A Royal Display: The Significance of Rubens' Banqueting House Ceiling

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A ROYAL DISPLAY: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUBENS' BANQUETING HOUSE CEILING

An honors paper submitted to the Department of Art and Art History of the University of Mary Washington in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

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A ROYAL DISPLAY:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUBENS’ BANQUETING HOUSE CEILING

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In seventeenth-century England, the Stuart monarchy presented themselves as chosen by God to rule over Great Britain. This idea, called Divine Right of Kings, asserted that Kings received their power directly from God and were not subject to any other authority.¹ This principle effected every part of early British society including the art they created and how that art was displayed. One monument, The Banqueting House ceiling by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) commissioned by Charles I (1600-1649), embodied the divinely given power of the Stuart monarchy. The ceiling, completed between the years 1632 and 1634, clearly demonstrates the idea of divine monarchy that was part of a wider European tradition. The main narrative of the ceiling is the triumphal and peaceful kingship of Charles’s father, James I of England (1566-1625). The Banqueting House was also influenced by classical and Renaissance art as well as Rubens’ work for Marie de’ Medici whose daughter was Henrietta Maria, Queen of England (1609-1669). Rubens’ Banqueting House, created in the continental European Baroque style, intended to show that the Stuart Monarchy was divinely chosen to rule over Great Britain.

By the time Rubens started to work on the canvases for the Banqueting House ceiling he was already a successful artist. In 1621, Rubens had finished thirty-nine canvases for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp that were influenced by Venetian Renaissance artists such as Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese.² The surviving oil sketch of The Sacrifice of Isaac (Figure 1) depicts the scene when Abraham is about to kill his son; this work was influenced by Titian’s Sacrifice of Isaac (Figure 2) in the Santa Maria della Salute. The angels that flies horizontally toward


² The canvases were destroyed in a fire in the eighteenth century, see Charles Scribner, Peter Paul Rubens (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 25.
Abraham with their legs held up in the air are seen in both works. Rubens, and many other artists of the period, also acted as a foreign dignitary to the courts in which he worked. In the seventeenth century, when the collecting of art became a political status symbol and an arm of foreign policy, it was common for nobility to use a court artist to gain information about other courts. Rubens was an agent of the Infanta Isabella’s court in the Spanish Netherlands. In 1623, he negotiated the truce between the United Provinces of Holland and the Spanish Netherlands. Since he was considered the “prince of painters” by the Netherlandish court he was allowed to discuss political policy when he painted princes’ portraits. Rubens’s self-portrait dated 1638 depicts the artist as a successful gentleman (Figure 3). He is dressed in elegant black and wears one glove with one hand ungloved, a symbol of cosmopolitan sophistication. Rubens’ background as a diplomat and courtier brought Marie and Rubens together. Charles must have thought that Rubens’s diplomacy and artistic skill were perfect for the task at hand.

Before he inherited the English throne when Elizabeth I Tudor died in 1603, James was King James VI of Scotland. James was overall a successful king because he kept Britain out of war for most of his reign but in his last few years he had several heath issues that interfered with his running of state and his patronage of the arts. He suffered from fever, and chronic indigestion, and he had lost all his teeth. Most of these conditions were because of his poor diet and love of sweet foods. These conditions eventually led to the death of the king on March 27, 1625 when the doctors who determined what the king died from blamed his death on preexisting

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health conditions. James was severely ill after the death of Queen Anne in 1619 and he was never again the same man. In the last years of his life, some of his advisors such as George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628), started to make decisions about domestic and foreign policy. It is unlikely that James was involved in the Banqueting House ceiling because of his health conditions. Charles I, son of James I of England and Anne of Denmark, would commission the Banqueting House Ceiling as a memorial to James’ legacy.

Charles I enjoyed both collecting and commissioning art for the Stuart Court. Charles was an active patron of the arts as a prince as well as when he became King. His brother Henry, Prince of Wales, who developed a large art collection influenced Charles. When Henry died unexpectedly in 1618, Charles received his brother’s art collection. Charles’ collection included works by Renaissance artist such as Titian, Antonio de Correggio, Andrea Mantegna and Dürer. His collection showed that Charles was a wealthy and powerful ruler because he had works of art by the masters of the Renaissance and Baroque periods to decorate his palaces.

In 1632, Charles made Anthony van Dyck, a pupil of Rubens, his court painter. Charles commissioned portraits by van Dyck such as Charles I on Houseback with M. de St Antoine (1633) (Figure 4). This image shows Charles in control of the horse, a symbol of the state. Painted in 1633, the work was hung at the end of the Long Gallery at St. James’s Palace.

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alongside many of the Italian and Renaissance artworks that Charles I collected. In the gallery, there were also paintings by Titian of Roman emperors that date to 1536-1540.\textsuperscript{11} In van Dyck’s painting, the king rides through an arch on a large white horse while the king stares directly at the viewer. The year is inscribed on a column in the left section of the painting. In the lower left corner of the painting is the coat of arms of Great Britain, with the single lion on a field of white as the symbol of Scotland, the three lions with a red background representing England and the harp on the blue background symbolizing Ireland. The crown and coat of arms shows that Charles I was king of Great Britain.\textsuperscript{12} The painting symbolize to dignitaries waiting in the gallery to see the king whose court they were in and who was in control. Van Dyck showed Charles I how he wanted to be seen – as a powerful king in control on all his subjects as a patron of the arts who was in control of his kingdom.

Many art historians have ignored the role of Henrietta Maria in the commission of the Banqueting House ceiling. Although the documentary evidence such as letters do not mention her, she was at the court when the ceiling was planned and she was a great patron of the arts. Henrietta Maria was born in Paris, France on June 13\textsuperscript{th} in 1625 to Marie de’ Medici and Henry IV of France. She was familiar with the work of Rubens because of her mother’s commission of the Marie de’ Medici cycle. She was also fond of Rubens’ work and requested to be the first to see the completed Medici cycle before she left France for England in 1625. On January 10, 1625, Rubens wrote to Valavez, “As to the desire Madame shows to see my pictures before her departure, I feel highly honored, and will be glad to offer her this satisfaction. The Prince of


\textsuperscript{12} Lionel Cust. “Notes on Pictures in the Royal Collections-XVI. The Equestrian Portraits of Charles I by van Dyck-I.” \textit{The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs} 17, No. 87 (1910): 159-160.
Wales, her husband, is the greatest amateur of paintings among the princes of the world.”

