

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Andrea BOSCOLI (Florence 1560 - Florence 1608)**

## **Erminia Tells Her Tale to the Shepherds**

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk.

Signed(?) *Boscoli* at the lower right centre.

Inscribed '*Quindi versando da begli occhi fora / umor di doglia cristallino e vago*' in brown ink in the upper margin and '*parte narro di sue fortune e intanto / il pietoso pastor pianse al suo pianto*' in brown ink in the lower margin.

228 x 160 mm. (9 x 6 1/4 in.) [image]

257 x 178 mm. (10 1/8 x 7 in.) [sheet]

The present sheet is part of a series of around twenty finished drawings by Andrea Boscoli depicting episodes from *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Torquato Tasso's epic poem of the late 16th century. Each of the drawings in this group have inscriptions in the upper and lower margins, almost certainly in the artist's hand, with the relevant lines from the *Gerusalemme Liberata*. First published in 1575, and in a more complete edition in 1581, Tasso's romantic tale was a popular source for artists, particularly in Italy and France, from the late 16th century through to the 18th century. Boscoli was no exception, and several drawings by the artist for other episodes of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, of both horizontal and vertical format, are known. However, as Julian Brooks has noted, 'The purpose of the set of Boscoli drawings taken from Tasso subjects is not clear; they might conceivably be related to a series of designs of 'tales of love' which Boscoli made to decorate his bedroom towards the end of his life. Alternatively they could have been made as designs for one of Boscoli's numerous literary friends. That Ludovico Cigoli saw them and praised them grandemente suggests that they were made or at least

known in Florence or Rome; they certainly date to the last few years of Boscoli's short life.'

As Brooks has further noted, the drawings from this series, which are datable to between 1604 and 1608, 'were highly innovative in the way in which they extracted the romantic episodes from Tasso's martial epic.' His comments on another drawing from the Tasso series are equally appropriate to the present sheet: 'Boscoli takes to bravura extremes the rich and schematic effects of light and shade for which he was well known...it is easy to understand why the drawings in this series were recorded as *storiette di chiaro scuro* ('little stories in light and shadow') in an inventory of c.1611.' Other drawings by Boscoli of scenes from the *Gerusalemme Liberata* are today in the collections of the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Courtauld Gallery in London, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the Fondation Custodia in Paris, the Istituto Centrale per la Grafica in Rome and the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, as well as in several private collections.

The provenance of Boscoli's *Gerusalemme Liberata* drawings can be traced back to the early 17th century, when they are recorded as a group in an inventory, compiled around 1611, of paintings and drawings belonging to an obscure Marchigian collector, Luca Fei of Filotranno, near Ancona. The Fei inventory, written by Father Francesco Orazio Civalli of Macerata, sheds more light on Boscoli's drawings and their scope. The inventory not only mentions Boscoli's drawings, praising their quality, but specifies that the original series included twenty drawings and that it focused specifically on depicting the romantic episodes taken from Tasso's poems. Some scholars have assumed that the series might have been a starting point for a series of engravings or may have been intended as a commission from an erudite private collector, who must have been very familiar with the writings of Torquato Tasso.

The four drawings by Boscoli devoted to the story of the Muslim princess Erminia are particularly interesting from an iconographical perspective, since they represent one of the first visual depictions of the tale of Erminia and the shepherds, an episode which experienced much popularity throughout the 17th century. Previous visual translations of this episode are known in works by artists such as Santi di Tito, Ludovico Carracci and Bernardo Castello. However, Boscoli's version betrays the artist's interest in the realistic depiction of rural life: the artist, in fact, chooses to focus mainly on the dramatic and romantic aspects of the tale of Erminia.

The pose of the horse seen from behind in this drawing is repeated in a drawing of a horse by Boscoli, in red and black chalk, that was formerly in the Jak Katalan collection in New York.

### **Literature:**

Francesco Orazio Civalli, *Le pitture e i disegni che sono appresso del Signor Luca Fei*, MS 539, Biblioteca Comunale di Macerata, 1611; Julian Brooks, 'Andrea Boscoli's "Loves of Gerusalemme Liberata"', *Master Drawings*, Winter 2000, pp.452-453, fig.8; Nadia Bastogi, 'Episodi salienti della fortuna della Gerusalemme liberata nella grafica fiorentina tra Cinque e Seicento' in Elena Fumagalli, Massimiliano Rossi and Riccardo Spinelli, ed., *L'arme e gli amori: La poesia di Ariosto, Tasso e Guarini nell'arte fiorentina del Seicento*, exhibition catalogue, Florence, Palazzo Pitti, 2001, pp.90-91, fig.8 (as location unknown); Nadia Bastogi, *Andrea Boscoli*, Florence, 2008, pp.355-356, no.530, illustrated p.205, fig.241 (as location unknown).

### **Artist description:**

Andrea Boscoli trained in the Florentine studio of Santi di Tito and was admitted into the Accademia

del Disegno in 1584. He visited Rome as a young man in the early 1580's and, like many artists before him, avidly copied the frescoes of Polidoro da Caravaggio that decorated the facades of several palaces there. Between 1582 and 1600 Boscoli worked primarily in Florence, with brief stays in Siena and Pisa. His earliest known painting is the Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew, painted in 1587 for the cloister of the Florentine church of San Pier Maggiore. He was also involved in the decorations for the apparati celebrating the marriage of the Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici to Christina of Lorraine in 1589.

In 1592 Boscoli completed a fresco cycle for the Villa di Corliano at San Giuliano Terme, near Pisa, and the following year painted an altarpiece of The Annunciation for the Chiesa del Carmine in Pisa. In 1597 Boscoli painted a Visitation for the Florentine church of Sant' Ambrogio, followed two years later by a Crucifixion for SS. Apostoli, now lost, and an altarpiece of The Preaching of Saint John the Baptist in the church of San Giovanni Battista in Rimini, signed and dated 1599. Between 1600 and 1605 Boscoli worked mainly in the Marches, painting frescoes and altarpieces for patrons and churches in Fano, Fabriano, Macerata, Fermo and elsewhere, while the last years of his career were spent between Florence and Rome.

Relatively few paintings by Boscoli survive today, and it is as a draughtsman that he is best known. His drawings were highly praised by his biographer Filippo Baldinucci (who noted that 'he drew so well...without lacking a boldness and an extraordinarily skillful touch') and were avidly collected. Some six hundred drawings by Boscoli are known, with significant groups of drawings in the Uffizi in Florence (many of which were once part of the extensive collection formed by Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici), the Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica in Rome and the Louvre.