Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Jacopo da EMPOLI (Florence 1551 - Florence 1640)

Glaucus and Scylla

Pen and brown ink and reddish-brown wash, heightened with white.

Squared for transfer in black chalk, and with framing lines in brown ink.

Inscribed Hanibal Caracci and Caracci on the verso.

Further inscribed Anibal Caracci on a small label (part of a previous mount?) pasted onto the verso.

Numbered N3074. on the verso.

141 x 198 mm. (5 1/2 x 7 3/4 in.)

This fine drawing is a preparatory study, with some differences, for Jacopo da Empoli's panel Glaucus and Scylla, today in the collection of the Museo Civico in Sansepolcro. Formerly attributed to Santi di Tito, the correct attribution of the painting to Empoli was made by Marco Chiarini in 1985. The Empoli scholar Alessandro Marabottini has described the Glaucus and Scylla in Sansepolcro as 'a beautiful painting…Empoli here seems to be at the peak of his ability to interpret the manner of Bronzino and Santi di Tito, enclosing the figures within well-defined and supple contours, and with his pure forms imbued with an amber, transparent clarity.' The painting is a rare example of a mythological subject in the artist's oeuvre.

The subject of Glaucus and Scyllais taken from Greek mythology and Ovid's Metamorphoses. Glaucus was a mortal fisherman who discovered a magical herb that brought the fish that he caught back to life. He decided to eat some of the herb, which made him immortal, but also caused him to grow fins and a fish's tail, and forced him to live ever after in the sea. He became a sea-god and prophet, and came to the rescue of ships in storms. Glaucus fell in love with the beautiful nymph Scylla and wanted to marry her, but, repulsed by his piscine form, she fled onto land, where he could not follow.

The present sheet was first published by Antonio Vannugli in 1995. As he noted of the drawing, 'The pose of Glaucus was altered in the final painting and the features of his face made more human; only the original satyr-like ears and fish tail were retained to refer to his identity as a sea-god…Empoli here drew with a continuous line that neatly defines the forms. Wash and white heightening were applied to

convey a soft lighting that emphasizes volume. Such elements of style, derived from Pontormo's and Bronzino's draftsmanship, form the basis of Empoli's "maniera soda" (or "firm manner").'

In his discussion of the Sansepolcro Glaucus and Scyllain his monograph on Empoli, Marabottini proposed a date for the painting, on stylistic grounds, of c.1600. However, as Vannugli pointed out, the painting is perhaps more likely to date from a few years later, by virtue of a close stylistic comparison between this preparatory drawing and two other compositional studies by Empoli datable to the middle of the first decade of the 17th century. In technique and handling, the present sheet may be compared with an equally highly pictorial, squared drawing of The Madonna and Child with Saintsin the Uffizi, which is a study for a large altarpiece in the church of Santa Lucia dei Magnoli in Florence of c.1606-1607. Also comparable in style and technique is another drawing in the Uffizi, depicting The Assumption of the Virgin, which is thought to be a study for a now-lost painting, formerly in the Florentine church of San Michele Visdomini, of the early years of the 17th century. Like the two Uffizi drawings, the present sheet displays an animated and vigorous graphic manner, with an extensive use of white heightening and a freedom of penwork, which also reflects the influence of Pontormo.

Although the present sheet is the only known definitive preparatory study by Empoli for the painting of Glaucus and Scylla, Marco Chiarini had proposed that a red chalk study of the head of a young man by Empoli in the Uffizi may have been used for the head of Scylla in the painting. That drawing, while indeed very close in pose and appearance to the head of Scylla, is however more obviously related to that of a servant in Empoli's painting of The Supper at Emmaus of c.1609, in the chapel of the Villa degli Albizzi (later Frescobaldi) at Pomino, outside Florence.

The present sheet was once part of the large collection of mostly Netherlandish drawings assembled by the Dutch collector Valerius Röver (1686-1739) of Delft. A manuscript inventory of the collection, in the University Library in Amsterdam, describes the present sheet, as a work by Annibale Carracci, under the inventory number 32./38: '[Portfolio] 32 [no.] 38: Zee God bij een zittend vrouwtje aan het strand root gewassen en gehoogt van dezelve 1-15'. ('Sea God with a seated woman on the seashore washed in red and heightened by the same [ie. Carracci].')

