

ORAZIO AND ARTEMISIA
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Clio, Muse of History

Oil on canvas, 50 × 38³/₈ in.
(127 × 97.5 cm)

Signed (in book): [I]632 /
ARTEMISIA / [F]aciebat / All
[?] illstr mo isg [nre] tr [in
monogram] osier [s?]

Private collection

1632

Signed and prominently dated, this painting was unquestionably made during the early years of the artist's first stay in Naples. A statuesque woman dressed in a bluish green mantle with richly textured rust-colored sleeves worn over a lace-edged linen chemise stands with her left hand on her hip and her right hand resting on a trumpet. She wears a crown of laurel leaves, and to her right lies an open book with a legible inscription. Garrard, Bissell, and Rowlands have reconstructed the inscription as "1632 Artemisia faciebat all' Illustre M., smemorato Rosiers / 1632" (1632 Artemisia made this for the Illustrious M., in memory of Rosiers / 1632). These scholars have related it to the fourth duke of Guise, Charles of Lorraine (1571–1640), who ruled Lorraine in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and employed as maître d'hôtel a nobleman named Antoine de Rosières, who died in 1631. We know that Artemisia worked for the duke of Guise, since she wrote in a letter on October 9, 1635, to the astronomer Galileo Galilei that the duke had paid her 200 *piastre* for a painting.¹ The Rosières of the inscription, however, is more likely to have been François de Rosières (1534–1607), who had been under the protection of the cardinal of Guise and had written a history of the duchy that traced its origins to the time of Charlemagne. Based on spurious sources, the work so offended Henry III that he imprisoned Rosières in the Bastille; he was released—in 1583—only on the intervention of the duke of Guise. It is likely, as Bissell suggests, that in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Rosières's death in 1607, the duke commissioned a work in his honor.

How the duke came to commission the painting from Artemisia is unknown, although the fact that she mentions payment for the work in her letter to Galileo may be a clue. We do know that the duke requested and received permission to leave France in 1631. Guise had supported Marie de' Medici in her dispute with her son Louis XIII, and in so doing had roused the ire of the powerful Cardinal Richelieu. By

applying for permission and undertaking a pilgrimage to Loreto, an important religious site, the duke in essence escaped to Italy. He later moved to Tuscany to take up permanent residence. In Tuscany, he may have met Galileo, who, in turn, referred him to the services of his friend Artemisia Gentileschi.

Previously known under the title *Fame*, this painting may have been altered by the artist to represent Clio. Cesare Ripa's 1625 edition of the *Iconologia* describes Clio, the Muse of History, as carrying a book and a trumpet and wearing a laurel crown, all elements of this portrayal. The attributes of Fame also include a trumpet, but the figure usually has wings, holds an olive branch, and wears a gold chain with a heart pendant. Recent cleaning has revealed the presence of wings in an earlier version (visible in the darkened areas at the shoulders), and it appears that the figure's left hand may once have held an olive branch.

The prominent signature may be Artemisia's own gloss on the notion of celebrity. The chief attribute of Fame is the book into which the names of noted individuals are recorded. Clio is usually depicted carrying a closed book, but Artemisia may have included an open book in her original rendition, one that she later retained when she changed the iconography. Artemisia has not only inscribed the name of Rosières, to whom the painting is dedicated and the patron's honoree; she has also signed the picture herself, thereby entering her own name into the book of Fame. The placement of the book, open for both Clio and the viewer to read, establishes a more interactive relationship between the viewer and the subject, whose statuesque pose and distant gaze do not otherwise invite the viewer's approach. In a similar reading, Garrard notes that the three-way relationship between Clio, Rosières, and the artist is, in effect, a commentary on the Renaissance notion of the pivotal role of the artist in the establishment of fame, while Hersey maintains that the picture serves as evidence that Artemisia was concerned about her own fame.

PROVENANCE: Oswald T. Falk, Oxford; C. R. Churchill, Colemore, Alton, Hampshire; London and New York art markets (since 1943); Arcade Gallery, London (1955); Sotheby's, London, February 26, 1958, lot 55; Wildenstein (1958); private collection (1997).

