

Antonio Verrio and the Royal image at Hampton Court

Brett Dolman



Antonio Verrio worked at Hampton Court Palace for William III and Queen Anne between 1700 and 1705 (Pl 1). This was his last major commission before his death in 1707 and has been dismissed as an inferior programme of decoration, not worthy of much investigation. Edward Croft-Murray's survey work for his *Decorative Painting in England*¹ did not give much space or consideration to this phase of Verrio's career, and the only academic article on any of the Hampton Court paintings appeared as long ago as 1940.² The special edition of *Apollo Magazine* published in 1994 to celebrate the re-opening of the King's Apartments after the 1986 fire contained chapters on every aspect of William III's decorative scheme except Verrio's murals.

For many years, it was claimed that Verrio had, in Walpole's phrase, 'spoiled it out of principle'. Verrio – a Roman Catholic – was, according to this way of thinking, disinclined to paint triumphalist artwork for a Protestant patron: in 1904, Charles Allom's report to the Board of Works even suggested that he could detect sinister caricatures of William and Mary hidden within Verrio's schemes.³ Verrio, it was also widely claimed, was going blind, and incapable of matching his earlier masterpieces at Burghley, Windsor and elsewhere. Yet evidence for these claims is elusive. Verrio continued to work

right up until his death and, as Edgar Wind pointed out, 'The mere fact that he served to their full satisfaction four successive sovereigns of vastly different tempers [and religion]... ought to free him from the suspicion of having been a man of principles.'⁴

The main reason why Verrio's paintings may, in places, 'want elegance', is that they have been frequently overpainted and restored, in an ongoing battle against the riverside elements that began soon after they were completed. Four separate 18th-century programmes to fix areas of detached plaster are recorded, whilst the 19th-century restorers seem to have indulged in overpainting whole areas of Verrio's original schemes.⁵ Restorers' signatures could even be traced in the paint layers themselves when the King's Staircase was yet again cleaned and restored in 1905. Further restoration of Verrio's work took place in the 1940s and the 1960s, and a less invasive conservation schedule is still in place today.

Nevertheless, Verrio's paintings at the palace are important – as rare survivals of royal baroque taste in this country. They can also illuminate the wider context of decorative iconography that informed William III's rebuilding of Hampton Court Palace after the 1688 revolution. For just as

William was 'personally involved in the selection of paintings for his palaces',⁶ and had an 'intense interest' and 'intimate involvement'⁷ in Hampton Court's furnishing and decoration, so too must he have cared about the not inconsiderable cost and importance of the painted murals. Verrio's schemes must be considered, not as 'expensive wallpaper' but as an integral part of the iconographic message William's King's Apartments were designed to convey.

William III's Hampton Court riverside Banqueting House⁸ was built near the site of the old Tudor Water Gallery, which had already been a kind of grand bucolic retreat for Henry VIII. Mary II had converted it into a temporary home while enthusiastically overseeing Wren's Hampton Court building works of the early 1690s. In 1700, William knocked it down and re-imagined its original purpose a little further west along the river as an informal entertainment house, for hosting small summer afternoon or dinner parties for close friends. The main chamber was decorated by Verrio in 1701, the trompe l'oeil ceiling 'open' to the sky and the walls pretending a richly carved interior decorated by framed paintings: the choice of content, with extensive gilding by Peter Cousin,⁹ made the room at once magnificent, personal, and even a little racy. In 1864, the Banqueting House was granted as a 'Grace and Favour' residence to a Miss Baly, whose Victorian aesthetic and sense of decorum provoked this letter to the Lord Chamberlain:

I find very objectionable the large undressed figures in the frescoes on each side of the fireplace and venture to suggest that they should be either draped or clouded in such a manner as to render them appropriate decorations for a drawing room. Lady Rennett [Baly's predecessor] had large bookcases which entirely concealed them.¹⁰

Undressed figures were hardly rare subjects for Verrio and his contemporaries of course, and William and his friends would have felt quite at ease with them, but what gave the Banqueting House a more particular allure was the choice of subject. Around all four walls, Verrio painted the various amorous adventures and misadventures of the gods: the two main scenes opposite the windows overlooking the Thames (the ones either side of the fireplace that Miss Baly mentions) in glorious baroque technicolour, the rest in muted grisaille. To the left of the fireplace (Pl 2), the god of the river Alpheus lustily pursues the nymph Arethusa, while Diana attempts a rescue, concealing Arethusa by a cloud before transforming her into a stream.¹¹ To the right, Bacchus liberates Ariadne from her misery on the island of Naxos.¹² In between the two coloured murals, and above the fireplace, a grisaille that is usually described¹³ as 'Jupiter and Juno' is actually better read as part of the story of Jupiter and Io,¹⁴ as the horns of a barely visible heifer are concealed beneath a poorly overpainted and damaged corner of the mural.¹⁵ The rest of the Io story is played out in the two grisailles in the north-east corner of the room, where Mercury beguiles Argus with his long stories and soporific pipe music before chopping his head off.

Verrio's inspiration for the grisailles in the south-east and south-west corners of the painted room again comes from Ovid. Arguably, the chosen scenes, running clockwise around the south wall, are: Pan and Syrinx; Narcissus and Echo; and two scenes from the tale of Caunus and Byblis.¹⁶ Narcissus is definitely the subject of the second of these grisailles, but the designs of the others are too generic to be definitely identified. An alternative reading of the south-west corner might be two separate scenes showing Hermaphrodite and Salmacis, and Cyane.¹⁷ Verrio may never



The illustrations are of works by Antonio Verrio (c1736-1707) unless otherwise stated

1 King's Great Staircase, Hampton Court Palace, 1702. Oil on plaster. © Historic Royal Palaces

2 Alpheus and Arethusa, 1701. Oil on plaster. Banqueting House, Hampton Court Palace, north wall (detail) © Historic Royal Palaces

have intended a specific interpretation in any case. Indeed, the painted room grisailles seem to have eluded definition even in 1701, as the payment accounts for Peter Cousin list the subjects simply as 'Europa, Danæ, etc'.¹⁸ The unifying idea behind the choice of subjects for the south wall, closest to the river, was, no doubt, that they all feature appropriate water-based tales, even if these were selected somewhat randomly from Ovid (Pls 3a, 3b).

