

Caravaggio's 'Denial of St Peter' acquired by Guido Reni in 1613

by PATRIZIO BARBIERI



26. *The Denial of St Peter*, by Caravaggio. c.1609–10. Canvas, 94 by 125.4 cm. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; purchase, Lila Acherson Wallace Gift).

IN 1997 THE Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acquired an early seventeenth-century painting of the *Denial of St Peter* (Fig.26). Almost nothing was known about its provenance before it was sold as an anonymous work by an antiques dealer to Vincenzo Imparato Caracciolo of Naples shortly after the Second World War. Only after its restoration in 1959–64 was it attributed to Caravaggio, and solely on the basis of style. This attribution, first put forward by Roberto Longhi, is currently accepted by almost all art historians, who date it to 1609–10, the last two years of the artist's life.¹ This article provides new

archival evidence concerning a painting of the same subject by Caravaggio acquired by Guido Reni in 1613 which could be either the work in the Metropolitan or another painting of the same subject that is now lost.

In 1612 Guido Reni returned to his native city of Bologna after spending over ten years in Rome. His departure, up until now dated to the spring of that year or shortly afterwards,² must have occurred before 8th March, on which date he instructed an agent to collect on his behalf from the Reverenda Camera Apostolica the balance of his fee for the frescos Reni had painted

¹ On the recent vicissitudes of the painting, see exh. cat. *Caravaggio. The final years*, Naples (Capodimonte) and London (National Gallery) 2004–05, pp.140–43, no.17, entry by K. Christiansen; see also M. Cinotti: *Caravaggio, la vita e l'opera*, Bergamo 1991, pp.180–81 and 227; and V. Pacelli: *L'ultimo Caravaggio, dalla Maddalena a mezza*

figura ai due San Giovanni (1606–1610), Perugia 1994, pp.99–100 (who dates it to 1610, but also records that Cesare Brandi believed the painting was the work of a 'caravaggesco siracusano').

² G.-J. Salvy: *Reni*, Milan 2001, p.19.

in the Borghese Chapel in S. Maria Maggiore (1610–12).³ His representative was Luca Ciamberlano, an engraver from Urbino with whom Reni had collaborated in 1609–12 on a series of engravings after his designs of scenes from the life of Philip Neri, made on the occasion of the reopening of the second inquiry into Philip's canonisation.⁴ On 12th September 1612, Ciamberlano again acted as his agent, charged with the task of collecting the money owed to Reni by some of his fellow Bolognese, debts that dated from the time of Reni's Roman sojourn.⁵

Ciamberlano cannot have been very prompt in dispatching to Bologna the sums he had collected, for on 3rd May 1613 Reni appointed another agent to represent him, the painter Alessandro Albini (1568–1646), also from Bologna, who had collaborated with him on the frescos of the Annunciation chapel in the Quirinal Palace.⁶ The same day, 3rd May, Albini summoned Ciamberlano before the notary Simon Petrus Corallus in order to make 'a final reckoning and balance' of the amounts owed by Ciamberlano to Reni (see Appendix below). It is in this document that mention is made of a painting of the *Denial of St Peter* by Caravaggio; Ciamberlano owed Reni 350 scudi, but the deed adds that:

in fact, as far as the correct reckoning and reduction of the said sum is concerned, the above-mentioned master Alessandro [Albini] stated that he had been given and received from the said master Luca [Ciamberlano], here present, a picture, that is, a painting by the hand of the late master Michelangelo da Caravaggio, which they say portrays the denial of St Peter with a maid. The above picture, the said master Alessandro stated that he had been given and accepted from the said master Luca, here present, for the sum of two hundred and forty scudi in cash.

