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Pirro Ligorio's Early Drawings and the Influence of Polidoro da Caravaggio: A Focus on Landscapes

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Pirro Ligorio, *Diana and Apollo Killing the Children of Niobe*, c. 1550. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Jeffrey E. Horvitz

During my stay at CASVA, I explored the validity and limits of John Gere's assumption, advanced in the journal *Master Drawings* in 1971, that the early draftsmanship of Pirro Ligorio (c. 1513 /1514 – 1583) must be construed as completely dependent on the example of Polidoro da Caravaggio (c. 1499 – 1543). Gere's ideas have been extremely influential, to the point where the subsequent identification and explanation of Ligorio's initial works as a draftsman have been based on his theoretical premises.

After a careful rereading of Gere's work, however, I realized that his hypotheses substantially rely on information provided in Giovanni Baglione's life of Ligorio, written in the first half of the seventeenth century. According to Baglione, during his early career in Rome (1534), Ligorio mostly decorated Roman palaces and houses with "trophies, friezes and stories illustrating the *magnificenze romane*" in the manner of Polidoro. Although all of Ligorio's facade decorations have disappeared, Gere came to the conclusion that Baglione's testimony was evidence enough to assume that Ligorio's designs were executed in conformity with the compositional patterns created by Polidoro in the 1520s. To be sure, Gere was able to correctly attribute to Ligorio some drawings traditionally credited to Polidoro, such as *Victory with Roman Trophies* (Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin) and *Roman Trophies with Prisoners* (Pierpont Morgan Library, New York), thereby enabling us to gain an idea of the appearance of the lost facade decorations and to assess the extent of Polidoro's influence on Ligorio's drawings. Moreover, Gere's essay offers a very precise description of the principal characteristics of Ligorio's draftsmanship, for instance, his quirky way of drawing the hands of his figures. As further proof of the link between Polidoro and Ligorio, Gere cited the imprint of Polidoro in the attitudes and dispositions of the figures represented in *Dance of Salome* (Oratorio di San Giovanni Decollato, Rome), the only extant fresco by Ligorio. Following this convincing analysis, Gere proceeded to search for and find Ligorio's early style in a group of drawings that he considered stylistically close to Polidoro but not by

Polidoro himself, ascribing them to Ligorio on the basis of a general stylistic similarity or even the subject matter represented.



Philip Galle after Giulio Romano, published by Hieronymus Cock, *Apollo and Artemis Killing Niobe's Children*, 1557, engraving. The British Museum; © Trustees of the British Museum

Even now, Gere's method of identification of the Ligorio drawings is systematically applied, and sometimes with manifestly erroneous results. This is the case for *Diana and Apollo Killing the Children of Niobe*, now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington. This work was attributed to Ligorio because it represents an episode treated in Polidoro's decoration on the facade of the Palazzo Milesi in Rome, but the style of the drawing is completely different from Ligorio's. In addition, the inventor of the composition was not Polidoro but Giulio Romano; in fact, the drawing is reproduced in reverse in an engraving by Philip Galle published in 1557 by Hieronymus Cock with the inscription *IVLIVS MANTVA INVE. H. COCK. EXCVDE. 1557. PHILIPPE GALLE FECIT*. We also find mention of the copper plate in the inventory drawn up upon Cock's death on March 1, 1601: "een coperen plaete van de Schieters van Julius Mantuanus."

After pondering the assumptions on which Gere's attributions were based, I decided to systematically examine the catalog of Ligorio's early drawings in the *Master Drawings* article. It was my intention to gauge their authenticity on broader grounds, checking all the aspects of Ligorio's particular style. I have thus begun to define and circumscribe all the characteristics of his early style. To that end, I have focused on a group of works that is surely autograph; that is, the sixteen well-known drawings illustrating the story of Hippolytus preserved in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, which I was able to study during a trip to New York. The material gathered during my stay at CASVA will be employed in the first chapter of my monograph on Ligorio's drawings. "The Genesis of Ligorio's Style," which will serve as a general introduction to the volume.

Research carried out in the National Gallery of Art Library and image collections and the department of prints and drawings has radically modified my approach to Ligorio's draftsmanship. During my residency, I also had the unique opportunity to become acquainted

with the three hundred drawings registered in the checklist drawn up by David Coffin, the greatest specialist on Ligorio, and published as an appendix to his posthumous *Pirro Ligorio: The Renaissance Artist, Architect, and Antiquarian* (2004) with the purpose of serving as the groundwork for a catalogue raisonné of Ligorio's drawings.