REFERENCES: Fröhlich-Bume 1940, 169; Harris in Los Angeles 1976–77, 122; Gregori in Naples 1984–85, 147; Garrard 1989, 92–96, 384, 514 n. 191, figs. 84, 85; Florence 1991, 66, 84 nn. 14, 15, 165 n. 24, 67, fig. 50; Rowlands in New York 1995–96, no. 2; Bissell 1999, 239–41 no. 27, 367 under no. L-30.



The relationship of this picture to a citation in a seventeenth-century inventory of the English royal collection has yet to be sorted out. Abraham van der Doort, the keeper of pictures and antiquities to Charles I, recorded a similar painting by Artemisia, "Done by Artemesio Gentellesco Item a woemans picture in some bluish draperie . . . with a trumpett in her left hand Signifying ffame with her other hand having a penn to write being uppon a Straining frame painted uppon Cloath. Hight 3 f 3—Breadth 2 f 5." Inventory descriptions are notoriously inaccurate, but the absence of a pen in the present painting and the discrepancy in size between the two pictures have led scholars to discount the inventoried painting as being the same as the *Clio*. Garrard and Fröhlich-Bume have suggested that the inventory entry describes a reduced copy.

The dark tonality of the picture, in which velvety rust complements a cooler dark green, lends a somber

air to the statuesque figure. Harris comments on the "bravura" handling of paint, most clearly evident in the freedom and surety with which the edges of the green drapery and folds along the shoulder have been defined. The tighter, more meticulous technique of many of Artemisia's paintings executed in the 1620s (the *Portrait of a Gonfaloniere* [cat. 66] or the *Seville Penitent Magdalene* [cat. 68], for example) has yielded to a looser, and perhaps more showy, application of paint.

The picture sustained some damage when it was first transferred to an oak panel in the eighteenth century. It was returned to a canvas support prior to the 1976 "Women Artists" exhibition and now displays surface cracking. It is trimmed along the left side.

1. The original letter can be found in the Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, Mss. Gal., P.I.T. XIII, car. 269–70. It is published in English translation in Garrard 1989, 383–84.

76.

Cleopatra

Oil on canvas, 46 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 69 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.
(117 × 175.5 cm)

Private collection, Rome

ca. 1633–35

PROVENANCE: Matthiesen Fine Art Ltd., London (1982–1988?); private collection, Rome.

REFERENCES: Gregori in Naples 1984–85, 306; Grabski 1985, 56–63; Matthiesen in London 1986, 49–52; Garrard 1989, 105–6, 274–76; Contini in Florence 1991, 70, 73; Bissell 1999, 50, 53, 230–31 no. 22.

In this, perhaps Artemisia's second representation of Cleopatra, the artist is unusually faithful to Plutarch's story. Plutarch recounts the arrival of Octavian's soldiers to find Cleopatra's body. Artemisia has selected the moment just preceding, when the maidservants Charmion and Iras have discovered the deceased queen and have not yet replaced the crown on her head. No evidence of the asp's bite is found on her body. The reclining figure of Cleopatra is tilted forward toward the picture plane and presented invitingly to the viewer. In the background, Iras and Charmion enter the closed chamber. The first maidservant registers no response; the second wipes tears from her eyes. But otherwise, neither shows any visible shock or horror. The jeweled crown and tasseled



Figure 141. Roman, third century A.D., *Sleeping Ariadne*. Marble. Museo Vaticano



77.

Birth of Saint John the Baptist

Oil on canvas, 72 1/2 x 101 3/8 in.
(184 x 258 cm)

Signed (on piece of paper at lower
left): ARTEMITIA / GINTILES

Museo Nacional del Prado,
Madrid (inv. p149)

ca. 1633–35

Rome, New York

The story of John the Baptist is told in Luke 1:5–80. The priest Zacharias and his wife, Elizabeth, are old and childless. While Zacharias is performing his service in the temple, the angel Gabriel appears and tells him that his wife will bear him a son. Incredulous, Zacharias asks Gabriel how he could know such a thing and the angel, angered that Zacharias does not believe him, strikes him dumb. When the child is born, the neighbors and midwives announce that he will

be called Zacharias, after his father. But Elizabeth protests, and names him John. Because no one in the family bore that name, the midwives appeal to the mute Zacharias, who motions for a writing tablet to be brought to him; upon the tablet, he inscribes the words “His name is John.”