As Queen of England she was also an important patron of drama as well as painting. She was involved in the creation of several of the theatrical productions that were performed in court and she sometimes acted in them herself. Her portraits such as *Henrietta Maria with Sir Jeffery Hudson* (1633) by Anthony van Dyck depict her in her elegant hunting costume with a light blue dress and a black hat with a feather (Figure 5). The monkey on the leash symbolizes beauty controlling passions and there is a crown sitting on the pedestal next to the Henrietta showing she is the Queen of Great Britain. Henrietta Maria was clearly interested in the arts and influential in establishing cultural traditions of the Stuart court. Similar to Charles, she wants to be in control of her environment and herself, because she is queen. She also had previous experience with the work of Rubens so she was probably involved in the commission of the Banqueting House ceiling.

**Court Culture**

James I started the Stuart tradition of bringing artists from the European continent to his court. Buildings, paintings, sculpture, and tapestry were all mediums used by the monarchs of Europe to display their power. James I was a patron of artworks in all of these mediums. The French mostly influenced his decisions about art. An early example of how he wanted to bring the modern style of art to his kingdom was the establishment of a tapestry workshop. He spent

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£2,000 to establish this workshop that created tapestries and he brought over skilled workers from Flanders to work there in 1620. The tapestry workshop, located at Mortlake near London, continued to produce tapestries during Charles I reign. When he bought seven of the ten Raphael cartoons he commissioned a set of tapestries of them from the Mortlake factory. When he was prince, Charles also commissioned works such as *Mars and Venus surprised by Vulcan* (Figure 6). In the early modern period, tapestries were expensive; therefore they were a sign of wealth. Since James was using foreign workers to create the tapestries, it showed his contemporaries that he was both a wealthy monarch and interested in having the best examples of modern art in his kingdom.

Charles I became an avid collector of European art and developed the largest collection of art of any previous English monarch. As a young adult, he grew up acquiring of the European art which was popular as a symbol of wealth and power. When Charles I became king in 1625, he sent agents to Europe to purchase art and recruit talented artists. During his entire reign, Charles surrounded himself with companions that he could talk to about art. Eventually all the prominent aristocratic collectors became the king’s favorites. The three greatest collectors during the reign of Charles I were the king himself, the Duke of Buckingham, and the Earl of Arundel. Agents of all three went throughout Europe to find art for their masters’ collections. In 1627, one of the greatest number of masterpieces came to the royal collection when the king’s

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agent Laniere bought the whole collection of the Duke of Mantua. The collection, worth £15,000, included paintings by Titian, Correggio, Raphael, Michelangelo, Andrea del Sarto, and Tintoretto. Several of these artists of the Renaissance and Baroque influenced the works of artists commissioned by Charles I. These collectors brought the culture of continental Europe to England and created an appreciation of continental art among the English upper classes.21

The rituals that took place in Charles’s court explained the social and political thought of the Stuart monarchy. The court ritual that most affected the art of the court was the masque which were large court dramatic productions performed by nobles and servants of the King. Occasionally, even Charles I and Henrietta Maria performed in masques. Masques and the visual art commissioned by the Stuart court displayed the same political propaganda about the Divine Right of Kings. Although the masque was an English invention, it was similar to the intermezzo performed at the Medici court in Florence.22 James I’s wife, Anne of Denmark, commissioned many of the early masques. These productions included decorations and structures by court architects including Inigo Jones. Jones worked on twenty-five masques between the years 1605 to 1641.23 His designs were figures from classical mythology including Gods, nymphs, and even satyrs. His drawing of satyrs (Figure 7) was used to design costumes for Oberon that was performed in 1611 and included two hooved satyrs dancing. Masques were filled with characters such as satyrs or hags that were eventually conquered by masquers dressed as allegorical figures such as Peace, Justice, Truth and sometimes Olympian deities such as Jupiter or Minerva.24 The

22 John Summerson, Inigo Jones (New Haven: Yale University Press), 12.
23 Summerson, Inigo Jones, 13.
use of Pagan gods as allegories of ideas about kingship were used in both the masques and contemporary European art including in the Banqueting House.

Some of the most important masques under Charles I were *Coelum Britannicum* and *Britannia Triumphans*. Thomas Carew, a court poet, wrote *Coelum Britannicum* and the masque was performed in 1634. In *Coelum Britannicum* the Olympian gods were impressed with the virtue of the royal couple, Charles and Henrietta Maria, and the life of the Caroline court. The gods were so impressed by the court that they wanted to remodel their heavenly domain after the life of the English court. The last scene of the masque was a genius and cornucopia with an olive garland watching over the future of England, Scotland, and Ireland. One of the last lines in the poem is “Then from your fruitful race shall flow Endlass Succession Scepter shall bud, and Lawrela blow Bout your Immortall Throne,”25 meaning that the Kings’ line will be immortal. *Coelum Britannicum* showed that Charles I was divine and that under Charles the kingdom would have peace and prosperity. The portraits of Charles depicted the same sense of ritual that the court masques showed and both the portraits’ as well as the masques’ goal was to show the authority of King Charles I.26 The ideas depicted in the masque were ideas that James I and Charles I believed in and they affected how the king wanted to be seen by his people. The masques influenced the themes of the Banqueting House Ceiling because they were part of the court culture of the 1620s and 30s when the planning for the canvases probably occurred.