Finally, and more definitely, Verrio's grisaille scheme concludes in the north-west corner of the room, above the entrance door, with two grisailles depicting Apollo and Clytie, and Apollo and Daphne.¹⁹ Interestingly, from at least as early as Philippe Mercier's painting *The Music Party*, of 1733,²⁰ the Banqueting House also contained portraits of some of the same Ovidian characters by the Italian artist Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini: Mercury, Juno, Apollo, Daphne, Pan, Syrinx, Diana, Endymion, Bacchus, Ariadne, Mars, and Venus.

Verrio's paintings have been extensively restored. The history of early restoration work remains uncertain, but in more recent years the entire scheme was cleaned in 1965 and to a lesser extent in 1986. The grisailles in particular have lost some of their subtlety with areas of damaged and abraded paint renewed with greater impasto than the original.²¹ This makes any stylistic conclusions difficult, but Verrio's authorship of the grisailles, at least, is open to question.



3a, 3b Comparison with 17th-century illustrated copies of Ovid does not provide absolute parallels with Verrio's work at Hampton Court, but one or two examples show that Verrio was probably drawing on a common source book of images: **3a** *Byblis* (?), 1701. Oil on plaster. Banqueting House, Hampton Court Palace, south-west corner © Historic Royal Palaces **3b** *Biblis en fontaine*, from Nicholas Renouard, *Les Métamorphoses d'Ovide*, illustrated by Jean Mathieu, Paris, illustrated edition, 1637. © Special Collections, University of Virginia Library



4 *Mary II when Princess Mary of York*, by Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680), c1672. Oil on canvas, 123.2 x 97.8 cm. Royal Collection The Royal Collection © 2009 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

5 *Presentation sketch for the ceiling of the Banqueting House, Hampton Court Palace*, c1700. Oil on paper mounted on panel, 34.3 x 49.8 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum, London © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Thurley²² suggests a collaboration for the whole scheme with other artists, notably Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer or Jakob Bogdani as flower-painting and grotesque-work specialists, possibly all working to a scheme drawn up by William Talman or Daniel Marot. Monnoyer, however, had died in 1699, although his son, Antoine, continued his work for royal patrons; on the other hand, Antonio Montingo, because of his documented connection with Verrio at Windsor, may also have been involved. In addition, the Works Accounts for March 1701 also record the presence of Louis Laguerre at Hampton Court. Laguerre painted twelve grisaille roundels on the exterior of the new building around Fountain Court, and it is possible that he also worked with Verrio painting similar pieces inside the palace.²³

The most impressive piece of Verrio's workmanship in the Banqueting House is undoubtedly the ceiling. Minerva sits in majesty over the variously assembled allegorical figures representing the arts and sciences. At the borders fly the Four Winds, attended by representations of the Four Seasons accompanied by their zodiacal identifiers: Spring (with Aries) accompanies the West Wind, Summer (with, probably, the lion's mane of Leo)²⁴ the mild East Wind, Autumn (with Libra) the rainy South Wind, and Winter (with Capricorn) the harsh, ice-breathed North Wind.

Some of the arts and sciences are readily identifiable: Painting, with her easel and brushes; Music, with trumpet; Song, with upraised and open mouth and her lute; Sculpture, presenting a carved bust; Astronomy, crowned by a circle of stars; Architecture, holding a scroll revealing an architectural drawing. The winged ears or head of another figure holding

a scroll, itself a symbol of acquired knowledge, might indicate the 'elevation – or flight – of the spirit to the things that are to be learnt' as Science itself is described by Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, one of the standard iconographic reference work for artists first compiled at the end of the 16th century. The figure may also represent Rhetoric, as a similar personification is described at Ham House. A figure in white, seemingly cast in theatrical pose, with her hand placed at her breast may represent Theatre, whilst a figure with an Eastern-looking headdress might be the personification of Philosophy.²⁵ The rest of the figures have no discernible attributes at all.

A preparatory sketch for Verrio's ceiling survives (Pl 5)²⁶ with two notable differences from the completed scheme. Minerva's owl has been replaced in the final version with a single 'all-seeing' eye of wisdom, while the figures of Sculpture and Music have been more clearly identified, with the addition of a carved bust, apparently meant as a portrait of a laurel-crowned William²⁷ himself. It might then be suggested that the bust was added at the direct request of the King after seeing the sketch. Minerva's prominent position in the scheme also raises the question of whether her inclusion carried a more specific meaning. Just as William seems to have placed himself centre-stage, he might also have included a portrait of his late wife as Minerva. Such royal iconography was, of course, normal baroque protocol: Peter



Lely, for example, had painted Mary as Diana in c1672, when she was a princess (Pl 4).²⁸

