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Francesco de' Rossi, Called Francesco Salviati

Portrait of Giovanni da Cepperello

FRANCESCO DE' ROSSI, CALLED FRANCESCO SALVIATI
(Florence 1510 – 1563 Rome)

PORTRAIT OF GIOVANNI DA CEPPERELLO, c. 1538

Oil on paper.
44 × 34 cm; 17 3/10 × 13 2/5 in.

Provenance

Private collection.



This remarkably vivid portrait, painted in oil on paper, can be securely attributed to Francesco Salviati, both on the evidence of its particular handling and through close comparison with a portrait included in the *Visitation* frescoed in the Oratory of San Giovanni Decollato in Rome in 1538 (Fig. 1).

The painterly characteristics that point to Salviati's hand include the rendering of the sitter's individual physiognomic features, particularly the eyes and the treatment of the beard. Allowing for the differences arising from the unusual technique of oil on paper, these may be compared with the *Portrait of a Goldsmith* in the Patrizi Collection, which scholars date precisely to 1538, at the end of the artist's first Roman sojourn.

The pose of the sitter is also similar, with the bust shown in three-quarter view and the head turned towards the beholder, and still reveals connections with Florentine portraiture of the 1520s, particularly that of Andrea del Sarto, which had provided Salviati with an important model before his move to Rome. Chiefly, the treatment of the eyes, with the eyelids articulated by angular accents that animate the sitter's gaze, is highly characteristic of Salviati's Roman draughtsmanship. The painting's dating to the 1530s is further supported by the sitter's costume, especially his headgear, which appears both in the aforementioned panel in the Patrizi Collection and in the two portraits of the patrons included in the *Visitation* fresco in the Oratory of San Giovanni Decollato.

In the scene depicting the meeting between the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, Salviati introduced the two patrons through the device of a staircase in the foreground, making the two figures appear as though they were ascending from below to witness the miraculous event. Both are dressed in contemporary costume and wear a round black hat with a single brim, precisely the same type of hat that appears in the present portrait in oil on paper. Moreover, the physiognomy of one of the two men appears to be the same as that rapidly recorded by Salviati in oil on the present sheet, probably to serve as a model either for the fresco or for a painting to be executed on panel.

Giorgio Vasari, in his *Life of Salviati*, reveals the names of the two patrons of the fresco:
'Giovanni da Cepperello and Battista Gobbo da Sangallo, having commissioned the Florentine Iacopo del Conte, a painter then still young, to paint in the Company of Mercy of the Florentines of San Giovanni Decollato beneath the Campidoglio in Rome - that is, in the second church where they gather - a scene from the life of Saint John the Baptist, namely the Angel appearing to Zacharias in the Temple, had the same Francesco [Salviati] paint beneath it another scene from the life of the same saint, namely Our Lady visiting Saint Elizabeth. This work, completed in 1538, he executed

in fresco in such a manner that it is among the most graceful and best-conceived paintings that Francesco ever made.'[1]

The two men in contemporary dress who appear at the bottom of the fresco are therefore the two patrons, whose identities can be established since Battista da Sangallo collaborated with his brother, the architect Antonio da Sangallo, while Giovanni da Cepperello, a member of a family of Florentine bankers, appears to have served as secretary to Cardinal Giovanni Salviati, the painter Salviati's patron.

Giovanni da Cepperello in fact also appears in Sebastiano del Piombo's portrait of Cardinal Salviati, now in Sarasota (Fig. 2). His sharp nose, lively and penetrating eyes, and long, wavy black beard appear to be the same both in the fresco and in the present portrait on paper. Given the rapid technique with which it was executed and the ease with which it could be transported, the function of the present work seems to have been to record the sitter's physiognomy so that it could subsequently be referred to either in the studio or on the scaffolding. Works of this kind must once have been more common than we might suppose today, since many colour studies or small preparatory cartoons executed in pencil or with the brush on paper have been lost precisely because their purpose was instrumental to the production of works on more durable supports.

In the fresco in the Oratory of San Giovanni Decollato, Giovanni da Cepperello's face is turned in the opposite way if compared to the present study on paper, but this could easily have been achieved by taking a tracing from the model and using it in reverse. Another similar study by Salviati is known, probably conceived to preserve the sitter's physiognomy for the artist's use in the studio when the sitter himself was unable to pose. The sheet is in the Galleria Palatina at Palazzo Pitti (inv. 1912 no. 310) and was formerly attributed to Annibale Carracci,[2] although in my view its date must be considerably earlier than the 1588 proposed in the catalogue.

This work too is an oil study on paper restricted to the sitter's face, in which the physiognomy and stereometric volume of the head are defined with powerful, confident brushstrokes, and in which echoes of Sebastiano del Piombo and Giulio Romano are unmistakable. Here again, the drawing of the eyes and the manner in which the nose is delineated seem to us attributable to the hand of the young Francesco Salviati, during his first Roman period, when the pictorial models just mentioned would have been more immediately present to the artist.

[1] Vasari, *Vite*, ed. Bettarini-Barocchi, vol. 5, p. 517.

[2] *Annibale Carracci*, exhibition catalogue, eds D. Benati and E. Riccomini (Bologna, 2006; Milan: Electa, 2006), no. II.13, pp. 118–119.

Equally characteristic of Salviati, in my view, is the rapid and assured manner in which the white edge of the shirt is indicated in both portraits on paper, with a single stroke of white paint suggesting a flash of light. Similar painterly characteristics are also found in an as yet unpublished portrait of a man painted by Salviati in the early 1540s, now in the Alana Collection.

Following careful cleaning - which removed later overpainting that had darkened the background and suggested a late sixteenth-century date - this sheet can now be acknowledged as an important rediscovery from Francesco Salviati's first Roman period, before his departure for Venice in 1539. It demonstrates both his versatility and the painterly mastery that would soon make him one of the most sought-after portraitists in Italy.



Fig. 1. Francesco de' Rossi, detto Francesco Salviati, *Ritratto di un Orafo*, collezione Patrizi



Fig. 2. Francesco de' Rossi, called Francesco Salviati, *Visitation*, detail of the portrait of Giovanni da Cepperello, Rome, Oratory of San Giovanni Decollato.



Fig. 3. Sebastiano del Piombo, *Portrait of Cardinal Giovanni Salviati and Giovanni da Cepperello*, Sarasota, Florida, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.

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