Röver's collection of drawings, compiled into forty-two albums, was purchased en blocfrom his widow in 1761 by the dealer Hendrik de Leth for the sum of 20,500 florins, and was subsequently then acquired in its entirety by the Amsterdam banker Johann Goll van Franckenstein, the Elder (1722-1785). Born in Frankfurt, Goll van Franckenstein settled in Amsterdam around 1740. His collection is known to have numbered over a thousand drawings by 1759, even before his acquisition of the Röver albums. The collection passed in turn to his son, Johann Goll van Franckenstein, the Younger (1756-1821) and grandson Pieter Hendrik Goll von Franckenstein (1787-1832), before being dispersed at auction in Amsterdam in 1833, following the latter's death. The sale of the Goll von Franckenstein collection, in which the drawings were divided into various albums, achieved an impressive total of 69,638 florins.

Literature:

Antonio Vannugli, 'Jacopo da Empoli's Study for "Glaucus and Scylla"', Master Drawings, Winter 1995, pp.405-409, fig.2; Riccardo Spinelli, 'Soggetti biblici, letterari e poetici nell'opera di Jacopo da Empoli', in Rosanna Caterina Proto Pisani et al, Jacopo da Empoli 1551-1640: Pittore d'eleganza e devozione, exhibition catalogue, Empoli, 2004, p.190; Heiko Damm and Henning Hoesch, ed., galleria portatile: Italienische Handzeichnungen aus der Sammling Hoesch, Vol.II, Petersberg, 2022, pp.90-95, no.18 (entry by Heiko Damm).

Artist description:

According to his biographer Filippo Baldinucci, Jacopo da Empoli's first teacher was Tommaso Manzuoli, called Maso da San Friano. He entered the Accademia del Disegno in 1576, and spent his entire career in Florence, apparently never leaving the city to work elsewhere. Empoli's earliest documented painting is a Virgin with Saints of 1579, now in the Louvre. Among his most significant works is an altarpiece of the Immaculate Conception, painted in 1591 for the Florentine church of San Remigio, and a Doubting Thomas of 1602, now in the Museo della Collegiata in his home town of Empoli. Between 1600 and 1620 Jacopo da Empoli was particularly active in painting altarpieces for churches in Florence, such for Santa Maria Novella, Santissima Annunziata and the Certosa at Galluzzo. He also earned a number of private commissions for religious works, notably a Supper at Emmaus painted in 1609 for the chapel of the Villa degli Albizzi at Pomino, outside Florence. Empoli was called upon by the Medici to provide decorations for such important occasions as the weddings of Ferdinando I de' Medici and Christina of Lorraine in 1589 and Marie de' Medici and Henri IV of France in 1600, as well as the funeral of Queen Margherita of Spain in 1612. Between 1617 and 1619 he worked on the decoration of the Casa Buonarroti in Florence. Empoli was a fine portrait painter, and also painted a number of still life pictures, of which fewer than a dozen survive, mostly datable to the 1620s. He is known to have established a private art school in his studio, to teach drawing to young artists and noblemen, in the latter part of his career.

Empoli was one of the finest Florentine draughtsmen of the early Seicento, and nearly a thousand of his drawings have survived to this day. As Richard Spear has noted, 'Jacopo da Empoli's paintings reveal a gradual but decided shift from Vasarian mannerism to Carraccesque naturalism and clarity; the drawings reflect a slow and meticulous personality, one attuned to methodical and repetitious study of gestures and compositional details.' The artist produced many individual studies for each figure in his compositions, working from live models to study and refine details of drapery, gesture, pose and lighting, and several preparatory drawings - often on coloured or prepared paper - survive for most of his paintings. (Almost no drawings related to his still life subjects are known, however). In his old age, when he had largely ceased working as a painter, he was reduced to selling his drawings to provide income to live by. A large number of Empoli's studies were thus purchased by Baldinucci, both for himself and for the inveterate collector Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici, so that by far the largest surviving group of drawings by the artist, numbering some four hundred sheets, is today in the Uffizi. (Many of Empoli's drawings were also purchased by his pupil and first biographer, the minor still-life painter Virginio Zaballi.) A much smaller but equally representative selection of drawings by Empoli is in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille, while other groups are in museums in Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Oxford, Paris and Rome.