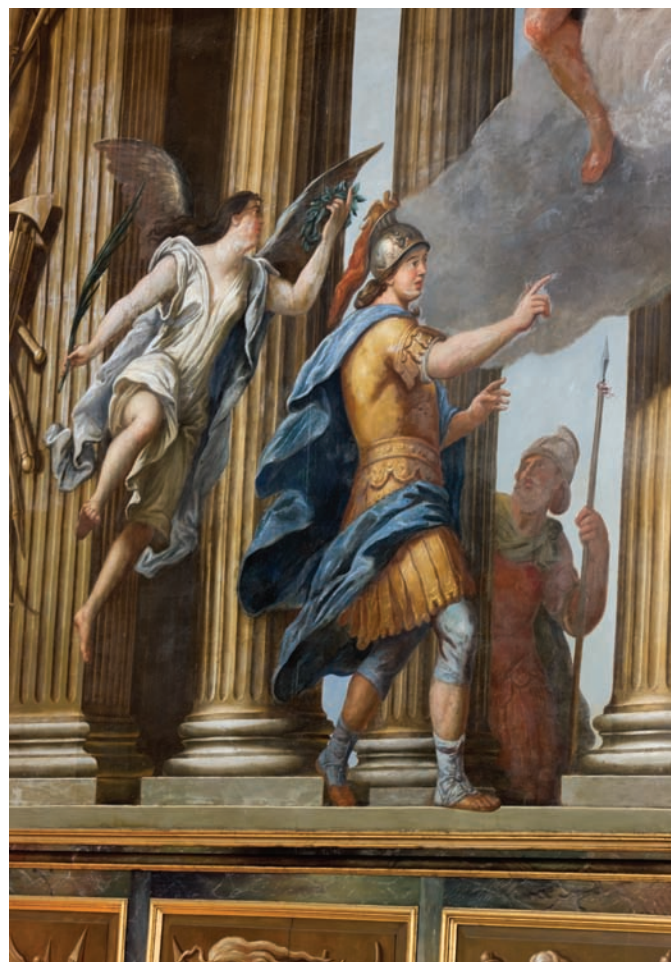
The Banqueting House was an elegant and grand, yet intimate, space for William to entertain his guests. Come and disport yourself by the river; make merry, live and love like gods; and remember that all of this largesse and artistic splendour has been made possible by the virtuous and noble patronage, through every season, of your King. Minerva, as goddess of wisdom, and more particularly as moral guardian of learning and the arts, was an obvious subject to demonstrate this. It was a common theme in baroque art, and Verrio had painted similar schemes before. Having such a painting on the ceiling was a clear message about the civilising benevolence of its owner, and so, in this case, of the enlightened royal patronage of William III.

As soon as Verrio completed his work in the Banqueting House in the late summer of 1701, scaffolding was raised along the main enfilade of King's Apartments within the palace itself. Work on furnishing William's new rooms had begun in earnest the previous year, and a sequence of painted ceilings running from the King's Staircase to the King's Little Bedchamber on the principal (first) floor was planned to complete the scheme. Verrio started work in the Great and Little Bedchambers, the two rooms furthest from the entrance, in the south-east corner of Fountain Court. These were the only rooms that Verrio finished before William's death in March 1702,²⁹ having found two appropriately sleepy themes to complement their function as

grand 'official' rooms that were used more as morning meeting areas than as actual bedrooms: William seems to have slept in a more intimate space on the ground-floor.³⁰

In the larger of the two rooms, Verrio painted the story of Endymion,³¹ the shepherd adored by the Titan Goddess of the Moon, Selene, and granted eternal youth by Zeus, but placed in a state of eternal slumber. Endymion lies in the arms of Morpheus, God of Dreams; his father Hypnos, God of Sleep to the left. Selene ascends from her nocturnal mystic rendezvous with Endymion in a cave, surrounded by some of their offspring. Eosphoros, the Morning Star, heralds the dawn, fast approaching from the east. The central scheme is framed within Verrio's usual mixture of gilded scrollwork, flying cherubs and fabulous creatures, surrounding four medallions showing scenes from the stories of Diana (who as Roman Goddess of the Moon was frequently associated with Selene, despite the inappropriate potency of the Endymion myth) and Actaeon, and Venus and Adonis. In the Little Bedchamber, Verrio painted *Mars asleep in the lap of Venus*, the literal disarming of Strife by Love.

Both bedchamber schemes can be read as William's memorialising of his wife, whose active role in the early building works at Hampton Court would have been readily recalled as William attempted to finish the King's Apartments. Surrounded by her favourite birds and roses, William – the great warleader – is pacified by the love of his wife in the Little Bedchamber, and now, when he sleeps, dreams every night of his lost love in the Great Bedchamber.



6 *Alexander the Great and 'Victory'*, 1702. Oil on plaster. King's Staircase, Hampton Court Palace, east wall (detail) © Historic Royal Palaces

7 *Apollo and the Muses*, 1702. Oil on plaster. King's Staircase, Hampton Court Palace, north wall (detail) © Historic Royal Palaces

Not all are granted attributes, but Eros, Aphrodite, Ares and Hephaistos make up the first group on the left, and the crowned figures on the right are Poseidon (with trident) and, presumably, Hades; the female figure looking as though she is being somewhat forcefully brought to the table to sit beside Hades may therefore be Persephone.³⁴ Further down, as the ceiling meets the wall, and the heavenly sphere intersects with the earthly realm, Verrio paints Artemis, astride her crescent moon, and Dionysos with his tutor and Olympian court jester, Seilenos. Finally, Herakles and Romulus himself appear underneath and to each side of a third, empty, table, at which the Roman emperors plan to sit, 'just below the moon in the upper air' as Julian describes.³⁵

But Julian's *The Caesars* is a Roman satire. Despite Romulus' best intentions, the Gods quickly decide that not all Roman Emperors should be welcomed on Olympus. Indeed, during what might be termed 'Round One' when 350 years of imperial pretensions are paraded in front of the banquet, many of Rome's erstwhile rulers are quickly dismissed or dispatched, accompanied by caustic comments about their reputation and conduct from Seilenos: Caligula (referred to not by name but simply as 'a fierce monster') is hurled into Tartarus. 'Round Two' is a battle of wits between the finalists: Julius Caesar, Octavian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Constantine and Alexander the Great, who has been introduced as a late non-Roman addition by Herakles. Each is given a chance to argue for their own merits; Marcus Aurelius gets the most votes on the basis that he is the wisest, and even Seilenos is outwitted and silenced.

