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ALBRECHT DÜRER

THE VIRGIN AND CHILD
WITH A FLOWER ON A GRASSY BENCH

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Oo gottes gepererin
Des höchsten thron hymel kunigin,
Aller sunder gröste hoffnung,
Ich pit dich durch dein kyndle jung,
Jesum, der dich erschaffen hat,
Mach mich sehen sein trinitat

Albrecht Dürer c.1510

O bearer of the Lord,
Queen of Heaven and the highest throne,
greatest hope of all sinners,
I implore you by your little Child
Jesus who created you,
help me to become aware of his deed of saving grace.



ALBRECHT DÜRER
(Nuremberg 1471-1528)

The Virgin and Child with a Flower on a grassy Bench, c.1503

Signed by the artist in monogram (lower centre): 'AD'

Pen and black ink on fine linen paper 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 6 $\frac{7}{16}$ in. (162 x 164 mm.)

Watermark: Fugger trademark (Trident and Ring, also known as Trident and Ball, or Trident and Shield)ⁱ

Provenance

Probably Willibald Imhoff (1519-1580) and his heirs, Nuremberg

Probably a member of the d'Este family, Modena, last quarter of the 16th century;

Probably brought to France in 1797;

Maison Carlhian, Paris, in partnership with Joseph Duveen (d. 1939) of Duveen Brothers, New York, probably October 1919;

André Carlhian (1883-1967), likely after 1939;

Thence by descent to Jean-Paul Carlhian, Concord, Massachusetts until his death in 2012;

Private Collection, Massachusetts.

