

Birds Bk
Account
1655

Part II
The Great Crow Blackbird

573.00

Authentication by Internal Evidence and Stylistic Analysis

877
~~In this copy, perhaps written in December
of 1884, Don Creswell and Christopher Sone~~

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In December of 1884 when I was negotiating the purchase of the Audubon painting, both Don Creswell and Christopher Sone of The Philadelphia Print shop, the Agents for the sale, steadfastly maintained that ~~that~~ ^{through} they did believe that the picture was indeed an original painting by John James Audubon, they were forced to conclude that, "We have neither provenance nor internal evidence to conclusively prove that this drawing is the same of the first print of a bird to be published from an Audubon drawing."

My brother and I have been studying Audubon's life and works for almost thirty years. We could tell even from ^{viewing} the small black and white photographs in The Philadelphia Printshop's Catalogue that the painting, which they were offering for sale was either an original Audubon or a very good contemporary copy. ^{the period} In fact it took me only five minutes to make up my mind to call Philadelphia to put a hole in the picture and to request color transparencies for close study. The Catalogue stated that picture was only attributed to Audubon, that it was ~~made~~ made with pen and watercolor, signed in an engraver's

script, "Drawn by John J. Audubon from Nature."
The Catalogue went on to say that the small work
was produced in 1825, the same year as Bonaparte's
publication of the first of ^{volume} his four volume supplement
to Alexander Wilson's American Ornithology. ~~It~~ It
was apparent that the men in Philadelphia had
decided to be very cautious - too cautious, I thought.

During our first conversation I asked ^{my, because} ~~him~~
if there ^{was} ~~was~~ any indications evidence of
~~works in pastel~~ ^{that one of} ~~pastels~~ on the picture. He
took a moment to go get the painting, and upon
inspecting, it came closely answered in the
crisis some surprise in the affirmative I had
~~not identified~~ ^{seen the} ~~Bonaparte~~ ^{Alexander} ~~print of the~~ ^{Jawson} ~~Great~~
Crow Blackbird but I ^{was acquainted with} ~~know~~ many of ^{his} ~~Jawson's~~
^{other} ~~Titson~~ prints for Wilson's Ornithology and Jawson's
technique was ^{really} ~~etching~~, and engraving, with the
color added by hand in watercolor only. ~~If this~~
~~picture was a copy from the print~~ ^{Jawson} ~~Because of the~~
presence of pastel work, the picture, if it was a copy,
would have to have been painted from the original, for
to the best of my knowledge, Audubon was alone
among the early nineteenth century ^{american} painters to
employ pastels to achieve in his work a ^{the special} ~~softness and~~
delicate shadings ^{which he required.} It was ^{this} softness, I might add, that
Jawson particularly exhibited in Audubon's painting ^{of the} ~~one of the~~
Though I had not yet done ^{any} ~~research~~ on ^{the} ~~main reason~~
drawing, I had the feeling, as I made that first

"Any living bird kept and painted as this"

"The artist - Any living bird kept and painted as this"

Phone Call to Philadelph that the style of the two birds was rather different. The lower bird, the which is the female, though drawn with considerable fineness, marked back to an earlier period in his work, while the upper bird, the male, seemed to seem to be painted in a somewhat later style. In that first conversation with Mr. Cresswell I suggested that the 1825 date was probably not accurate or that the painting might be a copy which Audubon himself may have made from one of his earlier works. I told him that the style of the female for me particularly recalled Audubon's paintings of 1815 or 1820. On reviewing Audubon's ~~biography~~^{life} biography I was later to learn that he had painted a picture of Bottailed Grackles at Bonnet Carré Church above New Orleans in ~~1821~~¹⁸²⁰ in January of 1821. This surely must have been the ~~picture~~^{picture} that Charles Lucien Bonaparte saw among ~~collections~~^{collections} the two hundred or so paintings which the artist had brought with him that ~~Spring~~^{Spring} to Philadelphia that Spring of 1824, and I think that it must have served as the model for the small ~~painting~~^{picture} illustration which Bonaparte requested for his publication. The Bonnet Carré painting is now in the collection of the New York Historical Society ^{in New York City}. It will be very interesting to compare ~~the two~~ it with the picture in question. But I am getting ahead of myself. Let us return ~~to the discussion~~ to list and discuss each element

^{the picture's}
of the style and technique.

of the painting's technique and style; its ~~iconography~~; anomalies, if any; its relationship to the Tauson plate; and the painting's relationship to other Audubon's works of the period; and finally we will deal with the question of the signature.