It is not clear if Reni was seeking through his agent Albini only to retrieve repayment from Ciamberlano of debts owed to him by other people that Ciamberlano was collecting on Reni's

behalf, or whether Ciamberlano himself owed Reni money. Nor do we know if the painting by Caravaggio was owned by Ciamberlano or acquired by him from one of Reni's debtors. Ciamberlano's residual debt amounted to 110 scudi (350 scudi minus the 240 scudi at which the painting was valued), which he paid back over the following seven years. He handed over the final instalment, 40 scudi, in 1620 to Reni's cousin and future heir, the Bolognese painter Guido Signorini.⁷

This document is important for two reasons; it is the first mention of a painting of a *Denial of St Peter* by Caravaggio. The second and last mention of such a work dates from 1650 when, in an inventory of paintings belonging to the Savelli family in Rome is listed: 'Un'Ancella con S. Pietro negante, et una altra mezza figura per traverso, p.^{mi} 5, e 4 del Caravaggio, D. 250'.⁸ In another inventory of 1650, the same picture is simply listed as a 'S. Pietro negante del Caravag.o'.⁹ Since this is the only work by Caravaggio ever mentioned in the family's collection, both Laura Testa and Keith Christiansen infer that this must be the same picture that is listed, without attribution, in a 1624 inventory of the Savelli palace at Ariccia and again in 1631, in Palazzo Savelli, Rome, as 'Un S. Pietro con l'ancella cornice dorata'.¹⁰ This is clearly the same painting in the inventory of 1650, but it is worth noting that in the last document, like the one relating to Ciamberlano's painting, only two figures are mentioned: St Peter and the maid. Two possible hypotheses can be advanced: that the painting referred to in the 1613 document is the same one that later belonged to the Savelli family, now in the Metropolitan Museum, or that it showed only two figures and has subsequently been lost. Some paintings of the same subject with only two figures attributed to Pensionante del Saraceni could reflect a lost painting of the subject by Caravaggio.¹¹ The first hypothesis seems to be the more probable, given that all three figures are not always mentioned in documents, even when they were known to be present.

The second point of importance is that the document shows that Reni owned a work by Caravaggio. During the years

³ Rome, Archivio di Stato (cited hereafter as ASR), Trenta Notai Capitolini, uff.28, vol.83, fol.526, 8th March 1612. Reni had completed his work on the decoration of the chapel before the deadline of 6th May, as observed by S. Pepper: 'Guido Reni's Roman account book – II, the commissions', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 113 (1971), p.383.

⁴ On this collaboration, see O. Malasecchi and S. Pepper: 'Guido Reni, Luca Ciamberlano and the Oratorians: their relationship clarified', *ibid.* 140 (1998), pp.596–98. On Ciamberlano (born c.1586; active c.1635), see also A. Bertolotti: *Artisti urbinate in Roma prima del secolo XVIII*, Urbino 1881, p.66.

⁵ ASR, Trenta Notai Capitolini, uff.28, vol.85, fol.89, 12th September 1612: the Bolognese Lattanzio Agucchi, who owes Guido Reni 150 scudi, pays on account the sum of 13 scudi to 'Lucas Ciamberlanus Urbinas quondam Pauli'. On 1st February of the same year, Lattanzio Agucchi also acts as a guarantor for a loan of 150 scudi granted by Guido Reni, in Rome, to Pompeo Marsili of Bologna; *ibid.*, vol.83, fol.290. On 3rd October 1612, the brothers Domenico and Gaspare Maria Simonini, also Bolognese, state that they owe 74 scudi to Reni; *ibid.*, vol.85, fol.188.

⁶ For these works, see C.C. Malvasia: *Felsina pittrice. Vite dei pittori bolognesi*, ed. M. Brascaglia, Bologna 1971, p.352; see also U. Thieme and F. Becker: *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, Leipzig 1978, I, pp.227–28.

⁷ ASR, Trenta Notai Capitolini, uff.28, vol.113, fol.783, 20th September 1620: balance of 40 scudi 'pro finali solutione' of the debt of 110 scudi, as per the deed dated 3rd May 1613. On Guido Signorini, see U. Thieme and F. Becker: *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, Leipzig 1978, XXXI, p.16. Guido Reni died at Bologna in 1642, and Guido Signorini in 1644 in Rome.