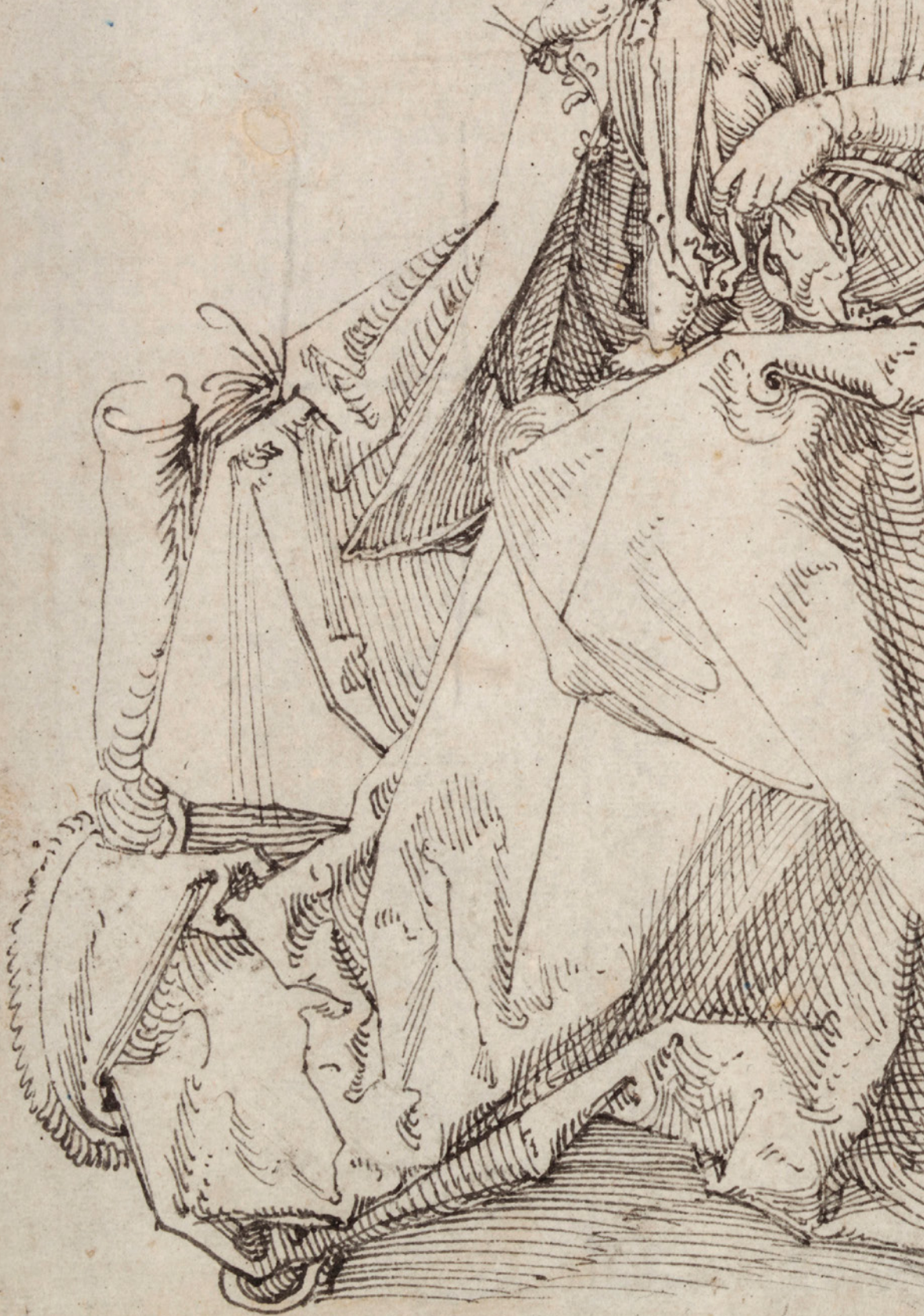


Albrecht Dürer
Self-portrait, Study of a Hand and a Pillow, 1493
Pen and brown ink
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Albrecht Dürer is regarded not only as the greatest German artist of his age, but also as one of the most important artists and intellectuals of the European Renaissance. His work was innovative, his output prolific, and his legacy immortal. Princes and emperors were among his patrons, and he engaged in discussions with scholars and artists from all over Europe. His travels opened new horizons for him and his art. In a remarkable synthesis, Dürer's work and thought combined an inexhaustible capacity for introspection and a cosmopolitan attitude that was balanced by an active involvement in the social and cultural world of his hometown, Nuremberg.

In this highly refined and hitherto unpublished composition executed in ink on a fine linen approximately square sheet of paper, the Virgin sits on a grassy bench and smiles at the viewer with her head gently tilted to the right. In an unusual departure from standard idiom the child is standing on her lap with a flower in his hand leaning into the bend of her left arm; he turns to look up at his mother, and presents the viewer the back of his naked body and exposed buttocks. His face is fully in shadow, yet beautifully suggested. The effect of this is to give his full attention to his mother, while she is engaged, or even interrupted, by the viewer. Lush curly hair falls over her shoulder and back. Her cloak, draped around her shoulders, is of a suggestively rich, heavy material which cascades over her legs, and spreads a fur-trimmed hem in opulent folds over the grassy ground. The seat is built from posts and planks rammed into the ground and is certainly filled with soil, which provides the substrate for the grass that gives its name to the location. Light from above left, provides contrast in the robe and thus space and volume, illuminating the Virgin's forehead and left cheek so that her eyes, nose and mouth emerge from the shaded right side of her face. This particular pose represents one of the most refined and highly finished drawings of the subject by Dürer. The artist's lifelong engagement with the subject of the Virgin and Child, second only in importance to his involvement with the Passion of Christ, produced fourteen engravings, five woodcuts, twenty paintings, and over seventy drawings and studies. There are, however, only a handful of finished drawings, completed in their own right. The *Virgin and Child with a Flower on a grassy Bench* belongs to this latter category.

Dürer's preoccupation with the theme of the Virgin and Child was associated with the prevailing cult of the Virgin Mary, which reached its peak in Germany in the years just before the onset of the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther





in 1517 when he nailed his *Ninety-five Theses* against the sale of indulgences on the door of All Saints' church in Wittenberg. Dürer's response to the subject is first seen in his early drawings of the *Virgin and Child with Angels playing Music* of 1485 in Berlin, the *Holy Family under a Tree* in a private collection, the *Seated Virgin and Child with two drapery studies* in the British Museum (Fig.1), the *Virgin with Musical Angels* in the Louvre, and the *Holy Family* in Erlangen, the latter three drawings of c.1491-2.ⁱⁱ

