

Francis Hayman



General Robert Clive

Reference: 11020

Dimensions:

Height: 50.80 cm / 20 in

Width: 60.50 cm / 23<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in

General Robert Clive receiving the homage of the Nawab Mir Jafar after the Battle of Plassey c.1761-2

Oil on canvas, 20 x 20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ins. (50.8 x 60.5 cm)

Inscribed indistinctly on stretcher: 'F.M. Wor... RA' 1

Provenance

Private collection, U.S.A., until 2012

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Literature: Brian Allen, Francis Hayman (New Haven & London, 1987) p.123, 177, checklist no.101;  
The Raj-India and the British, National Portrait Gallery catalogue 1990, ill. p.32, fig.10

This is probably a preliminary oil sketch by Hayman for the huge canvas (12 x 15 feet) which formed part of the series of four gigantic pictures illustrating glorious victories from the Seven Years War (1756-63) which were installed in the annex to the Rotunda at Vauxhall Gardens by the proprietor Jonathan Tyers (1702-67).

Although much acclaimed at the time of their unveiling in the early 1760s, all four large pictures had disappeared from the Gardens by 1840 (they were almost certainly removed and probably destroyed by that date or soon after) but a lengthy description of the original large pictures was published in a contemporary guidebook to the gardens and in the London press and this source enabled the identification of a larger (presumably subsequent) preliminary sketch for the same subject which is now in the National Portrait Gallery.<sup>2</sup> Another rougher version of this subject, was with Spink in the 1970s (K2 3992) and is now in a private collection in the U.K.

The subject depicted is the meeting between the victorious General Robert Clive (1725-1774) and Mir Jafar, the Nawab of Bengal (c.1691(?)-1765) after the Battle of Plassey on 23 rd June 1757. Clive was extraordinarily successful in India and, on his return to England in 1760 with an enormous personal fortune, received huge critical acclaim.<sup>3</sup>

In 1756 the Nawab of Oudh, Siraj-ud-Daula, (1733-1757) captured the East India Company's settlement at Calcutta and imprisoned British captives in the infamous Black Hole. Robert Clive, in command of the Company's army, recaptured Calcutta in January 1757 and then took the French fort at nearby Chandernagore in March. Clive then deposed Siraj, with the help of Mir Jafar at the Battle of Plassey.

Mir Jafar's rule is usually considered to be the start of British imperialism in India. He had effectively betrayed his predecessor Siraj ud-Dulah (1733-1757) who was killed soon after the battle, in order to become the next Nawab of Bengal. He gave a fortune of around £3 million to the East India Company, but in 1760 Mir Jafar was forced to abdicate in favour of his son-in-law Mir Qasim (d.1777). In 1763 Mir Jafar was restored with the full support of the Company for the remaining two years of his life. In 1764 Clive assumed supreme military and civil power in Bengal and forced the Mughal Emperor Sah 'Alam to allow him to collect revenue (diwan) on his behalf.

It is worth quoting at length from the rather exaggeratedly effusive contemporary description of the large lost picture since the author must have spoken with Hayman to elucidate the subject matter, if indeed the painter himself was not its author: 'General Clive, after gaining the battle of Plassey in the East Indies, which restored the English interest that had been ruined in those parts of the world, found himself under a necessity of deposing the reigning Nabob; for that purpose sent from the field of battle for Meer Jaffer, a principal General under the Subah or Nabob, and an enemy to the French. Meer Jaffer sent for, seeing the General surrounded by his victorious troops under their arms, approaches him with every symptom of doubt and dissidence in his countenance. The General is represented in the attitude of Friendship, by extending his hands to receive him. Behind the General stands his Aid de Camp with his spontoon in his hand; as bold but as graceful a figure as can well be conceived, the British colours are display'd in the hands of another English officer, with the like appearance as the former, but all of them in different attitudes. A bold horse, supposed to be the General's that seems startled at the sight of the elephant, closes to the fore ground of this compartment of the picture. It is but justice to the Painter to say, that no figures were

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ever better detached from the canvas than those are; that of the General, being the principal, is inimitably free, and in a most masterly stile of painting. The painter could with no propriety avoid representing the British figures in their uniform; but to prevent a sameness in the composition, he has with great judgment introduced the Indian groom in the habit of his country, which form a most happy contrast. Meer Jaffer wears on his face strong remains of the emotions already mentioned, but his dejection seems faintly alleviated by the General's manner of receiving him. The extension of his arms and the inclination of his body is most movingly expressive of doubt, submission and resignation, which is heightened by an Indian officer laying the Subah's standard at the General's feet. The future Subah or Nabob is attended by his son, a youth of about eighteen years of age, bewitchingly handsome, and painted with a masterly propriety. The other Indian figures behind Meer Jaffer are those of his friends and officers, and the countenances of them all strongly partake of the inquietudes of their principal. This co[m]partment is terminated by an elephant on the background, which the greatest judges from the East-Indies say is the best they ever saw in a painting, both co[m]partments of the picture (for so they may be called on account of the diversity of the figures they exhibit) are drawn up around the scene of interview. The painter has here taken advantage of the various dresses of the Indians, which, as well as their arms and all their other attributes, are preserved with the utmost precision, to introduce a beautiful play of colours, without departing from propriety.'<sup>4</sup> The other two versions and the present picture correspond closely to the published description except that there is no 'Indian officer laying the Subbah's standard at the General's feet' in either of the two other preparatory works, although the present work has a native with a box which may contain a folded standard. The present work also has a golden ladder and a chair on top of the elephant. Other minor differences between the preparatory works show Clive wearing his tricorn hat in both other versions but hatless in the present picture. In the present picture Mir Jafar is shown bowing more obsequiously than in the larger NPG picture. The NPG picture shows the red banner of the other two pictures turned into a British flag.

A letter in the National Library of Wales (Robert Clive Papers H1/1-4) reveals that Clive visited Hayman's studio on 26 April 1763 when Henry Clive paid 5s to 'Mr Hamans the painter'. This is recorded in an account book in the handwriting of Henry Clive (1709-1775), who was a first cousin of Clive of India's father. When Robert Clive came back from India for the second time in 1760, with his young cousin George in attendance, cousin Henry, who was an attorney, seems to have become a kind of steward, travelling with the party and keeping this account book (Dr Charlotte Mitchell kindly shared this information by email in October 2018). This shows that Clive almost certainly commissioned a painting from Hayman and it seems highly likely that he saw the Vauxhall Gardens work and decided that he wanted one for himself.

Despite never setting foot in India Hayman was among the first British artists to exploit Indian subject matter, a genre that was to become increasingly popular towards the end of the century in the hands of artists who did travel to the sub-Continent such as Zoffany and Tilly Kettle.

1. There is no record of any Royal Academician corresponding to the inscription.
2. See A Description of Vaux-Hall Gardens (London, 1762) bound into the end of the British Library's copy. See also The Public Advertiser, no.8905 (20 May 1763) and The London Magazine, XXXII (May 1763) pp.233-4, quoted by Allen, Francis Hayman (see Literature above). The larger sketch in the NPG was correctly identified by Brian Allen as by Hayman when it was catalogued by Christie's as 'English School' in an anonymous sale on 22 June 1979 (162), bought by the National Portrait Gallery. This work had previously been misidentified as

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by the American Mather Brown (1761-1831) by Mildred Archer in *British Portraiture 1700-1825* (London, 1979) p.419. For further details of the three other large historical pictures see Allen, *op.cit.*, pp.62-9

3. See Mark Bence-Jones, *Clive of India* (London, 1975)

4. See A description of Vaux-Hall Gardens (London, 1762) note 2 above.