Verrio has simplified all of this and altered its focus. Only twelve emperors appear below Romulus, and none is unambiguously identifiable, with Julius Caesar (who also plays the largest – and most loquacious part – in Julian's text) probably at the front, and Octavian close behind, with the philosopher Zeno in close attendance; Nero, with guitar, stands at the far right. But it is Alexander, separated from the Romans, and bracketed by the figures of Herakles, his promoter and symbol of heroic virtue, and winged Victory herself, that dominates one side of the composition (Pl 6).

It is Alexander, then, that seems to be the victor in this composition, and this is perhaps unsurprising given William's particular enthusiasm for his promoter Herakles, who appears throughout the decorative vocabulary of Hampton Court, standing for William's embodiment of virtuous leonine strength. While the figure of Victory stands beside Alexander, meanwhile, it is the figure of Justice who descends toward the Roman emperors, with a flaming sword and bridle,³⁶ ready to dispatch those who fail to meet with divine approval, just as she does in Julian's text. To underline the point, Verrio has added four monstrous bat-winged, serpent-tailed Erinyes, or Furies, hovering over the Romans, set to punish them for their mortal sins.

In the surviving sketch for this part of the Kings Staircase,³⁷ Alexander's victory seems even more explicit: Herakles presents Alexander directly to Zeus, over and above a jostling crowd of Romans. It is as if Verrio is recording the moment in Julian's text when Seleinos turns to Romulus and challenges, 'See now whether all these Romans can match this one Greek.'³⁸



Julian himself sits at his writing desk on the south wall of the King's Staircase, visited by Hermes who (according to Julian's own text) told him the story of *The Caesars*. Julian – the emperor who sought to return Rome to its pagan past, after the assumption of Christianity by Constantine – had been paralleled by Protestant writers in the 1680s with James II, as both were enemies of the 'true' church (if you were an early Christian or a 17th-century Protestant).³⁹ In this reading, Julian's victor Marcus Aurelius has lost his crown in Verrio's revision of *The Caesars* because it is William, as Alexander, who is the greatest.

Julian's prominence, however, raises the question of whether William is also aligning himself with the Roman apostate. As Edgar Wind has noted,⁴⁰ Julian himself was undergoing a bit of a rebranding in the 1690s. No longer vilified for his apostasy, Julian was instead championed as a figure of tolerance and reform, the pagan witness of Protestant truth. Just as Julian had spoken out against the debauchery and intolerance of the Roman Church, so too did William III.

Verrio's scheme is perhaps more in line with Julian's text than has been realised. William is not offering an unequivocal statement of superiority.⁴¹ If he was, Julian's text, despite its Protestant reinterpretation, was an odd choice, given that Marcus Aurelius ultimately won first prize. Similarly, Verrio's mural is not an obviously triumphal composition: Julius Caesar is almost as prominent pictorially as Alexander, and William indeed was happy elsewhere in the palace to trumpet the former's virtues, having had Mantegna's masterpiece, *The Triumphs of Caesar*, restored for the new Queen's Gallery.⁴² The King's Staircase is instead a carefully pitched piece of political art. William is the victorious Alexander, a foreign ruler, fit none the less to be welcomed into a native pantheon of kings. As Julian has Romulus admit, 'It is true

that my descendants have admired him so much that they hold that he alone of all foreign generals is worthy to be styled 'the Great'.⁴³ But which was the greatest? It is not for William, but the Gods, to choose. Verrio's painting, far from being simply expensive triumphalist wallpaper, is intended as an explicit interactive debate about William's merits as ruler. A visitor to the King's Apartments was meant physically and mentally to inhabit Verrio's world and debate the questions posed by Verrio's composition, and by Julian's text. This interpretation is reinforced by Verrio's choice of composition on the north wall. Here, he has abandoned Julian's text and instead painted an implicit homage to the benefits of William's 'Glorious Revolution'. At the top, Apollo, in his rôle as God of Music, sits amidst the Muses (Pl 7), the inspirational goddesses of the arts – a common baroque theme.⁴⁴ Here they are also joined by Pan, God of Nature, and Demeter, Goddess of Agriculture. Beneath, a display of gold plate sits centre-stage between the figures of Khloris, Goddess of Flowers, Zephyros, her husband, God of Spring⁴⁵ and Pomona, Goddess of Fruit⁴⁶ with Vertumnus. To either side, two river gods and two river nymphs complete the naturalistic setting. This, then, is William's case for inclusion at the banquet of the Gods.

Bickham⁴⁷ thought that the two river gods represented the 'Marriage of the Thame and Isis' into the River Thames, and therefore the whole north wall referenced, specifically, how Apollo (and therefore William) presided over an ever-abundant banquet and harvest here at Hampton Court, built on the Thames. Indeed, this itself, as Wind suggested, could be a metaphor for the Union of William and Mary. On the other hand, there is no obvious aquatic union taking place, and the interpretation of the north wall needn't be so geographically precise. It is true, though, that William's lion and Mary's rose do appear throughout the King's Staircase



8 *Triumph of William III (?)*, attributed to Sir James Thornhill (1675-1734), c1699-1702. Pen-and-ink sketch, 38.0 x 29.3 cm. Sotheby's London, Early British Drawings, Watercolours and Portrait Miniatures, 4 December 2008 (lot 114) © Courtesy of Sotheby's

9 *Design for the decoration of an alcove, Hampton Court*, attributed to Sir James Thornhill, c1702-04 (?). Pen and brown ink, with brown wash, over graphite, 23.2 x 32.7cm. British Museum, London © The Trustees of the British Museum

10 *A Mythological Sea Triumph*, 1703-05. Oil on plaster. Queen's Drawing Room, Hampton Court Palace, south wall © Historic Royal Palaces

decoration.⁴⁸ This again suggests that William, while keen to stress his worthiness and ascendancy, was equally eager to demonstrate his Stuart credentials.