While the earliest drawing is still entirely in style and tradition of the third quarter of the fifteenth century, as taught to him by his Nuremberg mentor Michael Wolgemut, the later ones were drawn when Dürer, as a young journeyman, was much preoccupied with the work of Martin Schongauer (c.1440/53-1491) the famous artist from Alsace whose reputation is based on small devotional paintings and engravings of the Virgin and Child. Dürer's early drawings were an important source of reference for his *Virgin and Child with a Dragonfly* (Fig.2),ⁱⁱⁱ one of the earliest engravings that he made when he first opened his workshop in Nuremberg in 1495. The heavy angular drapery, the fur-edged cloak and the grassy bench of the engraving, are also seen in the present sheet made a few years later, but Dürer has further developed his ideas on the position of the child who takes a more active, lively role than in these earlier compositions. Dürer's work on the subject is developed further still in the highly finished, and somewhat enigmatic, *Virgin with a Multitude of Animals*, made in about 1506 (Fig.3).^{iv} The present sheet is very closely associated in pose and treatment of drapery which has now lost some of its bulky appearance of his earlier works. A delicate drawing made in pen and ink with subdued watercolours, Dürer's *Virgin with a Multitude of Animals* shows the Virgin and Child seated on a bench. Still immersed in the book on her lap, she is interrupted by the Child who reaches to the side to break off a flower for his mother. This place of rest is located in the middle of a paradisiacal garden, awash in a sea of flowers and inhabited by a mass of animals and birds. Dürer's composition ultimately stands in the tradition of the *hortus conclusus*, a mystical theme of the Late Middle Ages whose literary inspiration goes back to the Old Testament text of the *Song of Songs* (4:12): "You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain." Two earlier variations of the composition – one in Paris dated 1503 with a less complex spatial disposition and a sketch in Berlin that precedes the Albertina sheet – show Dürer experimenting to find the final form.^v Christof Metzger's suggestion that the Vienna drawing was made in Venice in 1506 is



Fig. 1

Albrecht Dürer

The seated Virgin and Child with two drapery studies, c.1491-2

Pen and brown ink on both sides

© The Trustees of the British Museum, London



Fig. 2
Albrecht Dürer
The Virgin and Child with a dragonfly, c.1495
Engraving
© The Trustees of the British Museum, London



Fig. 3

Albrecht Dürer

The Virgin with a Multitude of Animals, c.1506

Pen and blackish-brown ink, watercolour, squared in fine black chalk
from the Virgin's head downwards

© The Albertina Museum, Vienna

supported by the watermark that is documented in northern Italy between 1503 and 1507.^{vi} In the end, the composition was perhaps intended to be used in a painting which was never undertaken. At any rate, this would explain the faint, but visible squaring of the Vienna drawing (which is also seen in the earlier Paris version), a tried and tested method of converting such a composition into a large format.

The present highly finished pen drawing focusses entirely on the position of the Virgin and Child. The drapery and the evocation of the hidden forms, as ever in Dürer, is a central feature of the work. The highly detailed composition has a rapid spontaneity, yet is, in the words of Andrew Raftery, “very carefully rehearsed”. The artist pays particular attention here to the spatial disposition of the opulent drapery and how it cascades over the edge of the bench on the right-hand side, finally spreading out on the ground. The comparison with the Albertina drawing reveals a close relationship, especially in the treatment of the drapery, and it seems clear that the artist used it directly when planning his composition of *Virgin with a Multitude of Animals*. However, the drawing is likely to belong to an early stage of the project, in which the artist is working out an alternative placement and gesture of the child, who here is seen standing on the left and twisting to face his mother, and in the final version leans over to the right, so that the child’s picking a flower is even more pronounced. In the Paris drawing this motif has not yet been elaborated and the Virgin’s loose, upper bodice and flowing hair is closer to the present drawing than in *Virgin with a Multitude of Animals*, in which the artist, inspired by Italian sources, has made the bodice and sleeve more close-fitting and covered the Virgin’s hair with a veil. It is testimony of a creative process that, as is often the case in Dürer’s work, extends over many years until the final solution is found.

The sheet is signed in an autograph monogram in the same ink as the original drawing. This monogram appears no fewer than twenty times on autograph Dürer drawings dated between 1501-1514. As there is a broad diversity of styles of creating the monogram employed by the artist, this stylistic difference can be considered an important piece of additional evidence to establish a date of circa 1503. The paper features a trident and ring watermark recorded in more than two hundred sheets used by the artist until circa 1517.^{vii} They include the *Virgin and Child* drawn in a similar style in the British Museum, signed and dated 1503 and possibly created in the same context (Fig.4).^{viii} Dürer mostly used the