Artemisia has followed a formula in use at least since the eleventh century for the representation of this scene from the life of Saint John.¹ On the left, the elderly

Elizabeth reclines on her bed, attended by a servant, while in front of her Zacharias writes the words of the naming. The central focus, however, is the group of midwives who tend to the bathing and swaddling of the infant. This emphasis on the bath and its implication of ritual is not unlike that found in most images of the birth of the Virgin Mary, a subject with a similar representational tradition. It is appropriate for an event with a popular feast day and undoubtedly alludes to the role of Saint John in the baptizing of Christ.

The painting is one of a series of six pictures. The Neapolitan painter Massimo Stanzione made four of them, the *Annunciation to Zacharias*, *Saint John Taking Leave of His Parents* (fig. 133), *Saint John Preaching*, and the *Beheading of Saint John* (all Prado, Madrid), while another Neapolitan artist, Paolo Finoglia, painted the sixth scene, now missing, *Saint John in Prison*. It remains uncertain if the event of primary importance in John's life, the Baptism, was included in the cycle. If so, as Bissell (1999) and Vannugli argue, it was probably an earlier painting integrated into the group.

Ever since Roberto Longhi wrote of the painting's effective re-creation of a domestic interior, in his pivotal article of 1916, it has generally been acknowledged to be an important example of Artemisia's Caravaggesque, tenebrist leanings. The figures appear to emerge out of darkened shadows, although the poor state of preservation perhaps intensifies this sense of chiaroscuro. Details of the floor tiles, the simple furniture, and the fabric textures add to the sense of observed individuals performing everyday tasks. Andrea Sacchi, who depicted the same scene in the early 1640s for the baptism of the church of San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome, represented Zacharias with a heavenward gaze, confronted by gesturing onlookers who respond to the divine intervention. No such acknowledgment of the miraculous appearance of Gabriel can be found in Artemisia's picture.

Garrard notes evidence of her reliance on the prototypes of Simon Vouet, whose *Circumcision of Christ* (Capodimonte, Naples) arrived in Naples in the 1620s, and Artemisia undoubtedly knew Vouet's heavily Caravaggesque *Birth of the Virgin* in the Roman church of San Francesco a Ripa. Vouet's realism and dramatic illumination combined with a carefully

balanced composition and classical figural style come close to Artemisia's *Saint John*, since her naturalist conception has been tempered by a beautifully composed and balanced figural grouping and some of her most accomplished figures, such as the kneeling maid at the right. The beautifully realized tactility of the midwife's shawl combines a naturalist tendency in the rendition of texture and surface with a growing interest in the representation of opulent fabrics and richly appointed interiors.

Pérez Sánchez notes that Artemisia's naturalism is tempered with the influence of classicism, a phenomenon that emerges in much Neapolitan painting of the 1630s, while Vannugli describes the picture as a transitional work, between the Caravaggism and drama of Artemisia's paintings of the 1620s and her more elegant later works, which responded to Bolognese classicism. It has been noted, by Garrard and Bissell (1999), that Artemisia attempted to conform stylistically to the work of Stanzione, and indeed the physiognomies of the pensive maid and the attendant holding the baby are comparable. The biographer Bernardo de Dominici, writing in the eighteenth century, describes a close relationship between the two painters, and mentions that Artemisia was mentor to the older Stanzione. While De Dominici's assertion may not be altogether accurate (see Lattuada, p. 384), Garrard's observation that the two artists "appear to have met each other halfway in the interest of creating a harmonious ensemble" must certainly be correct.²

Artemisia's *Saint John* is first mentioned as in the palace of the Buen Retiro in Madrid in the 1650s together with Stanzione's pictures, and is believed to have been commissioned by the king of Spain, Philip IV, for a chapel dedicated to Saint John, though nothing certain is known of such a commission.³ Artemisia, in a letter written in Naples in July 1635 to Grand Duke Ferdinand II de' Medici, tells her patron that she had to finish "some works" for "His Catholic Majesty" (meaning Philip IV).⁴ No other pictures currently known by Artemisia could have been done for him, and most writers concur that the Madrid *Saint John* must be among the pictures to which she refers. We know that the paintings were commissioned in Naples, for in the same letter she says that the

PROVENANCE: Buen Retiro, Ermita de San Juan, Madrid; Palacio del Buen Retiro, Madrid (by the 17th century); Palacio Real Nuevo; Capilla de la Calle del Tesoro, Madrid (by 1772); Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid (by 1820).

