

Giovanni BILIVERT (Florence 1585 - Florence 1644)

A Woman and Child Seated in a Landscape

Black chalk and grey wash, with framing lines in black chalk.

Inscribed *Parmigianino* at the bottom centre.

168 x 130 mm. (6 5/8 x 5 1/8 in.)

This drawing may depict the story of Hagar and her son Ishmael in the desert. Giovanni Bilivert treated the related Biblical subject of *Hagar and the Angel* in a painting now in the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg, and the present sheet may perhaps be a first idea for that composition. Among particularly comparable drawings by Bilivert are five studies in black chalk of *Mary Magdalene at the Tomb* - one in the Louvre, three in the Uffizi, and one in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge - which are all preparatory studies for a large painting of 1627, today in an Italian private collection.

Also similar in handling, albeit somewhat larger and more complex in composition, is Bilivert's drawing of *Pope Leo X Receiving King François I of France* in the Istituto Centrale per la Grafica in Rome, related to a painting of 1627 now in a private collection in Scotland, as well as a *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille, which is a study for the major late altarpiece of 1642 in Santissima Annunziata in Florence. Other technically and stylistically comparable drawings in black chalk and grey wash by Bilivert include two studies in the Uffizi; one of *Susanna and the Elders* and the other a fragmentary compositional drawing for a late painting of *Salome Presents the Head of Saint John the Baptist to Herod*.

The first recorded owner of this drawing was the Russian-born banker Baron Horace de Landau (1824-1903), who worked for the Rothschild bank and settled in Florence in 1866. He began collecting books, manuscripts, prints and drawings at the time of his arrival in Italy, and by the time of his death had amassed a huge collection, which was left to his niece, Mme. Hugo Finaly, née Eugenia Ellenberger (1850-1938). The present sheet later belonged to the Austrian banker Albin Schram (1926-2005), an important collector of historical letters, written by significant literary, political, scientific and musical figures, dating from the 15th to the 20th centuries.

Literature:

Heiko Damm and Henning Hoesch, ed., *galleria portatile: Italienische Handzeichnungen aus der Sammling Hoesch*, Vol.II, Petersberg, 2022, p.185, under no.33, fig.3.

Artist description:

The son of a Dutch goldsmith and jeweller in the service of the Medici court, Giovanni Bilivert (sometimes Biliverti) trained with Alessandro Casolani in Siena before returning to Florence and joining the workshop of Ludovico Cigoli around 1590. He became one of Cigoli's chief assistants, and remained in his studio for some fifteen years. Bilivert worked with Cigoli in Rome between 1604 and 1608, and upon his return to Florence entered the service of the Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici, who in 1611 appointed him designer at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, a salaried post he retained until Cosimo's death in 1621. Bilivert's independent career as a painter, which began in Rome with an altarpiece for the church of San Callisto, continued with much success in Florence. Most of his work was in the form of altarpieces and easel pictures, and he seems to have been uninterested in obtaining fresco commissions.

Among the artist's important Florentine commissions were a painting for the cycle of scenes from the life of Michelangelo for the Casa Buonarotti, painted between 1616 and 1620, a Discovery of the True Cross completed in 1621 for the church of Santa Croce, and a Guardian Angel executed four years later for the Certosa at Galluzzo, just outside the city. Bilivert also worked in Pisa, where he completed an Annunciation and a San Carlo Borromeo in Adoration for the church of San Nicola in 1611, followed several years later by a painting of Daniel and Habbakuk for the Duomo, executed between 1625 and 1630. From around 1636 onwards he produced mainly religious pictures. Some Bilivert's last works are a Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, painted in 1642 for the Florentine church of Santissima Annunziata, and a Miracle of Saint Paul, dated 1644, in San Marco. His pupils and followers included Orazio Fidani – who wrote a manuscript biography of the master - and Agostino Melissi, both of whom derived the composition of a number of their early paintings from drawings by Bilivert.

Somewhat less than four hundred drawings by Bilivert survive, of which the largest groups are today in the Uffizi in Florence, with almost three hundred sheets, and the Louvre in Paris, which houses some forty drawings by or attributed to the artist. Like his teacher Cigoli, Bilivert's drawings were for him an important means of artistic expression. Most of his drawings can be directly related to his paintings, with the same compositions often studied repeatedly; as the 17th century Florentine biographer Filippo Baldinucci noted of Bilivert, 'he always made a great number of studies for his works.' However, he seems not to have made many drawings as autonomous works of art and, unusually for a Florentine artist of the period, produced no drawings of nudes, and almost no landscapes.