Fig. 4

Albrecht Dürer

The Virgin and Child seated on a bank, 1503

Pen and black ink, with red chalk

© The Trustees of the British Museum, London

very fine and very thin, almost translucent paper for his double-sided studies of human proportion, as its qualities make it easier to trace a construction onto the reverse side for further refinement. It is unusable for printing and therefore never documented in Dürer's woodcuts or engravings. The watermark is the trademark of the Fugger family, an early form of a logo that was placed on wares as proof of their origin. This exquisite paper, a fine strong linen, is very likely to have originated in the famous Augsburg paper mill of Hans Oesterreichers (c.1445 – around 1507). The owner was also a fabric merchant and thus belonged to the closest Augsburg circle of Jacob Fugger (1459-1525), the fabulously wealthy merchant, mining entrepreneur and banker. From the 1530s onwards, the Fuggers, among many other businesses, also traded in paper produced by the Oesterreicher family, and it is reasonable to assume that the paper was a special production for the Fugger trading company. It was probably used as a means of preventing forgery of the company's documents.^{ix} Apparently Dürer was provided with a large quantity of this very high-quality paper around or short after 1500. However, Dürer's first contacts with the Fugger family are only documented for the period around 1510, in the course of the planning of the family chapel at St. Anne's in Augsburg.

Despite subsequent interventions, the drawing is in superb condition with only one small worm hole to the surface which does not impact the inked surface at any point.

Note on the Provenance

The earliest provenance of this drawing will always be difficult to establish. The original sheet was trimmed at an early date, and until recently conserved, was supported by at least four different sheets of paper, some of which were cut into strips to increase the size of the sheet by about 1cm at the upper and lower edges. One of them bears the handwritten number '108'. The innermost support, on late sixteenth century paper, is of the same dimensions as the original sheet and has an inscription in brown ink of about the same date, 'Modena No. 5'. The outermost support is inscribed in an eighteenth century hand 'Alberto Duro', the usual spelling in Italy at that time.^x Its watermark shows a *fleur-de-lis* in a double circle, with a trefoil suspended above and the letter M attached below. Similar watermarks date from the 1560s to the 1590s and are mostly located in Ferrara and Modena, which was the sphere of influence of the d'Este family.^{xi} These inscriptions suggest that the drawing was acquired by a collector in Italy, where Dürer prints and drawings were popular from the artist's lifetime onwards. For example, the inventory of Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte, who died in Rome in 1626, lists ten ebony frames with copper plates by Albrecht Dürer.^{xii} The printing plates for the copperplate Passion could be a potential candidate. An inventory drawn up six years after the death of Cardinal Alessandro Orsini in 1633 also lists a large number of copper plates, some of which can be associated with Lucas van Leyden, Sebald Beham and Albrecht Dürer, and more than ten wooden blocks by Dürer.^{xiii}

Various opportunities for such an acquisition would have arisen during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It is known that sales of drawings from Dürer's studio in Nuremberg were made at various points by his heirs, Endres and Ursula Dürer, before the latter sold large portions of the estate to the merchant and collector, Willibald Imhoff in 1557. By 1568, Willibald had inherited the library of his grandfather, Dürer's closest friend, Willibald Pirckheimer, and had assembled the largest collection of works by Dürer in Nuremberg. After Imhoff's death in 1580, it is known that further items were disposed of by his son, Karl, before he sold the bulk of the collection in 1588 to Rudolf II of Prague; and other Dürer material was disposed of by Ursula Dürer's niece, Regina Alnpeck in about 1580, some of which was acquired by Rudolf II's court artist, Bartholomeus Spranger (1546-1611) whose collection was sold, after the death of his heir, his nephew Gommer Spranger, at an Amsterdam auction in 1638.^{xiv}

The Imhoffs in Nuremberg continued to offer drawings by Dürer until the 1630s; an inventory from 1664 attests that the holdings were then exhausted.

That Nuremberg was still an important centre for Dürer drawings in the early seventeenth century is proven by a letter addressed from Nuremberg on 17 May 1636 by Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel to his economist, scientist and philosopher friend William Petty. Here Arundel complains that after the sales of recent years, there are no more works by Dürer, Holbein and other masters to be found. Of particular interest here, is reference to an Italian who was exceptionally enthusiastic about purchasing: "They say within these 3 or 4 yeeres [since 1632-33] great store of good thinges haue bin carryed out at easy rates; and, not longe since a lifeheuer dyinge [an art connoisseur, most probably Hans Imhoff III (died 1627), passed away a few years ago], an Italian hath bought and carryed away many of AD drawinges." A short time later, on 3 September 1636, Arundel mentions in the postscript of a letter addressed to Petty from Regensburg a "merchant in Bologna wch shewed Daniel Neece [the Venice-based Flemish art dealer Daniel Nijs] so many designs of Alberto Durero there, wch pray enquire of".^{xv} The fact that Italian collectors were making acquisitions in Nuremberg is reasonably well documented by a volume containing 228 prints by Dürer auctioned in Frankfurt in 1877, which came from the the Caetani family in Rome. A "member of the House of Caetani, who had a mission in Germany in the sixteenth century" had "purchased this collection from the Dürer heirs".^{xvi}