William can therefore be seen in Verrio's King's Staircase as three separate people. He is Julian the Apostate, ridding the world of Roman Catholicism; he is Alexander the Great, a heroic general fit to be mentioned in the same breath as all glorious English generals of the past; and he is Apollo, presiding over a new era of plenty.

William – and Verrio – originally intended for this interactive essay on William's authority to be further played out on the ceilings of the rest of the King's Apartments: all the rooms (apart from the Guard Chamber) have gently curving coves. If William had not died in 1702, there is every chance that Verrio's scheme would be more immediately comprehensible, placed in the wider context of a full decorative programme, just as he had completed for Charles II at Windsor.

Direct evidence for what this scheme may have been is scant. Beyond the preparatory sketches for the Banqueting House and the King's Staircase previously mentioned, there is another drawing by Verrio which shows a king bearing an olive branch, attended by figures representing Justice and Humility, and being offered a crown: it seems perfectly possible that this is an unexecuted idea for one of the other rooms in the King's Apartments, perhaps the Privy Chamber. Somewhere, the debate about William's authority offered up by the King's Staircase would have been answered with a more definitive message of kingship in an appropriate setting. A smaller Verrio sketch showing *An Allegory of The Triumph of William III* was sold at Sotheby's in 1975, a larger drawing showing *Victory seated holding a portrait of William III* appeared at Christie's in 1988, and in 2009 a modello for another *Triumph of William III* also appeared at auction.⁴⁹

Intriguingly, a drawing attributed to Sir James Thornhill, also recently brought to auction,⁵⁰ shows a central circular

design of a triumph, framed by figures representing the four quarters of the globe, and crowned by William and Mary's royal coat-of-arms (Pl 8). This may well be a hitherto unrecognised design for a ceiling at Hampton Court, and raises the interesting question of Thornhill's involvement. Evidence for Thornhill at the palace, before his first official engagement there for Queen Anne in about 1710, already comes from a small group of sketches at the British Museum. These appear to be copies from Verrio's finished schemes, with notes of how much Verrio charged.⁵¹ However, there is also another, separate, drawing at the British Museum (Pl 9),⁵² currently attributed to Thornhill as a design for the decoration of an alcove at Hampton Court, c1702-4, as it is similarly inscribed 'Verrio' with a scale: this also features a Roman triumph, and may be directly compared to the present Sotheby's drawing. The continuation of the Roman theme, introduced on the King's Staircase, would certainly have been appropriate, and reinforces the idea of a decorative programme that built on the debate set up by Verrio at the entrance to the apartments.⁵³

As has previously been stated by Susan Jenkins and by Simon Thurley,⁵⁴ William's other decorative decisions at Hampton Court do suggest an iconographic message of self-glorification. William was keen to be seen as a triumphant military leader and pacifier, particularly after the signing of the peace of Ryswick in 1697. The grisaille work, below Verrio's principal schemes in the King's Staircase, showing painted scenes of military victory and trophies of war, lead the visitor through to the display of real weaponry in the King's Guard Chamber.⁵⁵ Godfrey Kneller's enormous *William III on Horseback* dominated the King's Presence Chamber, and introduced William as the true British heir of Imperial Augustan Rome.⁵⁶ Triumphal tapestries were also part of the design vocabulary, with scenes from the lives of Hercules (Herakles) and Joshua adding mythological and spiritual weight to William's claims.



Hercules, indeed, is everywhere at Hampton Court.⁵⁷ He appears as one of a pair of andirons (the other being Ares) in the King's Guard Chamber, and stands (again with Ares) as a statue in the gardens. Louis Laguerre, when not working alongside Verrio, was employed to paint twelve gilded grisailles featuring the labours of Hercules on the outside of the building around the inside of Fountain Court, which housed the new royal apartments: these roundels are framed by wreaths of oranges and lionskins. Most explicitly of all, Caius Cibber's pediment for the main façade of the new East Front of the palace represents a very Protestant Hercules, with Britannia, trampling on the Roman Catholic church and her associated vices of Superstition, Tyranny and Envy. The fruits of good Protestant government fill the right-hand side of the pediment. This reflects the iconographic message traced in more elaborate detail in Verrio's paintings for the Banqueting House and in the King's Apartments.

But, as the King's Staircase makes clear, this was always what we might call a contextualising self-glorification. William was keen to be seen as a legitimate part of the Stuart dynasty. This explains not only the equivocal nature of Verrio's interpretation of Julian's text on the King's Staircase, but also the well-chosen selection of Stuart portraits ('editing out any unpleasant associations')⁵⁸ lining the rest of the King's Apartments. This was continuity as well as revolution.

Verrio had not finished painting the King's Staircase when William III died in March 1702. Queen Anne let him carry on and, eventually, paid him. The following year, Anne commissioned Verrio to paint one of the most important unfinished rooms in the palace: the Queen's Drawing Room. Anne, as reigning monarch, stayed in the King's Apartments at Hampton Court when she visited in 1707, but the Queen's Apartments were to be prepared for her consort, Prince

George of Denmark, and the unfurnished Queen's Drawing Room, centrally positioned on the East Front of the palace overlooking the formal gardens, was intended as its decorative focus.

Verrio fashioned a different trompe l'oeil effect in this room: the ceiling was again open to the sky, revealed above a marble hall supported on pretended pilasters, but the three walls were painted to resemble tapestries with wide floral borders and gold fringes. The painted scheme portrayed Anne as Britannia, venerated by the Four Corners of the globe, and as Justice, crowned by Neptune and Britannia, with George of Denmark playing a supporting role as the Lord High Admiral. The whole scheme recognised Britain's⁵⁹ emerging dominance over land and sea, a process catalysed during the time it took Verrio to paint the room, with the 1704 victories at Blenheim and Gibraltar.

