13–14. Woodville's experience with his vaccine in London led many, including Jenner, to suggest that it was contaminated with smallpox virus, Baron, op. cit., note 2 above, vol. 1, pp. 322–329, 364. In the same year (1800) Woodville and Pearson started the London Vaccine Institute which led to a rift with Jenner, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 360–372.

²⁴ Again, Woodville was the main English contact, *Rapport du comité*, op. cit., note 23 above, pp. 12–13, although not named by Baron, op. cit., note 2 above, vol. 1, p. 392.

²⁵ Dreyfus, op. cit., note 16 above, pp. 253–254. F. Masson, *Joséphine, impératrice et reine*, Paris, Ollendorf, 1903, pp. 126–127.

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quite possible that Jenner came to Napoleon's attention through Liancourt's influence on Josephine through his son and daughter-in-law.

CONCLUSIONS

It is not known how the Monsaldi engravings came to be made. For instance it is not known whether Monsaldi did them as a speculative venture or whether they were commissioned and if so by whom. No mention is made of them in Liancourt's biographies.²⁶

Despite, or perhaps because of, the unanswered questions, the engraving of Jenner remains a most interesting and thought-provoking exhibit, and the link to Napoleon a tantalizing possibility.

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²⁶ Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, note 16 above, p. 269, note 1, mentions in passing an unidentified engraving of Liancourt commemorating his connexion with vaccination. At least thirty-seven different engravings of Liancourt have been listed, G. Duplessis and P. A. Lemoisne, *Catalogue de la collection des portraits Français et étrangers conservée au département des estampes de la bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris, Rapilly, 1907, vol. 6, pp. 56–57.