I Technique and style

In discussing the techniques which Audubon employed in producing the Bonaparte painting of the Great Crow Blackbirds I must begin with a conclusion. Because Audubon left Philadelphia in ~~June~~ of late May or early June of 1824 to visit his ^{gradually} child hood parents west of the city, then ~~hastily~~ making his way to New York City via a visit to New Jersey, he ~~most likely~~ ^{had to have} painted the Bonaparte picture in ~~that~~ May of 1824.

This was a ~~critical~~ crucial time for the wild artist. His proficiency in ~~drawing birds~~ and portraying birds had made incredible gains. This ~~marked~~ a very marked change in his skills.

Audubon's work ^{had ~~not~~ begun to show} made a considerable improvement ~~beginning~~ ^{astonishingly} by late 1820 or early 1821. This growth of skill and refinement ~~was to~~ ^{was to} very noticeable in pictures of this period and some of Audubon's most charming and evocative paintings were created ~~by the~~ ^{by} his

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his wanderings in Louisiana and Mississippi from 1821 until his arrival in Philadelphia in 1824. The artist's very early work had been done primarily in pencil and pastel with the use of watercolor being employed mostly to render ^{the birds' feet} beaks and claws and occasionally the eyes. By 1820 he was using watercolor to underpaint most of the birds, but he still employed pastel to heighten areas of color and ^{to create} a softness that he was ^{able} to achieve in watercolor. Watercolor ^{was to become} began to become more and more his medium of choice, so that by 1824 he was only occasionally using pastel to create the effects ^{now and then} that I have already mentioned. He would continue to resort to pastels even into the 1830s, but his growing awareness of the demands of reproducing his work through etching, engraving, aquatint and hand coloring was to force him to adopt ^{sooner} influence his style significantly, forcing him to ~~then~~ study and to master the ~~best~~ techniques of drybrush watercolor. It is easy even for those not acquainted with Audubon's history to see how the ^{figures} ~~beauties~~ of his birds improve in sophistication ^{and elegance} as ~~he~~ he begins to rely more heavily on ~~the~~ the use of watercolor - a medium which ~~makes~~ made it possible for ^{him} to achieve a ^{much} "more sculptural" finish in ^{the figures} ~~the~~ the birds' outlines. I should also add that by 1824 he was also ~~using~~ making, an

Recent
Hawley's
technique
of

extensive use of ~~graphite~~ graphite pencil
to render the quills and the ^{feather} fletching of
the ^{feather} feathers, and egg white as a kind of varnish ^{to create a shiny surface} color on
All of these techniques are clearly ^{to create a shiny surface} revealed
~~Allen~~ ⁱⁿ ^{our} ^{prose} ^{of} the ^{Great} ^{North} ^{Wood} Audubon.
And it must be kept in mind that the
employment of pencil pen and ink, water color
and pastel ^{as egg white} was unique to ^{work of} John James
Audubon. None of the bird paintings of Mark
Catesby, (Pater) James Abbott () Alexander
Wilson () or Titian Peale () those
painters of American Birds whose works Audubon
might have seen, were created ^{using} ~~with~~ pastels. Though
pastels were popular in Europe, especially in England,
it was the French who particularly excelled in
this medium and Audubon was certainly employing
it on his ^{early} ~~early~~ painting of birds made in France
prior to his ^{returning to} ~~returning to~~ America ^{and adopting it as} his home country
in 1806. The profile of the female Grackle
is derived from the simple poses of Audubon's
^{early} work when when he was still ~~using~~ ^{relying}
^{heavily} on pastel but the drawing style of the
male bird exhibits a more sophisticated ~~attention~~
mastery of outline and an awareness of expressive
power which ~~an~~ outlines on copalms of conveying. Also
it should be noted that the upper bird is not
in straight profile but rather in ~~an~~ almost a
three quarters view reflecting a sophistication which

his work had been steadily slowing, since 1920.

II Anomalies

The painting of the Great Crow Blackbird now called the Boat-tailed Grackle conforms in every way conforms to the very personal techniques and ^{the unique} style of painting shown in Audubon's other works of the period 1820-1825. The techniques of pencil, pen and ink, water color, pastel and egg white are all present in this work and there are no stylistic anomalies.

III Relationship to the Lawson plate in Bonaparte's Supplement

The birds as shown in the print by Alexander Lawson which appeared in the four volume supplement to Alexander Wilson's American Ornithology (1825-1833) bear only a superficial resemblance to exhibit —. An artist named Alexander Rider was employed to alter the picture to fit a smaller format. (or at least that was Bonaparte's excuse for to Audubon). In the Rider redrawing and the subsequent Lawson print the male Grackle is pointed in the opposite direction from Audubon's drawing, ~~and is done in~~ a ~~much~~ ^{more clumsy} ~~heavier~~ ^{band} style than the Audubon's bird. The females are similar and it is likely that Rider relied on the Audubon pose when drawing his own version.