George himself is painted in full armour on the north wall, standing in front of the British fleet:⁶⁰ his figure is almost identical in pose and likeness to Kneller's full-length portrait, now in the National Maritime Museum, of around the same date. Verrio has added a typical array of sea deities, nereids and tritons to what is otherwise a traditional formal portrait. But the clarity of the message here stands in marked contrast to the obscurity of the opposite south wall (Pl 10). Verrio continues the naval theme of the north wall, but a sleeping cupid rests centre-stage, born by a four-horse aquatic chariot, surrounded by tritons, nereids and, most curiously of all, a tantalisingly sexless figure sitting side-saddle on a sea creature and carrying an instrument that seems to be simultaneously a lyre and a horn. The Three Graces paddle to the left, and the British fleet sails past in a calm sea in the background.

A sleeping cupid would normally represent the abandonment of worldly pleasures, but quite why such a



figure should sit centre-stage in this context is unclear. Croft-Murray suggested that this was an unhappy expression of Anne and George's conjugal affections, but this seems unlikely, not to say inappropriate. Instead, the sleeping cupid may be substituting for a real heir.⁶¹ The key to understanding Verrio's intention may be the mysterious naked figure with the lyre. It looks for all the world like a cross between Galatea, Aphrodite and Arion – we cannot even be sure of its sex. One thing it is surely not is another portrait of George of Denmark, although this reading seems to have slipped into current thinking sometime in the 20th century.⁶² This is surely absurd and the figure is almost certainly female, although this has been obscured, probably by later overpainting and clumsy restoration. Certainly, large areas of Verrio's scheme, here as elsewhere, have been extensively overpainted and retouched from an early period.⁶³

On the west wall, opposite the window, Britannia⁶⁴ receives the homage of the four quarters of the globe: America (with feathered headdress); Asia (with censer); Europe (with a crown and sceptre showing her pre-eminence over the rest of the world); and Africa (with an elephant headdress). To the far right of Britannia, Hercules is paired with Minerva, supporting the female figure of Religion. To Britannia's left are grouped Victory, Mars (reprising his double-act with Hercules) and the aged figure of Reformation (Pls 11a, 11b). Mars and Victory, representing real military success, are shown trampling over real soldiers, whilst Hercules and Minerva, representing moral victory, are shown triumphing over the metaphorical enemies of evil, possibly meant to represent Envy and Superstition, echoing Cibber's East Front pediment that frames this room on the outside.

The ceiling shows a finely detailed portrait of Queen Anne enthroned as Justice (Pl 12), with scales in one hand, sword in the other, and an overflowing cornucopia at her side, dressed in an imperial purple robe lined with ermine, crowned by Neptune and Britannia, declaring her dominion over sea and earth. Above them, fly Peace, Fame and the Morning Star, heralding the dawn of the new age. Around the Queen are grouped the three other Cardinal Virtues (as Anne herself is depicted as Justice): to Anne's right, supported by her lion, leans the helmeted figure of Fortitude; to her left sit Prudence and Temperance. To the sides fly the figures of Time revealing Truth, and Victory. Beneath, the Three Graces are joined by a figure representing Vigilance, and another repetition of Peace.⁶⁵ At the bottom gather Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, Juno, Apollo and Diana.

Verrio's image of Anne as imperial personification of Justice, raised in triumph even above the gods, is a fitting iconographic climax to the questions raised by Verrio's decorative scheme on the King's Staircase. Anne's apotheosis also triumphs as a work of art, one which shows how Verrio developed his ideas of pictorially representing a 'monarch in triumph' over four successive reigns. Whether working on a single canvas, as with his *Sea Triumph of Charles II*, or on a complex narrative argument stretched over several ceilings, as at Windsor for Charles II and Catherine of Braganza, and at Hampton Court for William III and afterwards Queen Anne, Verrio was the master of translating royal self-aggrandisement into illusionistic art. His work should be viewed in the same context as Rubens' *Apotheosis of James I* in the Whitehall Banqueting House. Its incomplete survival at Hampton Court (as at Windsor) and its deterioration (and woefully overpainted restoration) should not obscure this view.



11a, 11b The figure of 'Reformation' seems to have eluded all previous attempts at identification and has even been read as representing Prince George, but Verrio here is copying directly from Ripa's *Iconologia* where the figure of Reformation is described, 'An ancient matron in a mean habit; a pruning hook in her right hand, and in her left, a book open, inscribed, 'Pereunt discrimine nullo amissae leges: the Laws are always defended, and never perish by any accident': **11a** Reformation, 1703-05. Oil on plaster. Queen's Drawing Room, Hampton Court Palace, west wall (detail) © Historic Royal Palaces **11b** Reformation, from Caesar Ripa, *Iconologia or Moral Emblems* (London, first English edition, 1709; first published in Italy, 1593 and in France, 1644). © The English Emblem Book Project

12 Queen Anne as Justice, 1703-05. Oil on plaster. Queen's Drawing Room, Hampton Court Palace, ceiling (detail) © Historic Royal Palaces



1 Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England, 1537-1837*, 2 vols, 1962-70. I am very grateful to the following people for helping me extend the understanding of Verrio's work beyond Croft-Murray's summary analysis: Victoria Bradley, Cécile Brett, John Burbidge, Carolyn Crookall, Jon Culverhouse, Sebastian Edwards, Robin Forster, Ian Franklin, Richard Johns, Anna Keay, Sarah Kilby, Lucy Peter, Zoe Roberts, Chris Stevens and Lucy Worsley. A special mention must also go to the late Gerald Heath, whose unpublished archive of notes on Hampton Court Palace (Historic Royal Palaces) remains an essential companion.