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The Building

The Banqueting House is the only surviving building of Whitehall Palace, London residence of the king and his court. Whitehall Palace was the largest palace in Europe before it burned on January 4, 1698. After a wooden Banqueting House built under Queen Elizabeth I burned, a stone structure was reconstructed in 1616. Unfortunately the 1616 building also burnt down and the new Banqueting House, commissioned by James I and designed by the king’s architect Inigo Jones (1573-1652), was completed in 1622 (Figure 8). This building was one of the main commissions of James I’s reign and it was used for the masques preformed in the king’s court. The Banqueting House is in the background of the Portrait of King James I by Paul van Somer that dates to 1620 (Figure 9). According to David Howarth, James’s scepter points to the building in the background showing that the Banqueting House was a place to celebrate the king and his generosity. The commission of the Banqueting House demonstrates that James was interested in using architecture to create an image of wealth and power for the Stuart Monarchy.

Inigo Jones was highly influenced by the work of Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) and the Banqueting House was one of the first Palladian buildings in England. The façade is divided into seven bays with the Ionic order in the lower register with Composite order above. The columns are smooth, not fluted, which is similar to the columns of Palladio’s Palazzo Thiene (1544) (Figure 10). Both the Palazzo Thiene and the Banqueting House are divided into two vertical registrars with the Corinthian order at on the top level. Also, both buildings have pediments of


the windows that alternate between round and triangular forms, in the Banqueting House they alternate on the bottom and they are on the top register on the Palazzo Thiene. 29 Originally the building was constructed using three types of stone with brown Oxfordshire for the basement, a dun-colored Northamptonshire for the upper walls and white Portland for the balustrade and orders (Figure 11). These colors highlight the central second of the façade but these different types of stone were replaced by all Portland stone by William Chambers in 1773 and then again by Sir John Soane in 1829. 30 Jones designed the interior of the Banqueting House after a Roman basilica restored by Palladio. The building originally had an apse, at the south end of the room but it was demolished in 1625. 31 The Greco-Roman influences expressed in the architecture of Palladio create an ordered open space that was used for gatherings of the Stuart Court. The building was used for masques until Rubens’ ceiling paintings were installed in 1635. After that the room was used as a throne room to welcome foreign dignitaries (Figure 12). The audience of the ceiling was members of both the British court and other European courts as well as Charles himself. Since the building and ceiling were intended to impress foreign visitors, Jones used the Palladian and Baroque style to show that the British court was aware of the popular continental art and artists from the Renaissance.

The Court of James, which included Charles and the King’s advisors, decided in the early 1620s that they would ask Rubens to paint the ceiling of the newly built Banqueting House at Whitehall. However, it is not entirely clear who specifically suggested that Rubens should paint the ceiling. Fiona Donovan, a Historian of British Art, argues that it is not clear if Inigo Jones

29 John Summerson, Inigo Jones, 43-47.


31 Ibid, 42-43.
(1573-1652), the architect of the Banqueting House, had a say in deciding who would paint the ceiling. She suggests that Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel (1586-1646), a patron of Rubens and one of the king’s advisors who worked on the commission, first recommended that Rubens paint the ceiling. Arundel had connections with Rubens and could have been involved in the first approach to Rubens. Arundel was a frequent visitor to Antwerp where he became familiar with Rubens’ work. Two Catholic Englishmen named George Gage and Tobie Matthew who spent most of their time abroad, had connections with the British Court and were probably involved in the communication between the Court and Rubens. Gage and Matthew went on diplomatic missions for the British Crown and became familiar with artists in Antwerp.

Matthew met with Rubens in Antwerp sometime in either 1620 or 1621. A letter dated September 13, 1621 from Rubens to John Trumbull, James I’s agent at the court of the Infanta Isabella in Brussels, is the first time that the commission is mentioned in the written record. Rubens writes:

As for His Majesty and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, I shall always be very much pleased to receive the honor of their commands; and regarding the hall in the New Palace, I confess that I am by natural instinct, better fitted to execute very large works than small curiosities.

The fact that the letter mentions both James I, His Majesty, and Charles, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales shows that by 1621, the prince was involved in royal patronage. Also, it could mean that Charles was the main member of the royal family who wanted the commission. The

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34 Ibid.

New Palace mentioned was the recently built Banqueting House. Rubens gladly accepted the offer and then demonstrated his talent by saying he would rather work on larger works then smaller commissions.

Although Rubens’ work on the Medici Cycle would delay his work on the commission for the Stuart court he continued to remain in contact with agents of King James and later King Charles. It was also possible that Rubens accepted the commission for a diplomatic reason. In January 1625, the alliance between Spain and England dissolved because of a failed attempt by the Duke of Buckingham and Charles I to have Charles marry a Spanish princess. The infant Isabella realized that if Spain and the United Provinces went to war, then Great Britain would take the side of the United Provinces. She told Rubens to maintain contact with the Duke of Buckingham and Rubens met Buckingham at Henrietta Maria’s marriage by proxy in Paris. Because of this meeting, Rubens went to England in 1629 to negotiate a peace between Spain and Great Britain. His main purpose for this visit was diplomatic but it was possible that he started to work on his plans for the Banqueting House Ceiling.\(^{36}\)

The Duke of Buckingham was clearly involved in foreign negotiations with Rubens but he also could have been responsible for informing Rubens about the Banqueting House. George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham was an advisor to Charles I and a collector of art. He commissioned Rubens to paint *The Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Buckingham* (Figure 13). According to historian Kevin Sharpe, the relationship between Charles I and the Duke of Buckingham was both personal and political. It was clear that Buckingham was a favorite of James I and that they were lovers but Charles and Buckingham were simply friends. Although

some historians have argued that Buckingham instructed the king on matters of state the written record shows that they agreed on most things and that Charles made up his own mind.\(^{37}\) It is less likely that Charles and Buckingham’s relationship was more a friendship than about Buckingham controlling Charles. Buckingham was influential in the commission of the Banqueting House ceiling because he was a patron of Rubens and Charles I’s main advisor, especially in foreign affairs. However, in 1628 Buckingham was assassinated when he was thirty-eight before the ceiling of the Banqueting House was complete.