It seems very likely that the present drawing was to be found in Modena by the late sixteenth century. A hypothetical source for the Modena connection is Cardinal Alessandro d'Este (1569-1624) who had built up a considerable collection of drawings, which after his death fell to Alfonso III d'Este (1591-1644), Duke of Modena and Reggio. His son Alfonso IV d'Este (1634-1662) expanded the collection to about 2,300 drawings. An inventory of the ducal collection written in 1669 lists 2728 drawings, which were kept, among others, in 34 volumes.^{xvii} The collection was subsequently considerably reduced or divided among heirs, because by 1751 only 462 drawings are documented, of which only two are linked with Dürer's name (nos. 268, 312).^{xviii} Unfortunately, none of the collector's marks associated with the d'Este family (Lugt 106, 112, 1893), are visible on the sheet. However, the innermost backing sheet (with the Modena inscription) shows a circular brown mark in the top left corner which could be the remnant of an embossed paper seal. Its diameter closely corresponds to

the mark of Alfonso III (Lugt 112); indeed, documents certified by him with a pressed seal are recorded.^{xix}

Following the French invasion of Italy, part of the collection of the Dukes of Este entered the Louvre in 1797. Today, 1196 drawings from this collection are held there, among them one drawing by Albrecht Dürer, the *Agony in the Garden*.^{xx} It bears the collector's mark of Francesco II d'Este (1660-1694; Lugt 1893) in the lower right corner of the recto, and also the handwritten number 121 on the lower edge. This number refers to inventories compiled in 1796 by French art commissioners in the gallery of the Dukes of Modena. The number 108 written in a similar style on one of the backing sheets of the present drawing could have been added in this connection. Dispersal of drawings from Modena is known to have occurred at this time because other sheets bearing d'Este collector's marks are located in the British Museum, (via William Young Ottley and Thomas Lawrence) and in France in the collections of Jean-Baptiste-Florentin-Gabriel de Meryan Marquis de Lagoy, and Dominique-Vivant Denon.

This is a tentative, but not unreasonable reconstruction of the route that the drawing could have taken from Nuremberg via Modena to France. It is then likely to have ended up during the nineteenth century in the collection of Count Hubert de Pourtalès (1863-1949) who is known to have sold four Dürer drawings to Maison Carlhian, Paris, in 1919. In one case the drawing can be identified with certainty. André Carlhian, of Maison Carlhian, Paris, in partnership with Joseph Duveen, records in the Duveen stock books in October 1919 the purchase and sale of Dürer's *Woman in Netherlandish Dress*, 1521, to Joseph E. Widener.^{xxi} On the same support as the 'Alberto Duro' inscription, the present drawing has a number lettered in pencil, "36.43" in similar handwriting and in the same 4-digit format, as the 1919 stock number inscribed in Duveen's catalogue and on Dürer's drawing now in Washington. A record book made during the 1950s accounts for the continued presence of the *Virgin and Child with a Flower on a grassy Bench* in the collection of the Carlhian family.

Agnews is extremely grateful to Dr. Christof Metzger, Albertina, for confirming the attribution upon first-hand inspection of the drawing in Vienna in October, 2019, and for his assistance in the reconstruction of its provenance. Dr. Metzger will include this drawing in his forthcoming catalogue raisonné of the artist presently in preparation, scheduled for publication in 2022/23.