REFERENCES: Longhi 1916, 301; Pérez Sánchez 1965, 394, 452–54, 499; Bissell 1968, 161; Pérez Sánchez in Madrid 1970, 272–73 no. 83, 530–37 nos. 175–78; Brown and Elliott 1980, 67–68, 73 fig. 39, 79, fig. 42, 77, 78, fig. 46, 80–82, 89, 92, 123, 125, 217, 244, 251, 254, 263 n. 52, 264 n. 87, 266 n. 27; Gregori in Naples 1984–85, 304 no. 2.113; von Barghahn 1986, 29, 34, 152, 302, 306–8, 391–99, 447 n. 234, 533 n. 423; Garrard 1989, 97–99, 511 n. 163; Contini in Florence 1991, 67–70, 178; Vannugli 1991, 25–33; Vannugli 1994, 59–73; Bissell 1999, 249–56 no. 32.

viceroy had ordered the pictures on the king's behalf. Several scholars (Brown and Elliott, Gregori, Garrard) have identified this agent as Manuel de Guzmán, count of Monterrey and viceroy to Naples between May 14, 1631, and November 12, 1637.

The date of the commission is still not confirmed, although it has been placed between 1633 and 1635. Bissell (1999) posits that the paintings must have been under way before the artist made her claim of patronage in 1635. And a copy after Stanzione's *Annunciation to Zacharias*, by Francesco Guarino for the church of San Michele at Solofra, was painted in 1637. Paolo Finoglia must have already received his commission, which he presumably completed by 1635, when he departed Naples for Puglia, where he is documented in January 1635 and where he apparently stayed, precluding his having made his painting any later than that date. Garrard, followed by Contini, argues that the paintings must have been finished by 1633 and that they were part of a shipment sent by Monterrey from Naples to Spain in that year. (Monterrey also brought a second shipment with him when he returned in 1638, too late a date for the paintings to have arrived, given that Guarino had access to them in 1637.) Several writers have suggested that the Neapolitan architectural painter Viviano Codazzi must have inspired the open archway in the background of Artemisia's painting. Because he did not arrive in Naples until at least 1633 and is first documented as in the city in January 1634,

if Artemisia did respond to Codazzi's work, she could not have completed the painting before 1634.

Bissell (1999) has suggested that the painting may have been completed by the middle of 1634. He has identified the space in which the cycle was installed as the chapel of the Hermitage of San Juan at the Buen Retiro, begun in the spring of 1633. He submits that the pictures were ordered then and shipped in November, although he acknowledges that it would have been difficult for them all to have been painted so quickly. Evidence that they were completed by 1634 is provided by a couple of factors. Artemisia's letter of July 1635 uses the imperfect tense in mentioning works she had done for the king, suggesting that a period of time had elapsed since she had painted them. Second, other pictures commissioned from Artemisia were finished by January 1635, and Bissell has assumed that the *Saint John* must have been finished well before these paintings were begun. This would mean that it was completed sometime in the earlier part of 1634.

1. For these early traditions, see Réau 1955–58, vol. I, 443–47.
2. "Vita del Cavalier Massimo Stanzione," in De Dominici (1742–44) 1979, 45, describes how Stanzione went each day to watch Artemisia paint and how he attempted to imitate the "freshness of her beautiful color."
3. For hypothetical reconstructions of how the paintings were originally installed, see Vannugli 1994, 65–69; and Bissell 1999, 251–54. The present discussion of this commission is based largely on these works.
4. For the letter, see Fuda 1989, 170–71.