Other than the 1621 letter, there are few documents that relate directly to the commission. There is no surviving contract with Rubens that states the commission or program for the Banqueting House ceiling, but there is evidence one once existed since there are documents that could have accompanied the contract. If there was a contact with Rubens it could have been similar to the contract between Marie de’ Medici and Rubens. During his first visit to Paris the contract for the paintings was completed and on February 26, 1622 the document was signed by Rubens and the Queen Mother. The signature of the contract states:

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\text{De Rubens promises and binds himself to make and complete all the said pictures and canvases required for the two galleries of the aforesaid palace of Her Majesty within the time of four years, and in addition to draw and paint them, as has been said, with his own hand…}^{38}
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The signature of the contract goes on to say that the gallery was ready for the paintings and that Rubens will be payed 60,000 francs for his work. The language of the contract proves that the Queen as the client had certain expectations of Rubens. The contract did not state the subject of each painting which was discussed in several letters from Rubens to Peiresc and others.

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Originally there were supposed to be paintings for two galleries, the existing life of Marie de’ Medici and the success of Henri IV. Marie and her advisors decided on the themes of each painting. However, Rubens could decide on the figures’ pose and location as well as the overall style of the paintings. Since there was a connection between the two commissions through Henrietta Maria, it was possible that Charles had a similar relationship with Rubens because he choose the themes while Rubens was allowed to decide the overall style of the paintings.

The contract paperwork probably included written instructions about the subject matter for the ceiling. Some of these written plans were found in Sir John Coke’s papers. Coke became Charles I’s Secretary of State in September 1625. Gregory Martin, the first historian to discuss these written plans, divided them into “Project A” and “Project B.” He argues that these documents provide evidence that the plans for the Banqueting House ceiling date to the 1620s.

Donovan claims that these project plans provide inconclusive information because it is unclear who wrote the plans. These projects were created near the end of James I’s reign and probably date to the early 1620s or even 1625. Therefore, Rubens was not involved in creating the two projects because there is no evidence of further correspondence with him until 1629.

Project A was probably completed before the death of James I and commemorates the reign of King James. However, both projects refer to James in the past tense so “Project A” was

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likely edited after the King died.\textsuperscript{44} Project A focused on James’s learning and depicted him as a scholar. The plan includes the main canvas on the southern end of the room where James would be depicted with a pen and book while the Nine Muses surrounded him. The pen, book, and the Muses symbolize James’s love of wisdom. The plans also show that on the northern end of the room James was depicted as peacemaker and patron of the arts. The King was to be seen with the figure of Peace holding an olive branch and surrounded by symbols of the arts that flourished under his reign. He was to be flanked on each side of the main painting by different virtues associated with the King conquering their opposite vices.\textsuperscript{45}

Project B was created after the king’s death and the program commemorated the memory of the King.\textsuperscript{46} On the northern lower end of the ceiling the king was to be depicted in his royal robes led by Religion and Concorde, welcoming Minerva, goddess of wisdom, and Peace while expelling the personifications of war.\textsuperscript{47} The central panel of the room depicts James I carried into heaven by angels. The document states that the King was to be lifted by light of the “shyning glory of the Diety,” suggesting that James was to be depicted as a saint rising into heaven. He was to enter into a group of other deceased monarchs including King Solomon of Israel, the Roman Emperor Constantine, King Edward the Confessor of England, King Louis IX of France (St. Louis), and James I of Scotland.\textsuperscript{48} The presence of these kings and the depiction of James as a deity represents the idea of Divine Right of Kings. Not everything from these original projects

\textsuperscript{44} Martin, \textit{The Ceiling Decoration of the Banqueting Hall}, 32.

\textsuperscript{45} Hearn, \textit{Rubens and Britain}, 27-28.

\textsuperscript{46} Martin, \textit{The Ceiling Decoration of the Banqueting Hall}, 32.

\textsuperscript{47} Hearn, \textit{Rubens and Britain}, 28.

\textsuperscript{48} Martin, \textit{The Ceiling Decoration of the Banqueting Hall}, 36-37.
was included in Rubens’ Banqueting House, but the major themes of Wisdom, Peace, and the Divine Right of Kings are seen in both the written plans and the canvases.

Oil sketches on panel that Rubens created for the Banqueting House Ceiling survive and show his process of developing compositions. Although there were probably drawings on paper created for the planning phase of the Banqueting House ceiling, none have survived. A sketch of the several of the figures dated to 1628-30, is an example of how the initial plan changed for the final canvas (Figure 14). The sketch has many of the figures that can be seen in the ceiling and includes figures that eventually appear in the *Apotheosis of James I, the Procession of the Putti and Animals*, and in three of the vultures triumphing over vices. In the middle of the composition is James I with his foot on the globe of the world that rests on eagle’s wings. He is pulled up into the heavenly realm by Justice holding a sword in the sketch which is replaced by scales of justice in the final canvas. Above James is the figure of Victory with wings and Minerva with a shield that are similar to the figures in the final Apotheosis. On James’s left is an unidentified figure, which eventually becomes the figures of Piety and Religion in the canvas. In the upper borders of the sketch are the processions of putti and animals. This sketch provides the basic elements for the final canvases of the Banqueting House ceiling.

The sketch of the *Union of the two Crowns* has several details that were removed or added before the final canvas (Figure 15). The main figures of James, Minerva, and the figures of England and Scotland all have the same poses as the canvas. There is a winged female goddess behind James in the sketch but it does not appear in the canvas. The two men in the

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49 Ibid., 57.

background of the canvas do not appear in the sketch. One of these men could be Charles I but the other person is not known. The shield that the two putti hold does not have the coat of arms of Great Britain. These sketches were focused on the figures of the composition and the details would be incorporated in the final canvas.