References

- i Piccard online DE8380-PO-21465 (documented in 1519); Strauss pp. 3289-93 (used in 1500-26); not in Briquet und Meder
- ii Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. KdZ 1/W. L. Strauss, *The completed drawings of Albrecht Dürer*, 6 vols. New York, 1974, 1485/1; Sotheby's, New York, 1/9/1996, lot 17/Strauss 1491/6; British Museum, London, inv. 1983,0416.2/Strauss 1491/4 and 5; Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Arts graphiques, inv. 18647/Strauss 1491/10; Erlangen, Graphische Sammlung der Universität, inv. B155/Strauss 1491/9
- iii Meder 42
- iv The Albertina Museum, Vienna, inv. 3066/Strauss 1503/22
- v Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Arts graphiques, inv. 18603/Strauss 1503/23; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. KdZ 15387/Strauss 1503/21
- vi Christof Metzger, *Albrecht Dürer* (exh. cat. The Albertina Museum, Vienna), Munich/London/New York 2019, pp. 170-73, cat. no. 60
- vii Strauss, vol.6, pp. 3289-3292, not in Meder or Piccard
- viii British Museum, London, inv. 1846,0918.8/Strauss 1503/19
- ix Unfortunately, all of Jacob Fugger's documents were destroyed by his heirs. According to Franz Karg, Head of the Fugger Archives in Dillingen, there are hardly any archival documents from his time and anything with this special watermark.
- x See Giuseppe Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi ed inventarii inediti die quadri, disegni, bronzi, dorerie, smalti, medaglie, avorii, ecc.*, Modena 1870, please follow the index for many examples
- xi Charles M. Briquet, *Les Filigranes*, vol. 2, Paris et al. 1907, p. 393, nos. 7104-7121
- xii Inventory of the Estate of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, Rome, Archivio di Stato, 20 Notai Capitolini, Paulus Vespignanus, ufficio 28, vol. 138, fol. 583v. See Christoph Luitpold Frommel, *Caravaggios Frühwerk und der Kardinal Francesco Maria del Monte*, in: *Storia dell'Arte*, 9/109, 1971, pp. 5-52, esp. p. 37; Michael Bury, *Giulio Mancini and the organization of a print collection in early seventeenth century Italy*, in: Christopher Baker et al. (ed), *Collecting Prints and Drawings in Europe, c.1500-1750*, Aldershot 2003, pp. 79-84, esp. p. 83 and footnote 32
- xiii *Inventario delle robbe della bona memoria dell'illustrissimo Signor Cardinale Orsino*, compiled in 1633 by Filippo Alberghati, Archivio Orsini, I, busta 414.1, fasc. 15. See Adriano Amendola, *Collecting copper plates between Venice and Rome in the seventeenth century. Cardinal Alessandro Orsini, the Old Masters and the sciences*, in: *Journal of the History of Collections*, vol. 28/2, 2016, pp. 161-173
- xiv See on the dispersal of Dürer's estate Christof Metzger, *From Albrecht Dürer's Legacy*, in: Metzger 2019, pp. 51-67, and Christof Metzger, *Image and Itinerary. Dürer's Drawings from his Travels through the Netherlands*, in: Susan Foister and Peter van den Brink (ed), *Dürer's Journeys* (exh. cat. National Gallery, London), London 2021, pp. 149-63
- xv Quoted from Francis C. Springell, *Connoisseur & Diplomat. The Earl of Arundel's Embassy to Germany in 1636* [...], London 1963, pp. 143, 240, Letter XVII (dated 5/17/1636), pp. 251-52, Letter XXIV (dated 9/3/1636), Transcriptions according to the original letters in the British Museum London, Add. MSS 15970, fol. 26, 39-40
- xvi *Catalog der Kupferstich-Sammlung des verstorbenen Freiherrn Carl Marschall von Bieberstein, Auktion bei F. A. C. Prestel*, Frankfurt a. M., December 1, 1877, pp. III-V, preface. See Antony Griffiths, *Early Collections of Dürer*, in: *Print Quarterly*, 10, no. 4, 1993, pp. 398-400
- xvii See Jadranka Bentini and Patrizia Curti, *Ducal Galleria Estense. Disegni, Medaglie e altro. Gli inventari del 1669 e del 1751*, Modena 1990, pp. 14-16
- xviii Bentini/Curti 1990, pp. 66-86
- xix See Alfonso d'Este, reply to a letter to Giovan Battista Ronchi, Modena, June 8, 1624: <https://www.catawiki.com/en/1/22835371-alfonso-iii-d-este-autograph-reply-to-a-letter-to-giovan-battista-ronchi-with-seal-1624>
- xx Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Arts graphiques, inv. 18580/Strauss 1515/74
- xxi Today in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., inv. 1942.9.658/Strauss 1521/23