2 Edgar Wind, 'Julian the Apostate at Hampton Court', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol 3, no. 1/2 (October 1939-January 1940), pp127-37.

3 The National Archives, MS Work 19/309. Allom believed that the figure

of Artemis on the King's Staircase had a face on either side of her head – a double-faced Mary – whilst the bald Seleinos in the same painting was an insult to the King.

4 Wind, op cit n2, p128, n3.

5 A comprehensive account of the original context for Verrio's decorations, and for their subsequent conservation history can be found in Simon Thurley's magisterial *Hampton Court*, 2003. Thurley, however, is more concerned with Verrio's schemes as part of the built heritage of the palace, and does not detail either their content or their possible iconographic significance within the decorative programme.

6 Susan Jenkins, 'A Sense of History: The Artistic Taste of William III,' in 'The King's Apartments', *Apollo Magazine*, CXL (August 1994).

7 Simon Thurley, 'The Building of the King's Apartments: A Most Particular Monarch', in 'The King's Apartments',

op cit n6. Thurley records thirty visits made by the King to Hampton Court between November 1699 and April 1700. At each visit, decisions were made about the use of rooms, and the decoration within them.

8 A short account of the building and interiors of the Banqueting House by Peter Curnow was published in 1958 by Her Majesty's Stationery Office; this was reissued, with additional notes by Juliet Allen, in 1986.

9 In May 1701, 'Peter Cousen' was paid £79 9s 2d for all his gilding work (over 3,000 leaves) in the Banqueting House. The National Archives, MS Work 5/52.

10 The National Archives, MS LC 1/140.

11 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, V: 572-641. The figures are simply described as a 'satyr and nymph' by Curnow (op cit, n8), and more correctly as a 'river-god and nymph' by Croft-Murray (op cit, n1).

12 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII: 176-182.

13 For example, by Curnow and Croft-Murray (op cit, nn8, 1).

14 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I: 668-721.

15 'Much of the design has been obliterated, then disguised with what is now a darkened retouching.' John Burbidge, 'Condition Audit of Painted Decoration, 15th January 2002, Painted Room, Banqueting House, Hampton Court Palace', Granville & Burbidge, unpublished report. The original damage may have been caused by heat transmission from the chimney flue which runs behind this area of the wall.

16 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I: 688-712; III: 339-510; IX: 453-665.

17 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV: 273-388; V: 408-437.

18 The National Archives, MS Work 5/52.

19 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV: 256-270; I: 452-567.

20 Royal Collection inv no. 402414.

The figure of Endymion is seen in the background to the painting (assuming, of course, that its inclusion represented its real location, rather than simply an appropriate choice of background material). The association of Pellegrini's paintings with the Banqueting House has none the less been a long one, and some of this cycle are on display in the Ante-Room again today.

21 Burbidge, op cit, n15.

22 Thurley, op cit, n5, pp192-93.

23 The National Archives, MS Work 5/51.

24 This is arguably more obvious in the preparatory sketch, op cit n26.

25 Verrio painted similar, surviving, schemes at Hôtel Brûlart, Chatsworth (State Dining Room) and at Ham House (White Closet). Chatsworth has Minerva with the Seven Liberal Arts: Music, Rhetoric, Astronomy, Geometry, Logic, Arithmetic and Grammar. Ham House has Minerva with Geometry, Music, Rhetoric, Astronomy, Philosophy, Painting and Sculpture.

26 London, Victoria & Albert Museum, inv no. E.1085-1916. See also the article by Cécile Brett elsewhere in this journal, n92.

27 Ernest Law, *History of Hampton Court Palace*, 3 vols, 1885-1903, III, p129. Law first suggested this, and there is no particular reason to doubt it.

28 Royal Collection inv no. 404918 (Pl 5).

29 Thurley, op cit n5, provides a comprehensive account of the building and furnishing of the King's Apartments.

30 Ibid, p204.

31 The story of Endymion and Selene is referenced in various classical sources although it doesn't survive as a full text: see, eg, Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1. 56. Verrio had also painted this subject in the Queen's Bedchamber at Windsor Castle.

32 Julian wrote in Greek, so it seems appropriate – and potentially more accurate in this case – to identify the lead players in Verrio's painting by their Greek rather than Latin names.

33 This figure was described in most of the 18th and 19th-century descriptions of the palace (eg, Bickham, op cit, n34) as representing one of the Fates, as she holds a pair of scissors in one hand, but rather than carrying the thread of life, Verrio's winged goddess is holding a substantial handful of hair: one of Iris's roles as divine messenger was to bring a lock of hair of a deceased mortal soul back to Olympus. This, then, as made explicit by the presence of Zephyros and the rainbow, is Iris.

34 George Bickham, *Deliciae Britannicae*, 1742. Bickham was the first visitor to Hampton Court to attempt to describe the King's Staircase in detail. His interpretation was not based on a reading of Julian, however, and his attempts to identify some of the figures are also more or less arbitrary (he identified Alexander the Great as Aeneas). Nonetheless, this interpretation survived until the publication of Wind's essay on the staircase in 1940 (op cit, n2). Bickham incidentally did not pause to

comment on Verrio's other works at the palace.

35 Julian, *The Caesars*, 307 C.

36 This winged female figure was described somewhat mysteriously by Bickham (op cit, n34) and later commentators as the 'Genius of Rome'. It is clear from a reading of Julian's text that she is meant to represent Dike or Justice, who acts as the chief doorkeeper of Olympus, although her bridle suggests she also carries the moral judgement of Nemesis.

37 Listed by Croft-Murray as belonging to the collection of Sir Oliver Millar, late Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures. This may be the same drawing that was sold at Christie's South Kensington, English and Victorian Pictures, Watercolours & Drawings, 28 June 1988 (lot 40).