Rubens likely knew the written manuals that described how certain allegorical figures should be depicted and he and his studio assistants probably used these manuals in the planning phases of the Banqueting House. Written works such as Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* (1603) provided instructions on how to use pictorial imagery to represent a theme. One of the main allegorical figures in the Banqueting House is Peace. Ripa states “the personification of Peace is a winged young women dressed in white, with a wreath of grain and olive branches on her head and a palm found tucked under her arm.” Rubens depicts peace in *Minerva Protects Pax from Mars* that was presented to Charles I in 1630. Peace is not clothed in white or winged but she is surrounded by symbols including the wheat that the putti holds (Figure 16). In the *Apotheosis of James I*, the figure of peace that is on the right side of James is similar to Ripa’s description (Figure 17). She holds a wreath of grain in her right hand and olive branches are present in the crowns throughout the composition. However, she is dressed in white but also has a gold dress that covers most of the white.

**Iconography of the Banqueting House**

Rubens’ nine canvases for the Banqueting House ceiling are divided into three main sections (Figure 18). The central register depicts the *Apotheosis of James I* (Figure 19) in the

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53 Several Art Historians have discussed the iconography of the ceiling including Fiona Donovan, *Rubens and England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Gregory Martin, *The Ceiling Decoration of the Banqueting*
middle flanked by *Processions of Putti and Animals*. Since the focus of the entire iconographic scheme is the glorification of King James I, his apotheosis is central. An older James is seen in the lower part of the canvas in the center dressed in imperial robes and holding a scepter which identify him as an ordained monarch. He also wears the collar of the Order of the Garter, a necklace that consisted of separate medallions with blue backgrounds and red roses connected with golden chain. The central medallion, which is only partially visible, is the Image of St. George, patron saint of England.\(^5^4\) He has one foot on a globe that rests on an eagle’s wing. The eagle holds either fire or lightning bolts in his talons. Both the eagle and the lightning bolt are symbols of Jupiter implying that the king of the gods himself brings the mortal king into the realm of the gods. Two putti present James with a crown and orb symbolizing that James will be a king even in the afterlife. Other putti soar around the composition blowing trumpets and welcoming James. On James’s right is Justice holding a scale and thunderbolt symbolizing her fairness and power. To the left of James are two female figures that could represent Religion and Piety because one holds a libation bowl and the other holds a book, possibly the Bible.\(^5^5\) The semi-draped female figure in the center of the composition holds a laurel wreath which can symbolize peace and victory. At the top Minerva, with her shield and sword, descends from the heavens.

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\(^5^5\) James’s translation of the Bible, 1611, see Martin, *The Ceiling Decoration of the Banqueting Hall*, 195.
The *Processions of Putti and Animals* (Figure 20) are symbols of the prosperity of James’s reign. On the right side, the putti hold a long garland full of fruit. One putto rides a lion, possibly a sign that the even the noble beast is present at the celebration of the king. On the left canvas, a few putti ride a chariot and lead a dog and a goat. The putto in the middle of the canvas holds wheat in his arm showing the abundance of James’s reign. These processions show that a Golden Age came to England under the reign of James I. The imagery of winged children and a host of animals creating a procession was used by Inigo Jones in a 1640 masque. Motifs such as putti and animals from the Banqueting House ceiling were used in court rituals to emphasize the idea that the Stuart monarch brought prosperity and peace to the land.

*The Peaceful Reign of James I* is positioned directly above the throne and best understood when viewed by the king, Charles, on his throne (Figure 21). Therefore, Charles could gaze upon his father’s accomplishments depicted on the ceiling and aspire to be as successful as his father. James is the central figure of the composition and he is dressed in robes of state including the Order of the Garter and holds a scepter in his right hand. A putto stands on James’ left holding his crown. James is surrounded by Roman gods that support the peace he promotes through his reign. Two winged figures descend from the top of the composition holding a laurel wreath. The two women on the left could be Peace and Prosperity because of the fruit bouquet that Prosperity holds. James highlights these two figures because he is gesturing toward them. Below the embracing figures is Mercury, the messenger of the gods. Mars defeats the Hydra, showing James conquering evil. On the right, Minerva holds a shield with Medusa’s head on it and lighting bolts. The presence of Minerva shows the wisdom of the king. Some scholars have

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suggested that James is a Christ figure raising his hand in judgement which Minerva who acts as the Archangel Michael drives the demons into hell but this interpretation might be a bit extreme. James is Solomon because of architectural background with Solomonic columns creating a parallel between James and the Old Testament King Solomon showing James’s piety and power as head of the Church of England and Scotland. The source of these columns which were in St. Peter’s in Rome were the Raphael Cartoons that were part of Charles I collection. Therefore, Rubens depicted James in a setting that is from continental Europe to show that he brought peace and plenty to Britain because of his judgment.

_The Peaceful Reign of James I_ is flanked by _Temperance Subduing Wantonness_ (Figure 22) and _Bounty Triumphant Over Avarice_ (Figure 23). In _Temperance subduing Wantonness_ a female figure wearing a blue dress and holding a bridle, a symbol of control and order, steps on Wantonness. The figure representing Wantonness is twisted and it is hard to tell what gender the figure is. There is a dog, symbol of lust, in the bottom of the composition. In _Bounty Triumphant Over Avarice_, Bounty holds a cornucopia filled with precious objects such as jewels. There is a light beam around Bounty’s head showing the light of prosperity.

The register above the entrance to the room is the _Union of the Crowns of Great Britain_ (Figure 24). This depicts James’s most important achievement, uniting the crowns of England and Scotland to create Great Britain. James is seated to the right wearing his robes of state and a crown. He is elevated above the other figures and beneath a red baldachin. The king motions to the group of four figures on the left. The two female figures representing England and Scotland hold the crowns together above a small boy. Minerva is above them as a symbol of the wisdom

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57 Roy Strong, _The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy_, 141-142.
of the king. There are two men behind the group that are dressed in contemporary clothing that could be a reference to Charles I and the Duke of Buckingham. Roy Strong argued that these figures are Lucius, the first Christian King of Britain and possibly Constantine, the Roman Emperor which would correspond to the proposed “project A.” The man standing in blue clothing next to James is the Sargent at Arms protecting the king and the man siting to the ground is an ancient Briton witnessing the union. The pile of armor and weapons in the foreground, which a Putto is setting fire to, allude to the end of years of fighting between England and Scotland. At the top of the composition, two putti hold up the new coat of arms for Great Britain surrounded by red and white roses at the bottom which could be symbols of the War of the Roses. The scene is set in a classical interior with coffered ceiling and Doric columns.