⁸ G. Campori: *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventari inediti di quadri . . .*, Modena 1870, p.162 (document housed in Modena, Archivio Palatino). See also Christiansen, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.142. Since the Roman *palm* equalled 22.34 cm., the measurements indicated in the document (89.4 by 111.7 cm.) are close enough to those of the painting in the Metropolitan Museum (94 by 125.4 cm.).

⁹ L. Testa: 'Presenze caravaggesche nella collezione Savelli', *Storia dell'arte* 93–94 (1998), pp.348–51, esp. p.348.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.348; and Christiansen, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.142. The same painting appears in the palace at Ariccia in the inventory of goods of Prince Paolo Savelli made after his death in 1632; see ASR, Trenta Notai Capitolini, uff.5, vol.127, fol.144, 17th October 1632 (*Inventarium omnium, et singulorum bonorum hereditarium bonae memoriae Excellentissimi Domini Pauli Principis Sabelli in terra Ariciae existentium*), fol.149v. An indirect confirmation that this was the painting by Caravaggio can be found in the will of Federico Savelli in 1646, in which are mentioned works 'di mano di Guido Reni, del Caravaggio, e del Gentileco': see Testa, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.348.

¹¹ See, for example, the one at the Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai; and <http://www.scholarsresource.com/browse/artist/2142560586>.

¹² Malvasia, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.349: 'Che s'egli professava d'esser sì grand'huomo, perchè dunque tutto il giorno cercare quadri di sua mano e comprare quanti gli ne dassetto nelle mani?'

¹³ G. Giongo: 'Guido Reni giovane', *Commentari* 3 (1952), p.201: 'la gara tra Reni e Caravaggio e le ire di quest'ultimo hanno tutto l'aspetto di una spiritosa invenzione'.

¹⁴ Malvasia, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.354: 'Si paga ella meno della mia [a mezza figura by Caravaggio] quando ben il doppio ne vuole? Del S. Pietro crocifisso alle Tre Fontane, che ho fatto per settanta scudi fecciosi, non ne dava a lui cento cinquanta il Cardinal Scipione [Borghese]?'; but C. Terzaghi: *Caravaggio, Annibale Carracci, Guido Reni tra le ricevute del Banco Herrera & Costa*, Rome 2007, p.320, states that, contrary to Malvasia's assertions, it was Cardinal Aldobrandini, not Scipione Borghese, who commissioned the *Crucifixion*.

¹⁵ On this work, see S. Pepper: *Guido Reni*, Oxford 1984, p.215.

1601–06, Caravaggio and Reni were both working in Rome. Carlo Cesare Malvasia has written that there was considerable tension between the two artists over the competition for the contract to fresco the cupola of the Santa Casa at Loreto and that Caravaggio is said to have stated that if his adversary were really convinced that he was such a skilful painter, 'why did he spend all his time looking for pictures by him [that is, by Caravaggio] and buying as many as he could find?'.¹² But since there was no proof that Reni owned works by Caravaggio, it had even been considered that the tale of clashes between the two might have been merely a 'witty invention'.¹³ The 1613 document, however, confirms that Reni acquired at least one painting by his rival. Although this was brokered by a go-between, Albini must have been aware of Reni's taste and have obtained his consent before agreeing to the transaction. The value put on the *Denial of St Peter* was actually much higher than the value put on Reni's work at that time. Again according to Malvasia, the latter complained that during his time in Rome, Caravaggio's paintings were valued at twice the amount of his own, and that Reni only earned, for example, a 'miserable seventy scudi' for the

Crucifixion of St Peter (Pinacoteca, Vatican City).¹⁴ This large canvas, measuring 175 by 305 cm., was painted for the altar of the Abbey of S. Paolo alle Tre Fontane in 1604–05 during Reni's so-called 'Caravaggesque phase'.¹⁵ Yet, in 1613 Reni agreed to a valuation of 240 scudi for a much smaller canvas by his late rival.

Appendix

Final reckoning and balance of the amounts owed to Guido Reni by Luca Ciamberlano. (Rome, Archivio di Stato, Trenta Notai Capitolini, uff.28, vol.87, notary Corallus Simon Petrus, fol.8r, 3rd May 1613).