38 Julian, *The Caesars*, 316 C.

39 Samuel Johnson, *Julian the Apostate* (1682) is but one example. Johnson (who had been chaplain to the Protestant 'martyr' Lord Russell) also compared Romulus to Ignatius Loyola. Wind, op cit, n2, details its context during the Exclusion Crisis.

40 Wind, op cit, n2.

41 A similar equivocal approach can be seen at Chatsworth, where Louis Laguerre's original explicit apotheosis of the Duke of Devonshire as Julius Caesar has been modulated in the final composition to a more ambivalent message about power and ambition, with the murder of Caesar also shown. I am grateful to Richard Johns for pointing this out.

42 Laguerre was paid £260 for this work in 1702: The National Archives, MS Work 5/52.

43 Julian, *The Caesars*, 316 D.

44 Verrio himself had painted a smiliar theme at Chatsworth.

45 In the complex Olympian canon, Zephyros, as God of Spring, was married to Khloris, but was also, as the West Wind, the partner of Iris (op cit, n33).

46 Pomona is a Roman goddess, with no obvious Greek parallel. In this case, Khloris may be better recognised by her Roman name, Flora.

47 Bickham, op cit, n34. He may have been reminded of the more explicit depiction of the 'marriage of the rivers Thame and Isis' by James Thornhill in the Painted Hall of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich.

48 Edward Jesse, *A Summer's Day at Hampton Court* (1839) went on to claim that the whole design was intended as 'a compliment to William and Mary; [Hera's] peacock being an emblem of their grandeur... and the Zephyrs represent their mild and courteous disposition towards [their subjects]'.

49 British Museum, London, inv no. SL5214.249 (Brett, op cit, n105, pl 13); Sotheby's, 2 October 1975 (lot 124); Christie's London, English Pictures, 29 January 1988 (lot 118); Christie's South Kensington, Old Master Pictures, 23 April 2009 (lot 184). The latter modello (Brett, op cit, n87, pl 8) is said to be a design for St George's Hall, Windsor Castle, as it bears close comparison to Verrio's earlier murals there for Charles II. However, all these drawings provide clues, or even possible schemes, for a complete

triumphalist cycle at Hampton Court. 50 Sotheby's London, Early British Drawings, Watercolours and Miniatures, 4 December 2008 (lot 19). 51 British Museum, London, inv no. 1884,0726.40, fols 113v-114r. Brett, op cit, n113, mentions other evidence for Thornhill's early involvement at Hampton Court.

52 British Museum, London, inv no. 1865,0610.1325.

53 The story of Thornhill's early career is incomplete. The titlepage of his sketchbook (op cit n51) is dated 1699, at which point he may still have been attached to Thomas Highmore to whom he had been apprenticed in 1689. Whilst Thornhill is not listed as one of Verrio's assistants, Highmore was at Hampton Court between 1701 and 1702, mostly engaged in painting garden furniture and ironwork.

54 Jenkins, op cit, n6; Thurley, op cit, n7.

55 Geoffrey Parnell, 'The King's Guard Chamber: A Vision of Power,' in 'The King's Apartments,' op cit n6. 56 JD Stewart, 'William III and Sir Godfrey Kneller,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 1970, pp330-36.

57 And not just at the palace.

Hercules, the lion-slayer, and the lion, appear on William's coinage too.

When William returned to Holland in 1691, he was greeted with fireworks representing eight of the labours of Hercules. Susan Jenkins has traced William's Herculean obsession in, 'Hampton Court Palace: The Fountain Court Roundels by Louis Laguerre: An Investigation into Possible Sources for the Labours of Hercules series,' English Heritage, unpublished report, 1990.

58 Jenkins, op cit, n6, p4.

59 Interestingly, Verrio inadvertently dated this work by including the Stuart coat-of-arms on the west wall: two years later, the coat-of-arms was changed by the Act of Union that united the crowns of England and Scotland in 1707.

60 Not the Danish fleet, as Croft-Murray, op cit, n1, maintains. George's prominence in this room demonstrates that Anne intended the Queen's Apartments for the use of the royal consort; Anne's pre-eminence on the ceiling, however, emphasises who ultimately wore the crown, and perhaps also suggests that she required this particular room for her own use as well.

61 In the adjacent Queen's Bedchamber, Thornhill later painted four medallions of three generations of the Hanoverian successors to the Stuart dynasty, one for each wall. It is not impossible that Verrio originally conceived the south wall of the Queen's Drawing Room as an appropriate place to paint a portrait of a young heir to the throne. By this point, Anne and George had lost all thirteen of their children (William, Duke of Gloucester, the only one to survive infancy, died in 1700), but it was not out of the question for a new heir to be born. Perhaps, a 'sleeping cupid' was meant to represent this hope: alternatively, it might represent the abandonment of such hope.

62 Eg, June Osborne, *Hampton Court Palace*, 1984, p173. This assertion has been repeated occasionally since, including by Thurley, op cit, n5. Croft-

Murray does not make this claim. The fact that this is a portrait at all is unlikely: there is no evidence of any particular care being taken in its execution, unlike the portrait of George on the north wall, and of Anne on the ceiling, which are carefully delineated.

63 John Burbidge, 'The Queen's Drawing Room, Hampton Court Palace: Condition Audit of the Painted Walls and Ceiling,' Granville & Burbidge, unpublished report, 2002. There are a number of more obvious and more recent interventions too, including the addition of a wrist-watch to the figure of Marsyas in one of the overdoor grisaille panels.

64 Britannia was a Roman creation, but had reappeared as a national personification for the combined kingdoms of England and Scotland after 1660; Verrio had already depicted Catherine of Braganza as Britannia at Windsor Castle. She only gained her familiar Corinthian helmet in the early 19th century.

65 This figure has also been identified as Prince George in the past, probably on the basis of an apparent similarity to the mysterious naked figure on the south wall: the figure is even more clearly female, however.