The Union of the Crowns of Great Britain is flanked by Hercules as Heroic Virtue Triumphing over Discord (Figure 25) and Minerva as Wisdom Conquering Sedition (Figure 26). In Hercules as Heroic Virtue Triumphing over Discord Hercules is about to strike Discord with his club. The lion skin on his shoulder identifies him as the demi-God Hercules. Discord is an evil and sickly figure with skin that has a green undertone. In Minerva as Wisdom Conquering Sedition, Minerva is dressed in armor and attacks Sedition with her lance. The owl holding a laurel wreath identifies the victor as Minerva. Both of these scenes show that James I’s reign was triumphant in destroying the vices such as Discord and Sedition.

The Banqueting House and Continental European Art

Art historians have all agreed that the patronage of Flemish artists such as Anthony van Dyck and Peter Paul Rubens during the Stuart period changed the style and subject matter of British painting. These artists brought with them the foundations of the Baroque. This style used

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58 Ibid., 139.
drama, color, and movement. In a period when monarchs continued to commission artists to create works for new palaces this grand and energetic style that focused on opulence was used to show power and wealth. According to Erwin Panofsky, the Baroque was the climax of the Renaissance. In his essay titled “What is Baroque?” (1936) he states:

The first idea that comes to our mind when the word Baroque is heard is the idea of a lordly racket, so to speak: unbridled movement, over-whelming richness in color and composition, theatrical effects produced by a free play of light and shade, and indiscriminate mixture of materials and techniques.\(^5^9\)

The movement and drama that Panofsky highlights in his essay changed the static quality of sixteenth century British painting. As is common of art movements, in the early modern period the Baroque borrowed many of its forms and ideas from classical traditions of Greco-Roman Renaissance art. Therefore, the style and form used in the Renaissance influenced Baroque works such as the Banqueting House Ceiling. Since Rubens was one of the leading artists of the Baroque, the Banqueting House reflects the art of continental Europe and shows the arrival of the Baroque to Great Britain.

Rubens used the art of the Venetian Renaissance as a source for many of his works including the Banqueting House Ceiling. The main similarity between the Banqueting House and Venetian painting is that it is a ceiling painting done on a grand scale. A Venetian palazzo or church would often have elaborately painted ceilings done by Renaissance artists such as Paolo Veronese that depicted the owners of the palace or religious scenes. These ceiling paintings focus on the upward movement of the figures into a heavenly realm. For example, Veronese’s

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ceiling of the nave of San Sebastiano in Venice depicts *The Repudiation of Vashti, The Coronation of Esther* and *The Triumph of Mordecai* (Figure 27). In all of the images, the figures are standing on architectural forms with the sky above them. One goal was to show these events in a distant world above, while the people pray below.\(^6^0\) The balconies with garlands held up by *putti* are similar to the parade of *putti* and animals in the Banqueting House. The connection between the heavenly realm and the earth was used by Rubens in the Banqueting House to show that James I was a divine figure chosen by God to rule. Thus, he borrowed the idea of pictorially opening the interior of the building to the sky from Venetian art.

Rubens used iconography in his depiction of the reign of King James I that was similar to Venetian ceiling paintings. For example, scholars such as Fiona Donovan have made a compelling comparison between *The Peaceful Reign James I* and *The Apotheosis of Venice* by Paolo Veronese that was done in 1576-78 (Figure 28). *The Apotheosis of Venice* is in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Palazzo Ducale and depicts the figure of Venetia, an allegory of the city. In her analysis, Donovan argues that the depiction of Venetia shows the triumph of a Venetian Republic and thus provides an appropriate theme to show the achievements of King James I’s reign. She also states that both artists used the architectural backgrounds, particularly the twisting columns, to make a connection to King Solomon.\(^6^1\) In both paintings, the figure of the monarch is crowned by angels in the company of gods. There is the figure of plenty or prosperity near the monarch which shows that both Great Britain and the Republic of Venice depicted themselves as prosperous. Rubens has replaced the figure of Venetia with James I. Rubens and his patron state here that James is the divine ruler since he is in the heavenly realm.


Unlike the image of Venetia, James is not a symbol of his entire republic. *The Peaceful Reign of James I* is a celebration of the Divine Right of Kings and not the triumph of a Republic.

Rubens also used motifs that he had already executed in the Banqueting House ceiling. The composition of *The Union of the Two Crowns* is a direct reference to the Judgement of Solomon. In the story of Solomon, two women are fighting over an infant that they both think is theirs. Solomon then suggests that the women split the child in half and the actual mother refuses. In *The Judgement of Solomon* by Rubens that dates to 1617, Solomon sits on the throne in robes of state with a chain and holds a scepter (Figure 29). James wears a similar costume although his is the official British regalia. Both Solomon and James gesture to the two women as they deliver their verdict and hold scepters in their right hands. The setting for the painting is a round temple and not a palace that shows that James is a combination of a king and a religious figure. Since the judgment of Solomon was a biblical story, Rubens is depicting James as a divine figure because James is in the position of Solomon. Also, there is a connection to the themes in Medieval and Renaissance art because Judgement of Solomon was a popular motif for rulers in the Venetian Renaissance and is seen on the side of the Doge’s Palace.