Magnificus D. Lucas quondam Pauli Ciamberlani Urbinates [. . . et] Magnificus D. Alexander filius D. Antonij Albini Bononiensis pictor [. . .] fecisse inter sese computum, et solidum finalem de omnibus, et singulis usque in presentem diem per dictum D. Lucam pertractatis cum dicto D. Guido Reno tam de datis quam de receptis, in eo q. reperijse ipsum D. Lucam remanere debitorem dicti D.¹ Guidi [. . . scudi 350]. Ad cuius quidem summae bonum computum et diminutionem praefatus D. Alexander confess.¹² habuisse, et recepisse à dicto D. Luca praesente unum quadrum, seu picturam manu quondam D. Michaelisangeli de Caravaggio confectam in quo dixerunt esse depictam effigiem Sancti Petri negantis cum Ancilla. Quem quadrum praefatus D. Alexander confess.¹² habuisse et recepisse à praefato D. Luca praesente pro pretio scutorum ducentorum quadraginta monetarum. [. . .] Actum in Regione Parionis . . .

Obituaries

Allan Braham (1937–2011)

ALLAN BRAHAM, who died in March 2011 aged seventy-three, spent his career on the curatorial staff of the National Gallery, London (1962–92). He rose steadily to become Keeper and Deputy Director under Michael Levey, with whom he had a notably successful working relationship. Among the staff he had a reputation for his wide and thorough knowledge of the Gallery's collections and he worked fruitfully with its conservators, who valued his precise and meticulous approach. He was appointed Curator of Spanish paintings, publishing the revised second edition of the *Catalogue of Spanish Paintings* in 1970, and was the author of essays on Velázquez and also Rubens in the *Themes and Painters* series published in 1972. His contribution to the *Painting in Focus* series (1976), on the Rokeby *Venus*, was memorable for its attempt to test the artist's realism with the aid of live models, his four-year-old daughter playing the part of Cupid. The climax of this phase of Allan's career was the major loan exhibition from British collections *El Greco to Goya* in 1981. By that time, however, he had been given responsibility for Italian cinquecento paintings, of which the revised catalogue appeared in 1985. He also curated the Moroni exhibition in 1978. His involvement in all aspects of the Gallery's activities perfectly qualified him to write *The Working of the National Gallery* (1974).

Throughout these years, however, Allan was pursuing his love of French classical architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While still an undergraduate at the Courtauld

Institute of Art, his identification of a drawing by François Mansart had so impressed his tutor, Anthony Blunt, that he had been encouraged to write a full-scale article for publication in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, where it appeared in 1960, shortly before Allan's graduation. He then embarked on a Ph.D. thesis under Blunt's supervision on Mansart's drawings for the Louvre, completing it in 1967. Although he listed 'architecture' merely as his hobby in *Who's Who*, this was a passion pursued purposefully, and resulted in three major publications, two of them collaborative. With Peter Smith, he wrote the two-volume monograph *François Mansart* (1973), which was hailed by Robert Berger in the *Art Bulletin* as 'an absolute treasure' for its new documents, its many appendices and its nearly six hundred illustrations. The text, Berger predicted, would make it 'the definitive study of Mansart for many decades to come'. His second collaboration, with Helmut Hager, *Carlo Fontana: the drawings at Windsor Castle* (1977), was a more technical work. This was intended to lead to further collaborative catalogues of Italian Baroque architectural drawings. However, by the later 1980s he was beginning to falter, so that none of these plans came to fruition.

Allan's most wide-ranging architectural publication developed from a series of lectures and classes given at the Courtauld Institute. Here he moved forward further into the eighteenth century, examining the achievements of the last generation of *ancien régime* architects, of whom J.-G. Soufflot is the most celebrated and Charles de Wailly probably the one closest to Allan's heart. *The Architecture of the French Enlightenment* (1980) was immediately recognised as a groundbreaking achievement: The Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain awarded it the Alice Davis Hitchcock medallion for 1980, and it also received the Banister Fletcher Award, recognising its status as the first balanced and comprehensive account in any language of a