

GIUSEPPE CESARI, CALLED IL CAVALIER D'ARPINO

1568 Arpino - Rome 1640

*A Seated Prophet Holding a Book (A Study for the Figure of Moses)*

Red and black chalk, heightened with white chalk on paper; on it's old mount; c.1594.

224 x 181 mm

PROVENANCE: Padre Sebastiano Resta – John, Lord Somers (Lugt 2981, his number in pen and brown ink: *h 31.*) – Possibly Jonathan Richardson Sr., his mount with the attribution in pen and brown ink: *C: Guiseppino.* and on the verso shelf numbers: *GG.31.* (crossed out) / *G;* / *So. 20. No.17* – Benjamin West (Lugt 419) – Sale, London, Christie's, 16 April 1926, lot 54 – Sale, London, Sotheby's, 7 December 1976, lot 23 – Ralph Holland, London

EXHIBITION: Hatton Gallery, *Italian Drawings 1525-1570*, Newcastle upon Tyne 1982, p. 11, no. 39, plate VIII b

LITERATURE: James Byam Shaw, *The Italian Drawings of the Frits Lugt Collection*, I, Paris 1983, p. 155, no. 149, and note 6 – Herwarth Röttgen, *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari D'Arpino, Un grande pittore nello splendore della fama e nell'incostanza della fortuna*, Rome 2002, p. 268, under no. 49 (49i), reproduced p. 274, no. 49i – Herwarth Röttgen, *Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari D'Arpino, Die Zeichnungen – I Disegni*, vol. 2: *Die großen Aufträge – Le grandi commissioni 1587/93-1610*, Stuttgart 2013, no. 196

Giuseppe Cesari, called il Cavalier d'Arpino, began to receive commissions from Pope Gregory XIII in the early 1580s. Like Cristoforo Roncalli, he worked in the Vatican, the Palazzo del Quirinale and was active at other sites in Rome. He executed important works for Pope Clement VIII in the basilica of S. Giovanni in Laterano and in St. Peter's in the 1590s. In 1605, Pope Paul V commissioned him to execute frescoes in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore.

Herwarth Röttgen, in his monograph on Cavalier d'Arpino, dates the present very fine drawing to *circa 1594*. He suggests that it may be a preparatory study for the figure of Moses in the elaborate frescoes for the ceiling of the Olgiate Chapel in Santa Prassede, Rome, commissioned in 1587 by Bernardo Olgiate. These were completed by Arpino in 1595 (fig. 1). Ranking among his key works, the frescoes combine a re-evaluation of High-Renaissance models with a relegation of the purely decorative aspects of Mannerism to a minor role. Within Giovanni Alberti's simple *quadratura* framework Arpino has painted seated prophets, sibyls and dignitaries of the Church. The eastern lunette contains a Resurrection scene and the central image depicts the Ascension of Christ. The composition has a consistency that anticipates the Baroque. Its references to the influences of Raphael, Titian, Correggio and Michelangelo make it a true forerunner of Annibale Carracci's decorative scheme for the Galleria Farnese in the Palazzo Farnese, Rome (begun in 1597). The figure of Moses at the left side of the vaulted ceiling – for which this drawing is preparatory – is clearly the dominating figure in the composition.

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A further study related to the same figure and probably for the same project is in the collection of the Musée de Grenoble (fig. 2).<sup>1</sup> It shows Moses holding the 'tables of the law' (depicted in the form of a book), with his left hand placed under his right arm. The drapery over the figure's legs and the position of his feet have similarities with the present drawing. Moses is identified by the rays radiating from above his head. A further study for the same figure is preserved in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille (fig. 3).<sup>2</sup> Like the present sheet, it is executed in red and black chalk but without heightening in white. It shows Moses slightly turned to the left, his right hand holding the 'tables of the law' (now arched at the top) while his left hand is placed in his lap. These details and the style of the drapery display similarities with the figure in the final fresco. This, therefore, would seem to indicate that although the present drawing is highly finished, it was executed at an early stage in Arpino's planning of the project. A drawing for a Sibyl now in the Frits Lugt Collection, Paris (fig. 4), is very similar to the present drawing in both style and handling. It is a preparatory study for the figure of a *Sibilla Persica* in the vault fresco of the Capella Olgiati in Rome.<sup>3</sup>

In the present sheet Arpino's use of the *trois crayons*, combined with a high degree of finish and masterly style of execution, demonstrate the virtuosity of his draughtsmanship at the peak of his career.

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<sup>1</sup> Musée de Grenoble, [inv. MG D 1000]; H. Röttgen, *op. cit.*, p. 268, under no. 49 (49k), reproduced p. 274, no. 49k; Éric Pagliano, Catherine Monbeig Goguel and Philippe Costamagna, *De chair et d'esprit. Dessins italiens du musée de Grenoble XVe-XVIIIe siècle*, Paris and Grenoble 2010, p. 142f., no. 63, repr.

<sup>2</sup> Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, [inv. 2967]; See E. Pagliano, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 142, no. 63, repr.; Marco Simone Bolzoni will be publishing this drawing in his forthcoming book *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino. Maestro del disegno*.

<sup>3</sup> James Byam Shaw, *op. cit.*, I, Paris 1983, p. 155, no. 149, plate CLXXII.

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Fig. 1: *Ascension of Christ*, fresco, Cappella Olgiati, Santa Prassede, Rome

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Fig. 2: *Study for Moses*, black chalk,  
163 x 108 mm. Musée de Grenoble



Fig. 3: *Study for Moses*, black and red chalk,  
211 x 153 mm. Palais des Beaux-Arts,  
Lille



Fig. 4: *Study for a Sibyl*, red and black chalk,  
260 x 182 mm. Frits Lugt Collection,  
Fondation Custodia, Paris