There is also a connection between the Banqueting House Ceiling and the Marie de’ Medici cycle that Rubens created for the Queen of France, Marie de’ Medici. The cycle was created to show that Marie and her son, Louis XIII, had mended their feud and that she had been destined to rule over France as regent during Louis’s childhood. There is a parallel between the two works because both advocate the monarch’s divine right to rule. Marie became regent when her husband Henri VI died. One of the paintings in the cycle is the *Apotheosis of Henri IV*

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(Figure 30), the position of the two kings and the imagery of the *Apotheosis of Henri VI* is similar to the *Apotheosis of James I*. In both paintings, the deceased king is pulled up into heaven by two allegorical figures. Henri IV is pulled up by Time, the bearded man with the reaper on his right and Jupiter, with an eagle underneath him, on his left. 63 James is accompanied by Justice holding a scale, and Piety holding a libation bowl. The *Apotheosis of Henri IV* includes Marie on the right as his successor but Charles I, James’s heir, is not depicted in the Banqueting House *Apotheosis*.

To show the ideals and divinely ordained power of monarchs, artists depicted kings with Roman gods. Minerva, goddess of wisdom and war, is an important figure in the main three canvas. In the *Apotheosis of James I* the Minerva descends form the heavens with shield on her left arm and holding a laurel crown. Minerva suppresses Mars, the god of war, in the *Peaceful reign of James I*. In the *Union of the Two Crowns*, Minerva represents the king’s wisdom that approves of the unification of the crowns of England and Scotland. Minerva always wears a silver helmet with a blue feather and wears a blue-gray garment. The prevalence of Minerva and the strong connection between her and the king could be because James wanted to be seen as a king who favored wisdom. James I was the patron of the translation of the King James Bible and writer of religious works such as *Daemonologie* (1587). 64 He did not favor war because it was costly but as king of Great Britain he did have military power. Similar to Minerva he used his wisdom to make decisions about war and only maintained peace even though he had military


power. Therefore, one of the main themes of the Banqueting House Ceiling was that James I favored knowledge over war because it brought peace and prosperity to his kingdom.

Minerva is also an important figure in Rubens’ Marie de Medici cycle which could have influenced the Banqueting House. In several of the canvases in the Marie de Medici cycle, Minerva provides the French queen with guidance and support. For example, in the Education of Marie de’ Medici the goddess of wisdom herself educates the young queen. The final painting in the series, the Queen Triumphant, shows the queen as a goddess with the helmet of Minerva (Figure 31). When compared to the Banqueting House, the Minerva is depicted with the same icons such as the helmet and the medusa shield. The cannon, amour and guns were also symbols of male kingship which show Marie could be both king and queen. Therefore, the connection between the goddess of wisdom and kingship was prominent in both the works of Rubens and the ideas of divine rule in seventeenth-century Europe. On a more personal level, James was associated with Minerva because he was depicted as a wise and scholarly king. Also, Henrietta Maria could have suggested that the main deity to appear in the ceiling was the Goddess of Wisdom because she was familiar with how her mother used Minerva in the Maria de’ Medici cycle.

The figures throughout the Banqueting House were influenced by the ideas and images of the Italian Renaissance. For example, the triumphal processions of putti and animals that flank the Apotheosis of James I were influenced by Renaissance artist such as Raphael. Gregory Martin compares the processions in the Banqueting House with Frieze with the Triumph of Love and Frieze with a Child riding a Goat engraved by The Master of the Die and designed by

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Raphael. The tradition of putti charioteers on the friezes of Roman sarcophagi are the original source for both Raphael’s and Rubens’ processions.66 Both Rubens and Raphael’s processions include a lion as well as goats that pull the chariot. Rubens adds a continuous garland that the putti hold in the air that creates a sense of unity. The Banqueting House processions barrowed earlier iconography to show the prosperity and unity that was associated with James I’s reign.

The Procession of Putti and Animals is also similar to Annibale Carracci’s Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne that dates to 1597 (Figure 32). Carracci depicts the triumphal precessions of Bacchus, who sits in a golden chariot, with his bride new Ariadne next to him in a white chariot. The image is full of mythological figures celebrating the return of Bacchus from India including satyrs, nymphs and Putti.67 In both Rubens’ ceiling painting and Carracci’s fresco putti ride goats or rams which could symbolize control of lustful passions. Bacchus and Ariadne is also a story of love and Rubens could be using this as a reference to James’ love of his country and his people. Rubens’ choice to reference Carracci demonstrates that he wanted to depict James’ reign as a triumph and a celebration.

Conclusion

On January 29, 1649, Charles I walked under the Banqueting House Ceiling one last time as he approached his execution on a scaffold outside of the building. His legacy created a large collection of Baroque masterpieces including the Banqueting House. Henrietta Maria fled to France during the Civil War.68 She was one of the main links between to European Court culture

and depictions of kingship as the daughter of Marie de’ Medici. Both Charles I and Henrietta Maria used patronage of art as a display that they were the divinely ordained monarchs of Great Britain and had control over their subjects. These two monarchs, who were great patrons of the arts in England, commissioned artists such as Peter Paul Rubens to create works that showed they were divinely ordained to rule over Great Britain.

Peter Paul Rubens also used his experience as well as influences of Italian Renaissance traditions to show the wealth and power of the Stuart monarchy. He also used symbols that the seventeenth-century viewer would recognize because he followed the icons of kingship established by artist and manuals of the period. The iconography of the Banqueting House depicts the wisdom, peace, and prosperity that James I brought to Great Britain. Charles I wanted to reinforce his ideas about Divine Right of Kings by depicting his father as among the Greco-Roman gods and he also relates him to King Solomon. Henrietta Maria was familiar with the ideas of kingship because Rubens used similar motifs in the Marie de’ Medici cycle. The Banqueting House ceiling is a Baroque masterpiece that symbolizes the ideals and achievements of the Stuart monarchy that they wanted displayed to the British Court and subjects as well as other European courts.
Appendix 1: Images

Fig. 1: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1620-21. Oil on panel, 50 x 65cm. Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 2: Tiziano Vecellio, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. Oil on canvas, 328 x 285 cm. Santa Maria della Salute, Venice.
Fig. 3: Peter Paul Rubens, *Self-Portrait*, 1638. Oil on canvas, 109.5 x 85 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 4: Anthony van Dyck, *Charles I with M. de St Antoine*, 1633. Oil on canvas, 370 x 270 cm. Royal Collection, London.
Fig. 5: Anthony van Dyck, *Henrietta Maria with Sir Jeffery Hudson*, 1633. Oil on canvas, 219.1 x 134.8 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 6: Mortlake factory, *Mars and Venus surprised by Vulcan* (cut down from larger tapestry), c. 1620-22. Silk and wool, 368 x 345 cm. Royal Collection, London.
Fig. 7: Inigo Jones, Satyrs, 1611. Drawing on paper. Chatsworth House.

Fig. 8: Inigo Jones, The Banqueting House at Whitehall, 1619-1622. London.

Fig. 9: Paul van Somer, James I in Whitehall, 1620. Oil on canvas, 227.0 x 149.5 cm. The Royal Collection.
Fig. 10: Andrea Palladio, Palazzo Thiene, 1544. Vicenza, Italy.

Fig. 11: Computer generated replica of the Banqueting House with original colors

Fig. 12: Inigo Jones, *The Banqueting House at Whitehall* (interior), 1619-1622. London.
Fig. 13: Peter Paul Rubens, Equestrian Portrait of Duke of Buckingham, 1625. Oil on panel, 46.6 x 51.7 cm. Kimbell Art Museum.

Fig. 14: Peter Paul Rubens, The Apotheosis of James I and Other Studies: Multiple Sketch for the Banqueting House Ceiling, Whitehall, c. 1628-30. Oil on Oak, 947 x 630 mm. Tate Britain, London.
Fig. 15: Peter Paul Rubens, *Union of the Crowns*, c. 1632-33. Oil on panel, 64 x 49cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

Fig. 16: Peter Paul Rubens, *Minerva Protects Pax from Mars*, 1629-30. Oil on canvas, 203.5 x 298 cm, National Gallery of Art, London.

Fig. 17: Peter Paul Rubens, *Peace from The Apotheosis of James I*, 1633-34.
Fig. 18: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Banqueting House Ceiling*, 1633-34.

Fig. 19: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Apotheosis of James I*, 1633-34. Oil on canvas, 975 x 625 cm.
Fig. 20: Peter Paul Rubens, *Processions of Putti and Animals*, 1633-34. Oil on canvas, 237 x 1204 cm.

Fig. 21: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Peaceful Reign of James I*, 1634-35. Oil on canvas, 762 x 549 cm.
Fig. 22: Peter Paul Rubens, *Temperance Subduing Wantonness*, 1634-35. Oil on canvas, 549 x 239 cm.

Fig. 23: Peter Paul Rubens, *Bounty Triumphant Over Avarice*, 1634-35. Oil on canvas, 549 x 239 cm.
Fig. 24: Peter Paul Rubens, *Union of the Crowns of Great Britain*, 1634-35. Oil on canvas, 762 x 549 cm.

Fig. 25: Peter Paul Rubens, *Hercules as Heroic Virtue Triumphant over Discord*, 1634-35. Oil on canvas, 549 x 239 cm.
Fig. 26: Peter Paul Rubens, *Minerva as Wisdom Conquering Sedition*, 1634-35. Oil on canvas, 549 x 239 cm.

Fig. 27: Paolo Veronese, *The Triumph of Mordecai*, 1556. Oil on canvas, 500 x 370 cm. San Sedastiano, Venice.
Fig. 28: Paolo Veronese, *The Apotheosis of Venice*, 1576-78. Oil on Canvas, 904 x 579 cm. Palazzo Ducale, Venice.

Fig. 29: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Judgement of Solomon*, 1617. Oil on canvas, 234 x 303 cm. National Gallery of Denmark.
Fig. 30: Peter Paul Rubens, *Apotheosis of Henri VI*, 1622-25. Oil on canvas, 394 x 727 cm. Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 31: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Queen Triumphant*, 1622-25. Oil on canvas, 394 x 295 cm. Louvre, Paris.
Fig. 32: Annibale Carracci, *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1597. Fresco. The Farnese Gallery, Rome.

Sir:

I am quite willing that the picture done for my Lord Ambassador Carlton be returned to me and that I paint another Hunt led terrible than that of the lions, with a rebate on the price, as is reasonable, for the amount already paid; and all to be done by my own hand, without a single admixture of anyone else’s work. This I will maintain on my word as a gentleman. I am very sorry that there should have been any dissatisfaction in this affair on the part of my Lord Carleton, but he never let me understand clearly, although I asked him to state whether this picture was to be a true and entire original or merely retouched by my hand. I should live to have an opportunity to restore his good humor toward me, even though it should cost me some trouble to render him service. I shall be very glad to have this picture located in a place as eminent as the gallery of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, and will do everything in my power to make it superior in design to that of the Holofernes which I painted in my youth. I have almost finished a large picture, entirely by my hand, and in my opinion one of my best, representing a Lion Hunt, with the figures life-sized. It is ordered by my Lord Ambassador Digby to be presented, I understand, to the marquis of Hamilton. But as you rightly observe, such things have more grace and vehemence in a large picture than a small one. I should be glad if this painting for the gallery of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales were of larger proportions, because the large size of a picture gives one much more courage to express one’s ideas clearly and realistically. In any case I am ready in every respect to employ myself in your service, and recommending myself humbly to your favor, offer myself at all times.

As for His Majesty and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, I shall always be very much pleased to receive the honor of their commands; and regarding the hall in the New Palace, I confess that I am by natural instinct, better fitted to execute very large works than small curiosities. Everyone according to his gifts; my talent is such that no undertaking, however vast in size or diversified in subject, has ever surpassed my courage.

Sir,

Your very humble servant,

Antwerp, September 13, 1621

Peter Paul Rubens
Bibliography

Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


